

## OBSERVATION POINT

By Philip H. Power  
Publisher

Whether we like it or not, our suburbs are directly dependent for their economic health on the state of the automobile industry. When it's going well, employment is up, people are spending money, orders are flowing, executives are meeting their debt service payments, fish are jumping and the cotton is high. The reverse happens when the auto industry is in trouble.

Unfortunately for our economy, the industry took a long strike last fall and is still in the middle of a drive to compete against imported cars made abroad, where labor is cheaper. Even more of concern in the long run is what appears to be a sustained attack launched against the auto industry by a diverse group of people.

Safety experts are pushing development of various devices which the auto companies say will help save lives but will also raise the price of cars.

Senator Hart is hot to get better bumpers, and the Federal government has laid down minimum standards for auto pollution.

Even recent polls have suggested that the American male's affair with his automobile—a romance that goes back to the Model T and carries as many Freudian overtones as any other romance—is fading.

And, of course, there is always Ralph Nader.

FOR A LONG time, the auto industry reacted to these pressures by elephantine methods: It ignored them.

But in recent months, the big three automakers have started to

react in much more constructive ways to consumer complaints. Each has launched programs designed to speed up handling of beeps related to safety, pollution, product quality and service.

Ford has started a "We listen better" campaign, and has been encouraging customers to write to corporate headquarters with complaints or suggestions about their cars. The company has also established a new customer service division to improve its service operation.

General Motors has started an experimental program enabling consumers in the Chicago area to call Detroit toll-free to make their complaints direct; the complaint is relayed to the regional service office nearest the customer and a local representative visits the customer and his dealer to solve the problem.

## R.T. Thompson writes

## No Secrecy About Public Meetings

Dallas Goss, president of the Plymouth Education Association which represents teachers in the Plymouth School District, has taken our Editor Fred Delano and School Supt. James Rossman to task for reports coming from a meeting of the school board on a Saturday morning several weeks ago.

The points at hand are that Delano was not notified of the public meeting and that he was able to learn what transpired in an interview with Supt. Rossman.

Goss, in his President's Letter published in the PEA publication Plymouth Educator, writes:

"THE USE of the careers of educators as ammunition for taking a bead on the school board by the local newspapers is reprehensible. For the sake of the teachers involved, would that the sniper had to help conduct the classes involved through to the end of the school year."

"The press seems to be piqued, to put it mildly, over the board's decision to change the date of its next meeting. As president of the Plymouth Education Association, I have not missed a school board meeting as a result of its being changed to another day. In fact the vice president of the board informed me two days before April 10 that another date was being considered..."

Then his column continues, "Another important consideration was the nearness of the deadline for notification for reemployment to probationary

teachers in compliance with the Michigan Tenure Act.

"The information pertinent to this situation that appeared on the front page of the local newspaper was not released by board members.

"It is unfortunate that the superintendent of schools felt obliged to unkennel the details of the board's deliberations. The board functions under Robert's Rules of Order which dictate that minutes of any meeting are submitted for approval and correction at the next regularly scheduled meeting which would have been April 27.

"The board's practice and only requirements have been to approve minutes every 30 days at the first board meeting of the month. The next date for this to have been done was May 10."

GOSS THEN GOES on to point out that the minutes of the meeting were released in detail three days after the meeting although the board approval wouldn't have been until May 10. Then he continues:

"Unlike another editor in Plymouth, the Educator does not consider itself to be the spokesman of the Almighty, nor to be above, the jaws governing the conduct of school boards in the state of Michigan and the rulings of the Supreme Court of this state with respect to those laws."

"Our purpose is to present a view of events to the public, as one possible interpretation and

not as the ultimate truth of a particular situation.

"POINT 1 — If the school board has the moral obligation to notify the local paper in the event of a special meeting, then the obligation to notify all papers of distribution in this area follows directly, and that's a lot of notifying. Not only this but a special effort to bring such meetings to the attention of the general public is implied. The idea that a school board is obligated beyond the law, when carried to its logical conclusion is not only ridiculous but also expensive. If the defender of the 'public's right to know' wishes to keep informed of school board meetings, let the impetus be his."

"POINT 2 — Not having one's contract renewed is a traumatic experience at best. For a young family man, it is a personal disaster. To compound this disaster by stating erroneously that they had been fired in large letters across the front page of the local paper is inexcusable.

"There is a dividing line between the public's right to public knowledge and the public servant's right to privacy in his professional life. The privacy of five individuals was invaded in such a way that chances of employment and growth in their profession has seriously been impaired."

PERHAPS MR. GOSS feels that the public, which votes for millage which pays teachers' salaries, shouldn't be told what is going on at board meetings. At least that is what he implies in writing that such information shouldn't be available until the minutes are approved perhaps a month later.

No. 1. Mr. Goss is well aquainted with the fact that all meetings of the school board are public and then all matters discussed there at once become public information. That's why the Observer Newspapers have all meetings covered with a reporter to keep the public and the PEA as well informed of the board actions.

No. 2. School boards in all communities have a tendency to call special meetings without notifying the public — the thought being that the fewer in attendance, the less discussion of actions.

We have always felt that, inasmuch as the school board is elected by the public, then its actions should be under public



AUTO CRITICS, predictably, have viewed these efforts with something close to cynicism.

Auto sources claim the reverse! A Chrysler official said of the critics, "They should come here and see what we're doing."

The public reaction seems, on the whole, positive. Chrysler's "Man in Detroit" program has been receiving about 400 letters and 100 phone calls a day; Ford has been somewhat more vague, but notes that it has received

"thousands" of letters; at GM, the volume has been somewhat lower than expected, around 100 a day.

Although cynicism may be in order, given the past history of the auto companies, at least they have shown they are willing to take steps to listen to people.

Obviously, this is a good start. If it helps the auto makers improve their credibility and their products, it can only help us in the suburbs.

## 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.

MRS. H. B. CONROW  
LIVONIA

I ask myself and the rest of the public continuously not to be so lethargic, timid and tongue-tied about our spending affairs. When writing does not help, let's march to Lansing.

You refer to the state's wise men, the true "practitioners," like the art and science, of practical politics show an unrestrained animalistic ardor in extracting taxes.

Michigan has the highest home ownership in the nation (74%). To use 50% of actual market value, this political ratio is fallacious, deceptive and unrealistic. The home owner pays 30 or 35 years before it belongs to him, and still increases in taxes every year. For what?

Glamorous demands for more public services, more subsidies — those so called better services are the same; only more scandals by people who fill their pockets and are guilty of these ventriloquial inconsistency. If it is not unusual for the tax specialist of a business firm to use persuasive facts and figures to show the detrimental efforts of new taxes.

The fact that business pays 40% of all total taxes in Michigan and provides jobs for most of the individual taxpayers is not true. How much do those people write off and still pass on to the taxpayer again?

This goes for all the utilities, their increases to the customers. How imprudent that those increases have been granted.

They like to scalp the American working man for those disasters. Most workers, the auto workers to the tradesmen with few exceptions had increases from 6% to 8%. White collar workers to 10% to 12%.

Michigan Legislature had the top list of our nation. Gov. Milliken, himself, had a pay increase of 13.3% and a generous expense account.

What about that "loophole amendment" passed down by the Legislature, that all government retirees, employee, federal, state and city — are exempt from state income tax?

It is the ability to pay, not to starve and deprive us of the necessities of life. Keep our American prestige abroad, when millions are poverty stricken, hungry? Let's substitute nourishments for the poor Americans right here at home.

## Tim Richard writes

## Teachers On School Boards?

Each Law Day, the barristers puff themselves up and proclaim: "Ours is a government of law, not of men!"

They're essentially right, but I would amend their cliché to say: "Ours is a government of law, not of ethics."

For we are in the season again when candidates are announcing for board of education posts. There being no law to prohibit it, and ethics being irrelevant, we find that a number of these candidates are persons who teach school in other districts.

For immediate examples: James Melosh, who teaches in the Clarenceville district, is running for the Livonia board; Donald M. Hanson, who teaches in Livonia, and Edwin Blasky, who teaches in Detroit, are running in the Redford Union district. There will be others. \*\*\*

NO ONE IS saying they're inept or dishonest. No one is saying they're violating the law. But I do suggest their candidacies demonstrate a certain moral obtuseness, a certain insensitivity to the ethical principle called "conflict of interest."

Nearly all teachers these days are unionized, mostly under the Michigan Education Assn., some under the American Federation of Teachers. Those unions get local officials together to plot out strategy on a regional basis.

The school boards (stockholders) have their get-togethers, too, and hear talks from prominent legal eagles on how to deal with the teachers unions.

The conflict is clear: A school board member who is also a teacher could learn the latest management stratagems, then pass them on to his union.

Before the teacher unions burn me in effigy, let me point out that the conflict of interest could work the other way: An anti-union teacher could pass on strategic information to the school board on which he serves.

HERE'S A practical case: The board and union in school district "A" agree to set salaries

based on the average in several neighboring districts. A teacher in district "A" is a school board member in district "B". He therefore has something material to gain by voting for high salaries in "B".

Similar conflicts can occur over settling of grievances.

Teachers like to argue that they can make great contributions to the political process. And they can — on city councils, in the Legislature, in political parties. But they shouldn't be on school boards.

Even their favorite argument — that they have some expertise in school matters — can be turned against them. If you get a board that has too much first-hand knowledge of schools — as we have at Schoolcraft College — then the board can begin second-guessing and interfering with the administration.

There's much to be said for a board that's a little on the dumb and innocent side.

## Editorial &amp; Opinion

## OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS, INC.

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