



By Philip H. Power
Publisher

OBSERVATION POINT

County Government Is 'Hydra-Headed Monster'

Richard Nixon is chief executive of the federal government, William Milliken is head man in state government, and Norman Feder, Ed McNamara and Gene McKinney are in charge of the local governments in Southfield, Livonia and Westland respectively.

But who is in charge of your county government? Who runs it administratively? If you don't like the run-around you're getting in a department, to whom do you go?

Nowhere. And that's just about where county government has been going. The best description I've heard of it is that it's a "hydra-headed monster," and I can't think of a more apt term.

WITH FEW exceptions, most of the people in county government want to keep it that way. One of those few exceptions is a guy named Bob FitzPatrick, the alert and progressive young chairman of the Wayne County Board of Commissioners, the man who replaced the Zak Pack on that county's legislative body.

FitzPatrick has been running into political flak of late because he champions a pair of bills before the Legislature that would allow a county to make some administrative reforms.

One would allow the election of a county manager. That would put someone in charge of the store.

The other would allow consolidation of some departments. At present, counties have road commissions and drain commissioners, and FitzPatrick's specific idea is to combine these offices into a single public works department.

IT MAKES perfect sense, just on the face of it, to put people in related lines of work in a single department. Most cities do it that way.

Mayor McNamara, who served on the old Wayne County Board of Supervisors before it was reorganized, is critical of the semi-independent Road Commission, which also runs Metropolitan Airport, for building nice but little-used roads around the airport when it could be using some of those funds for heavily traveled roads such as Six Mile.

Unfortunately, the Road Commission is headed by a three-man panel who serve staggered terms and are appointed by the Board of Commissioners. Not only do the road commissioners answer to no one for how they spend their money, but it would take four

years to replace a majority of two.

That, to use the jargon of the Now Generation, is "unresponsive" government. That's the kind of thing that men like Bob FitzPatrick, Ed McNamara and Sen. Carl Pursell are trying to attack up in Lansing.

AGAINST THEM are arrayed (yep, you guessed it) the road commissioners, the drain commissioner, the elected county office heads, and many of the less progressive politicians in both parties.

(Quick now: Who is the register of deeds? Is he doing a good job? How do you know? Shouldn't there be a chief executive you do know riding herd?)

Wayne County for many years was afflicted with a sheriff who, whatever his earlier virtues, finally became ill and decrepit. No one saw him around much of the time. But because of the political structure, he kept getting re-elected and finally died.

A mayor or city manager can remove or gracefully retire a police chief who is no longer functioning, but how do you do that to a sheriff in county government when there's really no one in charge?

That's the bad side of the picture -- the fight between the FitzPatriks and the innumerable county functionaries who stay out of the limelight and want to hang onto their jobs. There is a good side.

THE GOOD SIDE is that they are all agreed the voters should have another chance to look over county home rule and elect a county charter commission. It's supposed to be on the ballot next year.

County home rule, however, can't go very far in Michigan because charter commissions will have nowhere near the same freedom to make reforms that city charter commissions have in the municipalities. County home rule is almost a joke compared to city home rule in Michigan.

And so, even if home rule is approved by the voters and a charter commission does the very best job it can, a lot more will need to be done. That's why FitzPatrick is asking the Legislature for the elbow room to get a top-rate county manager and to reorganize a few departments along 20th century lines.

It's ironic: Here we are, on the eve of the 21st century, and our counties don't even have a 20th century government.



Tim Richard writes

Court Rules For Lawyers Actually Restrict News

With a horrible sense of timing, the Michigan Supreme Court picked the eve of National Newspaper Week (Oct. 10-16) to adopt new rules for lawyers -- or, to put it in terms of the consumer, new restrictions on your right to know the facts about criminal cases.

Chief Justice Thomas M. Kavanagh says the rules were designed for lawyers and weren't intended to regulate the work of the news media.

Now, we in the news media are used to being called some pretty nasty names, but the chief justice has gone too far this time in insulting the press corps' collective intelligence. The truth is that the rules are indeed cleverly designed to restrict the dissemination of news.

UNDER THE NEW rules, lawyers are forbidden from making pre-trial statements on such information as the previous criminal record of an accused person, confessions, the results of tests, the character or reputation of the accused, the refusal of the accused to submit to tests, the identity and testimony of a prospective witness and the evidence.

Not all of the rules are bad. A confession, for example, may later be retracted.

One court rule that is just plain stupid, however, is the one about a person's previous criminal record. It's fairly simple, though arduous, for a reporter to check past court records, the accused's neighbors or past school chums.

The Kavanagh court's rules, in this instance, are cheap harassment of the press. In an important case, they simply won't work.

ON THE OTHER hand, the press corps doesn't come into

court with entirely clean hands. Indeed, on a couple of occasions in recent years, I warned that unless certain papers mended their ways, the legal business would stick all of us with restrictive rules, and by gosh it's happened.

Recall, for instance, the John Norman Collins murder case in Ann Arbor when a Detroit Free Press reporter interviewed a young lady after she had testified in the pre-trial examination and then published a gruesome story of how Collins liked to kill cats.

Collins couldn't possibly get a fair trial after a story like that hit the streets. Remember, the trial jury hadn't been picked when it was published.

The Detroit News did an equally dirty thing to a black ex-convicted of killing another white girl in Ann Arbor, this time an unauthorized, purely speculative piece that the guy was tied to some black cult or other.

The story hurt the accused's chances of getting a fair trial, it made an unsupported accusation against the black group, it helped make Detroit's race relations as bad as they are by offending the black race, it insulted the reader's intelligence, and it probably helped turn the Supreme Court against all newsmen.

WHAT IS HAPPENING is that American legalists are moving in the direction of the British system. There, the press can report only the fact of the arrest, the identity of the accused, and not much else.

In Britain, however, it's not as bad as it sounds because the accused is brought to trial rather quickly, commonly within a few weeks.

In Michigan and other Ameri-

can courts, it takes 12 to 15 months before the trial starts in a case like Collins' or Richard Speck or the Manson gang.

Meanwhile, a fearful public could be kept in the dark. The justices of our Michigan Supreme Court should take their pettifogging noses out of the rulebooks and consider the feelings of people like the parents of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti coeds.

Michigan's courts, supposedly supervised by Kavanagh and his cohorts, are dismally slow in handling cases, especially criminal cases. The justices should perform their sworn duties in that area first, and then come up with some more sophisticated way of comprising the accused's right to a fair trial and the public's right to know.

Sense And Nonsense

We received a note from an Observerland mother asking us to say their son had won a \$500 scholarship from the Detroit News for which he is a carrier. We're flattered that the Detroit News gives an award and we're asked to tell about it.

In Plymouth they have just completed the demolition of three of the oldest houses on Main Street.

Was there a protest from the citizens of the "colonial" community who cherish the symbols of their heritage?

There wasn't. The old homes were torn down to make way for a brand new historical museum.

What wrath has Roth wrought?

Local school observers are chuckling over Judge Stephen

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.

By Dr. John Pagen
Supt. Waterford Schools

I read your article "Why Does It Take So Long In School Talks?" in the Wednesday, Sept. 29, 1971, Observer.

You touched upon many important points in the article. These points should be published widely, but you also overlooked some critically important points.

I'm wondering how people, like me, who would like to see the public thoroughly informed, can go about seeing that the information process takes place. Your point that some outside group should negotiate for school boards is not valid for many reasons.

YOU OVERLOOKED the point that school boards and administrators have attempted to hold the line to the extent that in Michigan we have had almost 200 strikes in school districts. At the present time the majority of contracts in Michigan are not settled. Isn't the obvious analysis that school board negotiators are attempting to hold the line?

What assistance have we received from the newspapers? Typically when a strike occurs the newspapers urge the board and negotiators of the union to get back to the table and compromise. The only way that school boards can compromise is by giving money.

One of the tragedies that exist today is that I have not met one newspaper reporter who thoroughly understands Public Law 379, who understands how discriminatory it is to the taxpayers, and who understands the process that takes place in negotiations.

You may also be interested to know that in many districts, ours included, administrator salaries are not tied to the raises teachers receive. In the Waterford School District last year the majority of our administrators received a flat \$100 raise for the year because of the fact that we felt it was important to bring these salaries in line.

ANOTHER FACT is that administrators today have extremely demanding jobs and appear to be getting criticized from all directions for many things over which they have no control. They must receive fair remuneration if we are going to attract the calibre of people in these jobs we need.

If you are interested in discussing the facts on public employee negotiations, I would be glad to spend some time with you. The public should be informed of the kind of laws our legislators have passed that end up costing us more and more money.

Editorial & Opinion

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