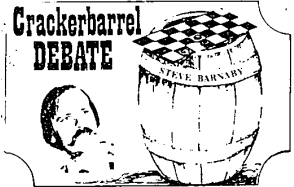


Why lawyers and journalists hit sour notes

Lawsuits. Subpoenas. Retractions. It's a different world for journalists today. It used to be that knowing how to report, write or take a photograph was enough. But no more. As they say, the times are a-changing.

At one time, liberal arts students had to make a choice of professions: journalism or law. But today you can have both at the same time.

In my first few weeks as managing editor of Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, I have been assailed at my many contacts with lawyers. It was something I hadn't expected.



Recall fever is an abuse of the system

Some folks just can't get anything right. Take the disgruntled Tischites, for instance, who want to put the kibosh on the political careers of Democratic state Senators Doug Ross and Kerry Kammer.

In the most recent fray over property-tax relief, the state legislature voted to put a Milliken-backed proposal on the May 19 ballot.

A Tisch-oriented tax bill met an early death in the Senate finance committee. The difference between victory and defeat on that committee was Ross and Kammer. They voted against reporting Tisch III to the floor.

Hence Tischite ire has rained down on the duo with the threat of a heavy-duty recall drive.

But the Tisch tacticians are misguided in more ways than one. Although Ross and Kammer were sincere about their votes, they, nevertheless, were pawns of the Senate's Democratic kingpin, state Sen. William Faust.

The Democratic leader, who smelled a possible victory for the Tisch bill in the committee, used his power to pack the committee with two more members. Ross and Kammer were tapped for the duty and the rest is history.

IF ANYONE should be a target of Tisch III supporters, it should be Faust.

But in truth, nobody should be threatened with recall in this little political drama.

Historically, recalls were made for scallywags and scoundrels who abuse the system through omission or commission. Neither Ross or Kammer fit the description.

Both were working within the political system, as was Faust. Nothing illegal or lawless was done. Senate Tisch supporters simply were outsmarted.

But in recent years the recall system itself has become a tool to punish politicians whose votes are in philosophical contradiction to one group or another which has a bone to pick.

Time and again politicians are the victims of irrational revenge.

Such abuse threatens our democratic form of government. Qualified individuals by the droves are shying away from running for public office because of the abuse.

Many incumbents simply are throwing up their hands in disgust and getting out, leaving for more peaceful pastures.

The day quickly is coming when honest political debate will be stifled, the introduction of new ideas quashed, because of persons who refuse to fully understand the system and choose rather to abuse it.

OUR POLITICAL leaders should be encouraged to speak out and to vote their consciences. Certainly if we disagree with them, we can vote them out of office at the properly designated time — at reelection.

Let recall be used sparingly and with just cause.

discover Michigan Bill Stockwell

Did you know that the Wayne County Road Commission used 36,000 gallons of white paint and 29,000 gallons of yellow paint to mark highway lines last year? It also used 100,000 tons of salt to combat the winter's snow and ice while maintaining 1,752 miles of roadway.

A few days after that, a certified letter was delivered from California with a lawyer's demand for a retraction on a column critical of a diet plan.

Friends tell me that many lawyers are looking for work. With no-fault automobile accidents, no-fault divorces and the slowdown of the economy, there's not much legal work around.

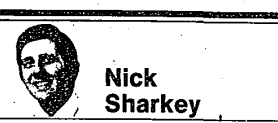
Others suggest legal action is now part of our modern culture. If you don't like something, sue, that reasoning goes.

ALL OF THIS legal action has been handled fairly routinely, so far.

Threats of lawsuits and subpoenas are easy to make. Usually, an investigation of the facts is made, and the matter is easily resolved.

But it still takes time. The issues must be studied, the law read and lawyers consulted. It is a nuisance.

That's not to say the press is never wrong. Every responsible journalist tries to the utmost of his/her ability to be responsible and accurate. We sometimes make mistakes. Those who are careless are



usually quickly weeded out of the profession. Journalists are more anxious to get rid of their irresponsible peers than any lawyer or judge. That's why we have mixed emotions about the recent decision of a Los Angeles jury to award Carol Burnett \$1.6 million in libel damages against the weekly scandal sheet, the National Enquirer. The Enquirer had reported that Ms. Burnett was loud and implied she was intoxicated in a Washington, D.C., restaurant. The facts as determined in the trial refuted the Enquirer story. Clearly, Ms. Burnett was entitled to a settlement.



from our readers

Unnecessary to wait for men's clubs

To the editor: As the vice president of a consulting firm, I agree with the idea conveyed in the article "A woman's place is in community service clubs."

However, I am dismayed at the implication, also conveyed in the article, that women are not involved in community service clubs.

For the past 12 years, I have been a very proud member of the Birmingham chapter of Pilot International, which is one of five international, classified, civic and service organizations for professional and executive women. Although I am presently president-elect of our local chapter, I have also served as governor of our district, which covers 13 clubs in the states of Michigan and Indiana.

If you have ever bought a hotdog, hamburger, cup of coffee, doughnut or bag of chips at the Birmingham Village Fair, you've met Pilots because we've manned that booth since the beginning of the fair. It's our main fund-raising activity for our projects account.

Among a few of our international activities are:

- Pilot serves on the National Safety Council Board of Directors.
Pilot is the only woman's service club with a voice in the administration of the worldwide programs of CARE, Inc.
Pilot was granted observer status at the United Nations in 1973.
Pilot is a member organization of the National Voluntary Organizations for Independent Living of the Aging.
Pilot is the only service club represented on the executive committee and steering committee of the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped.
If you know professional or executive women who are interested in working with a service club, please direct them to us. Women don't have to wait to be allowed to

join a men's service club to become active in vital community affairs. They have come a long way, baby!

The main problem that women in service clubs still encounter today is that their employers do not support their club efforts to the extent that they do men's clubs, particularly as regards giving the women adequate time to hold luncheon meetings.

Instead, most of us belong to clubs that meet at night. In that way we are not taking time away from our job but we are forced to take time away from our families and we are required to be out alone, sometimes in areas which aren't the safest for women (or men, either), and this often discourages potential members from joining a women's service club.

Keep up your interest in women in service clubs. We need all the support we can get.

Roberta Holladay Royal Oak

Price isn't problem

To the editor: In response to a survey conducted by your newspaper recently, there was a rather massive outpouring of complaints about the price of gasoline.

We Americans are simply outraged at having to pay \$1.40 for a gallon of gasoline but our friends overseas pay more. In Germany it is \$2.66; in France, \$2.70; Japan, \$2.79; Brazil, \$2.80; Sweden, \$2.80; England, \$2.89; Ireland, \$3; Spain, \$3; and Italy, \$3.40

How fortunate we are to live in a country where gas is only \$1.40 a gallon.

The problem is not that gas is too high. The problem is that we consume too much.

Frederic R. Adams Birmingham

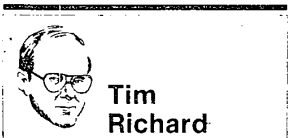
Few journalists would shed tears for the National Enquirer.

On the other hand, the publicity given to the lawsuit and the large amount of the settlement will only encourage more lawyers to start legal action against the press. Other cases will be considerably less clear-cut than the Burnett-Enquirer example.

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION allows anyone — no matter how large or small — to gather and publish news. This right extends to a large company like the one which publishes the National Enquirer to the kid down the street who publishes neighborhood news on a hand-cranked press.

Publishers of newspapers punch smaller than the National Enquirer may begin to censor themselves because of fear of legal action. If that happens, freedom of the press — and, more importantly, the people's right to know — will suffer a serious setback.

That's why journalists worry about lawsuits, subpoenas and retractions.



'The Prince' addresses a corporation

Any reporter who has ever covered a chamber of commerce has heard someone say, "Hey, we gotta get politically active," and someone else respond, "Yeah, we gotta get active," but nothing happens.

The reason, says Edward A. Grefe, is that many corporate types assume the political "wheel" has been invented, that there is some written method whereby business' point of view can command the same kind of public attention as Ralph Nader's and civil rights groups' and environmentalists'.

Grefe is a former vice president for public affairs of Philip Morris U.S.A., and the card he slipped me when he was in town recently calls him president of International Civics Inc.

He has written a book with a hackneyed title of "Fighting to Win: Business Political Power." I assure you there is nothing hackneyed about the content.

It is a chief executive officer's guide to setting up a public affairs program in a company. It is to a modern corporation what Machiavelli's "The Prince" was to the renaissance city-state with this ethical difference: Grefe advocates obeying the law, fighting cleanly but still playing political hardball.

GREFE'S STARTING point is the post-Watergate 1974 amendments to the Federal Election Campaign Reform Act, the most important part of which corporate people have ignored.

"To most corporate executives . . . this act outlined a legal way to set up a fund-raising and political fund disbursement mechanism. Few took time to look at an even more important aspect of the legislation, the right to spend corporate funds to teach employees how to become involved in the political process."

He has a point. Business groups set up political action funds with only marginal impact. You can't buy elections. You must win them.

Grefe's advice isn't cheap. His 282-page book, available as of April 15 (catch the symbolism?), runs \$35 from Law & Business: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York.

IT'S NOT ENOUGH, Grefe argues, to hire a retired admiral or general who knows the good old boys on Capitol Hill.

He outlines how to set up a public affairs office, how to find politically knowledgeable people to staff it, and how to spot developing issues and influence them instead of merely reacting when it's too late.

Flowed his pages on the limitations of lawyers. In a hot spot, a corporation usually defers to its lawyer for a legal opinion on a political question. The lawyer is essentially negative on the theory you can't get into legal trouble with a "no comment." He gets the company into political trouble.

The public affairs executive, Grefe goes on, is more than a public relations job. PR explains what is in the best light. Public affairs seeks to shape events prior to their happening.

THE HEALTH of a company is too important to be left solely in the hands of the management committee — that's how I would put it.

Grefe writes of mobilizing the political acumen of the employees, the suppliers of goods, the banks and truckers and insurance companies with whom the company deals, the local politicians who tax the company and even "the friendly competitors." No room for intra-community class warfare.

He sums it up: "The modern chief executive officer need no longer apologize for producing a profit or jobs. He may, in fact, begin to be more assertive . . . Before doing so, however, he should reach out to consolidate and to unify that constituency that shares, or should share, with him an intense interest in keeping the corporation profitable, its people productive."

Political power isn't bought. It's won.