

OBSERVATION POINT

Few Politicians Take Initiative

By Philip H. Power, Publisher

In this age of polls, manufactured public opinion and manipulators of the public pulse, it's a nice change to read through Dean Acheson's memoirs. Present At The Creation.

Acheson, you may recall, was Secretary of State under President Truman. And most people recollect Truman as the little haberdasher from Kansas City who came to the presidency with what looked like very limited capabilities but wound up being rated as a pretty good Chief Executive.

Good, I think, because he had guts. Acheson repeatedly recounts decisions made by President Truman solely on the basis of what he thought was right, regardless of public opinion or political expediency. Foreign aid, Development of NATO, Dropping the A-bomb on Japan. The list is long.

Acheson suggests, without directly saying so, that Truman's political philosophy was to make decisions according to what he thought was right, and then to campaign for re-election on that basis. If the votes went against him, so be it. If they went for him, same thing.

But at least he called 'em as he saw them.

LOOKING AT THE political scene today, I don't see much of that kind of attitude.

We're in a recession now because President Johnson let us get into an inflation. And how did he do that? He had a chance to raise taxes in late 1965; he had a working majority in Congress to get it passed, and all the economic experts recommended it.

But LBJ read the opinion polls, found that people didn't want their taxes raised, and didn't push it.

The mind's eye casts back over that period and sees Lyndon Johnson bounding over the White House lawn, waving a sheet of polls, snorting, and saying, "Well, I'm the most popular President in the history of the hull U. S. and A."

The skeptic is inclined to say, "So what?" Or President Nixon, whose style is much cooler but equally canny, carefully lofting a trail balloon in the form of Spiro Agnew's speeches, finding that the polls showed Agnew was one of the most popular figures in the country today, and unflinching him on the campaign trail this fall.

THESE DAYS we seem to have government by public opinion poll rather than by principal or courage. For it somehow seems that politicians are inclined to make decisions according to whether the polls show they're going to get votes rather than according to their principals or conscience.

Is that leadership? I don't think so.

Nor do I think that today's politicians are any weaker than those of the past. If public opinion polls had been available to Truman, I suspect he would have used them in the same way as have Johnson and Nixon.

The point, however, is that the technique of public opinion polling

has enabled politicians to get an advance reading on how the public will regard their actions. And that introduces the possibility -- nay, the probability -- that politicians will trim their sails to prevailing public opinion in the endless search for votes, rather than exercising their best judgment.

IT'S GOT TO -- the point where the main place to see political leadership is in places where political polling isn't done regularly. Like suburban communities.

Two recent examples make the point.

Last year, Southfield's Mayor Norman Feder changed the city's assessment practices set up by his predecessor, James Clarkson, such that more taxes would bear on the individual homeowner than before.

Feder took his action to comply with state uniform assessment practices and because he thought it was proper policy.

Now some voters are hoping

med, and Feder will have to face them at the next election.

But at least he had the guts to do what he thought was right.

Or, in another case, Livonia's Board of Education last week tried to pass a bond issue involving some far-reaching ideas involving vocational training, recreation and civic pride.

All the experts said the Board was crazy coming for a millage of that sort, what with taxes up, people sore at students, and things generally in a mess.

The Board got licked, and good, on all four proposals. But at least the Board did what it considered right and proper, without ducking the issue.

Both these examples constitute local leadership, flying in the face of what would have been overwhelming opposition had some local polls been taken.

But I guess I'm old fashioned to respect leadership when it happens, regardless of how it turns out at election time.

Tim Richard writes

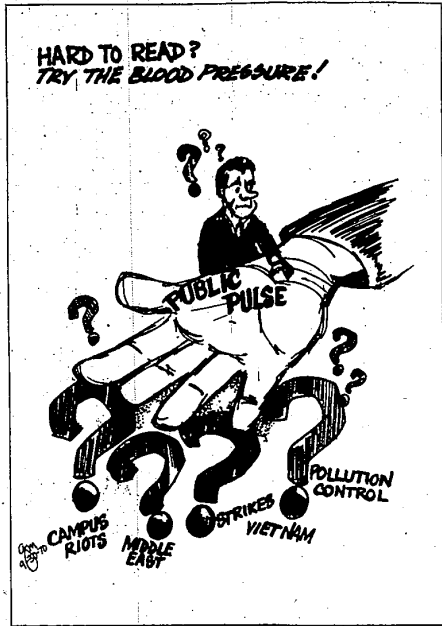
Weather Tops In TV News

What news story on television during the last week has been 244 per cent as important as the insurance in Jordan?

Here's a clue: That television news story was 1,900 per cent as

important as a labor story out of Washington and 670 per cent as important as the United Auto Workers strike at General Motors.

Need more clues? Well, it was 2,036 per cent as important as the



Asks Lower Drinking Age

By DAN J. GILMARTIN

There are those in the state and in our city who would be in favor of lowering the drinking age from 21 to 18.

That is, they would be in favor of lowering the legal age if there weren't so many segments of our society which would rise up and smite them with the "demon rum" tag if such thoughts were openly voiced.

The courts today are fairly bulging with young people before the bar of justice on charges relating to the misuse of drugs and narcotics.

BASICALLY, they are young people. In the main, they're alienated from the establishment and a large portion of their peers -- parents included.

These young people between the ages of 18 and 21 are living in a limbo of their own. They are faced with aimless wanderings after graduation from high school.

They are responsible as adults for all criminal acts. They are also entitled to serve in the Armed Forces.

But they are not allowed to enter a bar or restaurant unless accompanied by an adult; and then they're not allowed to drink.

Many of the establishments which serve alcoholic beverages have the attractions sought by the youngsters -- dancing, music, floor shows and the opportunity to associate with adults.

BUT THEY'RE excluded. The young people, however, certainly can go to the Eastown in Detroit, or to rock festivals like Goose Lake and Woodstock.

It's difficult, in assessing the explosiveness of those places, to understand why "Harman's Bar and Grill" is out of bounds.

The 18-21 group ultimately gets into a pattern. What's left is cruising up and down the streets, hanging around at drive-ins or congregating in parks.

They, as a consequence, suffer a

philosophical inbreeding. It's fairly simple to become anti-police, anti-aud and anti-establishment.

INSTEAD of pushing the young people into a sub-culture world of drugs, wouldn't it be far better to allow them to associate with not only the 18-year-olds of their peer group but also with all segments of society.

The drug society, by its nature, is subterranean. It lends itself to secrecy.

Which is the lesser of the two evils? Beer or speed?

Oakland's Destiny In The Balance

By JACKIE KLEIN

"From high above you can just barely make out the landscape, and only then if a sudden gust of wind blows away the thick, ugly cloud of smog that hovers above it."

This is a gloomy picture of what could happen in Oakland County in the year 2000 -- described in the new "Oakland County Book of History," which traces the county's rich folklore, but predicts a bleak future unless something is done.

"The rivers are brown, sometimes black, never blue. Cars are lined up for miles on the expressways. As you watch, blue exhaust smoke curls up from each car, is caught in the wind and wafted away. No trees, no grassy meadows -- just a lot of houses and buildings."

Despite this depressing possibility, the book points out that Oakland County's future will be shaped by people with bright, young ideas who will prevent the county from becoming a "sprawling environmental death trap."

THE BOOK explains that Oakland has more land for future expansion than any other county and predicts this attraction will make it a powerful business force in years to come and a challenge for economic leadership.

The biggest problem facing the county in the future will be providing the booming populace with more schools, roads, water, sewers and fire and police protection. According to a Detroit Regional Transportation and Land Use Study, by 1990 Oakland County will have a population of more than 1.5 million,

with 500,000 under the age of 15 and 250,000 between the ages of 15-24.

"That will mean a lot less elbow room but a lot more young ideas," the book states.

THE BOOK predicts that there will be more and more multi-storied buildings for housing and business and rapid advances in modern educational techniques.

The questions are: if building and expanding will affect the county's environment, can it provide living space for double the present population without wiping out every tree? Will more industry choke off already beleaguered rivers, lakes and streams?

Oakland County planners are dreaming about "cities under glass," gigantic cities under a dome of synthetic materials. These complexes will be air-conditioned and people will be able to zip from place to place inside the dome on moving sidewalks or a speedy helicopter, the book foresees.

Advanced manufacturing techniques will banish smog and smoke and lethal pollutants will be no more, is the book's optimistic prediction.

"BY DISREGARDING nature's environmental danger signals, by engaging in petty bureaucratic bickering, by taking an 'I don't care' attitude, each of us can be a little bit responsible for leading Oakland County -- now so full of bright promise -- down a road to ruin" the book warns. "As in the past, Oakland's people will remain her most vital asset."

they discover a cure for cancer? No again. Did Ted Kennedy quit the Senate? Sorry, wrong again.

The most important story on the 11 p.m. news on a typical evening last week was the weather report. It had nothing to do with a tornado or a killing smog or a blizzard. It was a typical September weather report: Warm, partly cloudy, rain in the evening.

HOW, THEN, DOES one conclude that it was more important than all the other political and social events? One arrives at that inescapable conclusion by comparing the amount of time given to weather report of Sonny Elliot to the amount of time given to all other events. Here's how I logged it:

• The Jordan strife, including color footage of actual fighting -- 115 seconds.

• The labor story from Washington -- 15 seconds.

• The UAW strike at GM -- 50 seconds.

• The strike at EMU -- 14 seconds.

• Ann Arbor tent-in -- 45 seconds.

• Warren Woods teachers strike -- 21 seconds.

• Interview with MSU's President Wharton -- 79 seconds.

• Interview with Sen. Ervin -- 74 seconds.

• A power failure in Detroit -- 17 seconds.

• A Chicago zoo feature on an elephant -- 38 seconds.

• Sonny Elliot's weather report and jokes -- 4 minutes, 45 seconds.

IF YOU ADD UP the time given to the first six stories, you should come up with 260 seconds. The weather report got 286. If one assumes that TV newsmen give time to an event in some relation to its importance, educational value or raw human interest, it follows that Sonny Elliot is more important than the first six stories put together, with 25 seconds to spare.

To put the matter in perspective, it should be pointed out that Sonny's 4:45 of broadcast time actually includes a preface of 40 seconds of solid jokes. (Let us disregard, for now, whether the jokes are very funny.)

It then follows that Sonny's uninterrupted jokes during the "news" were more important than the Washington labor story, the EMU strike, the Warren Woods strike, the power failure or the elephant feature; and only slightly less important than the GM strike or the Ann Arbor tent-in.

These, then, are the priorities that one particular station (Ch. 4) assigns to various news stories.

Keep that in mind the next time you see a commercial telling you how great television news coverage is.

Kids Losing Sports Interest?

By R.T. THOMPSON

Has the high school athletic program lost its appeal for student participants? Do the average schoolboy or schoolgirl have so many other activities and interests now that they are losing interest in football, basketball, baseball--the three major sports -- as well as many of the minor events?

That's the question many coaches in Observeland are asking after discovering that the turnout for football and cross country this fall has been far short of the usual total.

Time was when a coach would have so many candidates for the football squad that he had to start making cuts before the opening workout because he didn't, have enough uniforms.

BUT APPARENTLY that has become past history since at least three or four of the 22 schools in the circulation area of the Observer Newspapers had less than 50 candidates for the football squad.

Livonia Stevenson, defending champion of the Inter Lakes Conference and a longtime athletic power in the area, started the season with the smallest squad in the memory of Coach Jack Reardon.

Stevenson faces a rebuilding program this season, and Reardon found that few, if any, members of the junior class were among these turning out.

North Farmington, another of the traditional powerhouses, is faced with the same problem--the smallest squad in years.

And the coaches have no answer for it.

PERHAPS one of the answers is that the athletic heroes aren't the school idols as in the past. The day when the star quarterback or the ball carrier who made the winning touchdown was the biggest man on the school campus appears to have passed.

One coach, who is working with a small squad, put it this way:

"It seems like the kid with the long hair who can strum a guitar gets most of the attention these days. Forgotten are the athletic idols and the kids of today want to be in the limelight just as much as the sports heroes of past years."

"So, if it means no sports and more practice on the guitar, then that's what they're doing. This is a strange world we're living in now, and what was the story yesterday isn't even a minor item now."

IT APPEARS that teenagers today aren't willing to make the sacrifices necessary for sports participation. They don't want any part of the long hours of hard work that is needed to get in condition and stay that way for three or four months.

They seem to prefer to be a big man on campus with a big car. And operating an auto is expensive. Thus, it follows they must find some kind of a job to pay the costs, and that means no sports of any kind.

Take Plymouth High as an example. Two of the most outstanding footballers in the school didn't report this fall. One plans to turn his attention to other sports, and the other just couldn't be bothered.

Loss of the pair is bound to hurt, but others have been found to step into the two vacancies, and the team is moving along. How much better it would have been with the two in the lineup is a matter of conjecture.

We can remember not so many years back when it was the ambition of every good sized youngster to wear a varsity letter in the halls of the high school.

But that was "back when" and not now. A stroll through the halls of most any high school these days finds the big wheelers and dealers are those with the long hair, beads around their heads, colorful jeans, high heeled shoes and oftentimes a mustache.

Certainly they come out on Friday nights and Saturday afternoons to watch the games, but they aren't joining in the cheers and neither are they that much interested in the action on the field.

Most are just out for additional exposure of their curly locks etc.

WHICH MAKES ONE wonder if the day isn't rapidly approaching when school officials will have to take a good look at the athletic programs and decide whether they are worthwhile.

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