



By PHILIP H. POWER
Publisher

OBSERVATION POINT

DISSENT

View points expressed in DISSENT do not necessarily reflect those of Observer Newspapers Inc., but are presented in the belief that publication of all segments of thought on a public issue is a prerequisite to understanding and progress.

What Is Solution To Strikes Called By Public Employees?

He said it in 1919: "There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, anytime." That was President Calvin Coolidge.

He may have been right in 1919. But in 1970, recent events have proven him incorrect.

In 1958 across the nation, there were only 15 strikes by 1,730 public employees. This year, according to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, "every three days during the first two and a half months of 1970, an American city found itself struck by its employees."

THE NATION-WIDE trend is borne out in this area.

Last year, school teachers in Plymouth went to a strike. Schools were shut down, and settlement was obtained only after a judge virtually forced both sides to bargain in his courtroom.

Earlier this spring, all city employees except fire and policemen in Westland struck. The shutdown dragged on, with neither side willing to negotiate, until a crisis involving pickets trying to prevent a private contractor from repairing a broken water main broke the stalemate.

In Livonia, police and firemen demanded more money. This spring the police staged a slowdown, charging then Mayor Harvey Moelke with refusal to negotiate. The issue became a hot one, and some observers think it was involved in Moelke's defeat last month.

Currently, the policemen and city are in arbitration, using for the first time the state law passed last year providing for binding arbitration in such disputes if negotiations break down.

FOR MANY YEARS, Michigan state law clearly forbade public employees to strike. But as time went on, and as public employees saw their salaries being outpaced by settlements in private industry, it became clear that they had no effective means of getting local governments to consider their demands seriously.

Accordingly, public employees started calling in sick, or staging slowdowns, or even walking out. Injunctions were obtained through various courts, but it shortly became clear that if an entire police department decided to walk out, even an injunction would not be effective.

Coupled with this development came increasingly successful efforts to organize public employees into unions such as the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. Seeking to represent effectively the demands of their membership, such organizations have increased the pressure on local government administrations.

MY GUESS IS that the issue of public employees' strikes is going to be one of the big ones of this decade.

Inflation and settlements in private industry increased organizing activity by unions in the field. A taxpayer revolt limiting the money available to local governments.

All these are elements in what looks like a serious and continuing problem.

It's a problem that bears particularly hard on suburban communities, for two reasons.

First, they simply aren't big enough to find room in their budgets to hire a fulltime labor relations man, such as Detroit has in Albert Leggat. Second, they are faced with the overwhelming need for money to develop new cities, so that there simply isn't much money in the budget for salary increases for their employees.

WHAT SOLUTIONS are available?

Any to be developed will have to meet two criteria: The right of public employees to organize and bargain collectively, and the right of the public not to have certain crucial services (fire and police protection being the two most often mentioned) suspended.

Much hope has been placed in the new state law, calling for binding arbitration in disputes involving police and firemen.

Livonia Mayor Ed McNamara, whose city is using the new law, doesn't think much of it. Settlements worked out in one city, with one set of employment and financial conditions, are not directly applicable to another city with a different set of conditions. Yet arbitrators, McNamara says, are prone to regard one settlement as precedent for determining another.

The other problem, according to Livonia's mayor, is that an arbitrator may come up with a settlement that a city simply can't afford.

IF ARBITRATION poses problems, what other system is available which allows continued

public safety but insures a settlement?

A number of people have been talking about an arbitration-like arrangement, but with a more lasting relationship between the arbitrator and the parties involved. Perhaps a jury of citizens acceptable to both sides could be selected to carefully fol-

low the facts in depth and then be involved in the arbitration process.

Perhaps a kind of umpire, with an arbitrator's skills, who would spend time learning the inner workings of both sides before becoming involved, would help. Perhaps Senator Robert Griffin's old suggestion about a

separate system of labor courts is the long run solution.

Whatever the solution to be worked out, it is clear that one is needed - badly.

Otherwise, we in the suburbs are going to see our communities rocked by labor-management disputes for a long time to come.

Dan McCosh writes

Educational Technology... Bah!

The audio-visual convention in Cobo Hall is over, and school budgets have just begun to be passed around in the local school districts, so it seems like an appropriate time to comment on the technological revolution in education.

"... You're sitting on tiny fingers of foam rubber in an inflated room while 21 projectors flash 1,500 slides across seven screens..." The scene is created

by something called "multimedia environment", and is calculated to get the kids' attention.

A full closet of movie projectors, slide projectors, and mechanized thingamobobs is like a welfare Cadillac to most school districts these days.

I ONCE SPENT a full afternoon trying out all the machines packed into an experimental classroom. Besides the ordinary

film, they had a thing called "controlled reading" that exposed a strip of type at a uniform speed.

The effect was like trying to read the screen credits for the last 1,700 bit-players in "Ben Hur."

About now you probably get the idea I'm prejudiced - I hack writer, probably has too many pimples to get a job with a TV station...

Actually, some of my best friends make motion pictures. I've nothing against them. I just don't want too many in the same classroom with my daughter.

ANYONE WHO HAS ever seen the script for a movie could see why.

On paper, the script for a 30-minute film is about the same length as a short magazine article. Try a race with someone - you read normally and he reads out loud - and you'll see why this is true.

Writing and mathematics are the only way real ideas are communicated. They are the best intellectual shorthand we have, and the only kind of communication that can be subjected to systematic analysis.

"But how about the pictures?" you say.

Well, how about them - how do you argue, debate or question a picture? Pictures convey a terrific emotional impact, but not much useful information. In the classroom, they stir the kids up, on rare occasions give them some motivation, but not much else.

THE REST OF the so-called "educational technology" is even worse than films. Every new teaching technique seems to have a corresponding gadget, usually to the detriment of both the technique and the school budget.

Programmed learning is a case in point.

The idea behind "programming" is a good one - putting small "capsules" of information in front of a student, letting him assimilate them, and then testing him on the information immediately.

Good teaching programs look something like old-fashioned spelling workbooks - the innovation is how they present the material. When they work well, they work very well.

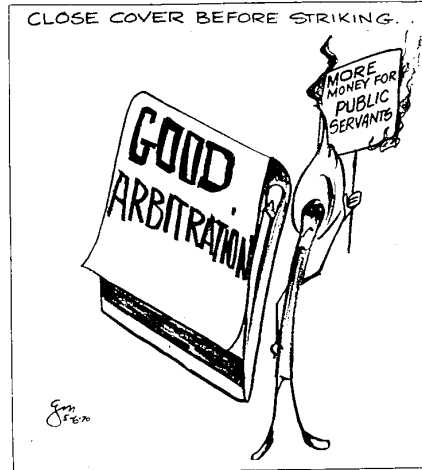
But the good idea got into the hands of the "hardware" people, who found that the books could be cut up, put on strips of paper and put into "teaching machines" that were about the most expensive page-turners ever developed.

The only rationale for those "teaching machines" was that it was a lot easier to sell "derblinkerights" to a school board than something that looked like a high-priced textbook.

No, I'm not against teaching technology in general. Some machines know their place. The tape-recorders in the "language lab" made learning a foreign language a lot easier. Computer terminals for students to practice learning "machine language" are great too.

But not mechanical thrill-seeking just because a school board likes hardware in its closet.

Tiny fingers of foam rubber, indeed.



Dennis L. Pajot writes

Parties Are For People, Too

WASHINGTON, D.C.

A delegate to the U. S. Chamber of Commerce National Convention in Washington, D. C. sought and obtained only two autographs while mingling with more than 120 of the country's most distinguished business, education and government leaders.

His tribute went to persons all-too-often condemned in the

eyes of Americans. They were somewhat surprised to be asked, None but this one delegate pressed forward through the crowd of thousands to plead for the moment.

EACH COMPLIED, scribbling in the desired spot; the space on either side of the U. S. Capitol Dome pictured on a brochure.

Below the picture appeared the words: "Action Aids for More Effective Public Affairs..." The delegate thought them appropriate.

His prizes were the script of Rogers C. B. Morton, Chairman of the Republican National Party, and Lawrence F. O'Brien, Chairman of the Democratic National Party.

MORE THAN ALL the political office holders, more than all the nation's top public advisors, more than all the wielders of the nation's capital wealth, these two men and their roles impressed the delegate as being most relevant to the needs of society.

Their jobs serve as the keystone in the arch of democracy of a Republic on one side and the free enterprise system on the other, through which all the people must march.

After flogging away at each other's partisan viewpoints in a

prepared debate, both had departed from form and issued solemn observations.

"THE ONE THING most challenged in this political year 1970 is the two-party system itself," said O'Brien. "We are at a point in America when everyone of us must prove the worth of this process."

Morton agreed. "This country will be bettered only when we can close the gap caused by the wedge of the so-called independent."

To delegates and guests of the Chamber of Commerce Morton said, "Politics never hurt my business and I don't think it'll hurt yours."

Morton is a Congressman from Maryland. O'Brien is a private businessman and teacher now and was formerly Secretary of the Post Office Department and political-legislative aide to President John F. Kennedy.

EACH NOW HAS the task of mobilizing effective expressions of the national will, through coordinating of candidates, issues and the people's voices.

This last is the most unappreciated.

Candidates and issues there will always be, with or without partisan political parties.

Who would rally significant numbers to sufficiently influential concentrations of candidates and viewpoints if not these?

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Sense And Nonsense

It's too bad the Michigan Republican Party invited U.S. Vice President Spiro Agnew to speak when he comes to our state June 15.

Judging from some of the statements being made these days by Mr. Agnew, he could stand to listen to someone else for a change.

Somehow I don't think my students will buy this. They are going to be disappointed because they believed in an article which turned out to be a farce. They ever trust the written word again? Will they ever put themselves out again for another project along this line? My sin is that I was too naive. Too naive because I believed that what was written in a seventh grade weekly was true.

I was told to write a letter but not to involve my students. Should I tell my students that a company that has just misled us, has also asked us not to write any letters expressing our feelings?