



By Philip H. Power
Publisher

OBSERVATION POINT

Voting Machines And The Nostalgia Of The Old-Fashioned Paper Ballot

I have this disturbing feeling that this is going to be the first middle-aged column I have ever written.

Why middle-aged? Because I suspect it's going to be the first one I can remember that looks back to how things were when I was young and compares them unfavorably with the way things are today.

I couldn't help thinking that way when I voted yesterday.

I walked into the antiseptic booth, pulled the big red plastic handle, and... .shtwunk...the cable-powered curtain swished shut behind me. Trapped now inside the machine, I faced the ballot which was carefully secured from my touch behind the glass and metal of the box.

And all those levers! I searched out the candidates I wanted to vote for, reached out, pawed the levers down. Click (softly).

I had just voted, played my part in the essential action of a democracy. And what happened? Just a small, soft click.

Where, I wondered, had my vote gone? Spun down electronically, whispering its way into the vacuum tube bowels of the machine, its fate entirely in the hands of whatever serviceman who set up the machine before voting.

VOTING BY MACHINE is like drinking a weak martini. You expect to get something out of it, but not much happens.

Back in the old days, you set to vote with paper ballots. You'd walk into the polling place, get your ballot, and step into one of the rough wooden booths. You'd turn, pull the curtain shut yourself, and settle down to work your way through the ballot spread out in front of you.

You voted with a pencil (ball point pens were dangerous, since the flick of a thumb by a partisan teller could spoil your vote), and when you found a candidate you particularly liked, you could put an especially deep black mark in the box opposite his name. None

of those soft little impersonal clicks.

Then, finished, you could rip back the curtain in defiance or open it smoothly and confidently, depending on how you felt (today's voting machine gives you only one mechanical, unfeeling speed) and walk over to the ballot box with your own ballot in your hand. You'd have folded it up, and you stuffed it into the box yourself as you walked out.

You might have some worries about the honesty of the tellers, but you had the nice feeling of knowing that it was your ballot, marked just the way you wanted. And you knew darn well that your vote went into the ballot box because you— not some electron tube — put it there.

Voting by paper ballot in the old days may not have been efficient, and it certainly was open to shenanigans in the counting. But at least it was personal and individual, something you could relate to and make your own.

IN SHORT, voting the old way by paper ballot was satisfying.

It may have been inefficient, and it may have been more open to dishonesty than the modern machine method, but the whole process of making your own mark on a ballot somehow gave me more of a sense of involvement with the political process than the soft click of that darn lever that I pulled yesterday.

Commentators have been puzzled about this election. They have remarked on the declining sense of involvement in the political process they see in the electorate, and they have wondered that the stories of political payoffs and corruption (on the part of both parties) have so little stirred the people.

I wonder if a small part of the problem doesn't lie in the actual mechanism by which most people have any contact with the political process: voting. And I wonder if in some subtle way the unfeeling, dissatisfying, impersonal process of voting by machine hasn't played a role in changing the way people feel about politics in our country.



Local Politics

An Unpleasant Campaign Ends

This has to be the most unpleasant political campaign I've ever covered.

Perhaps it was because it was so long — the better part of a full year. Perhaps it was because politicians no longer have respect for the public and each other, the same way the public tends increasingly to mistreat officials.

THE FAVORITE low-down trick seemed to be the last-minute change.

Paul Harty, seeking to upset Judge Robert Brang in Redford Township, began a lawsuit in the last week of the campaign concerning the incumbent's ties to the Democratic Party. Naturally, the Circuit Court couldn't possibly settle the matter prior to the election.

Morley Winograd, Democratic chairman in Oakland County, was upset about the way votes were tabulated in some Republican-dominated areas in the Aug. 8 primary. So he waited until one week before the Nov. 7 election to ask Secretary of State Richard Austin's office to send special poll watchers down to the GOP areas.

The Republicans pulled the same kind of stunt. Months ago, Oakland County Board Chairman Larry Pernick (D-Southfield) wrote a letter endorsing another

Democratic candidate. It apparently was on official county stationery. The Grand Old Party waited until the closing days of the campaign to cry "foul."

REPUBLICAN Ralph Judd knew for months that 17th District Congressman Martha Griffiths was passing herself off as Farmington, Southfield and Redford's servant, even though the district doesn't officially change until Jan. 1. Nevertheless, Judd waited until the final week of the campaign to make an issue of it.

Running for Wayne County commissioner, Mary Dumas (R-Livonia) was running ads and distributing literature which many persons felt inflated her contributions as trustee and board secretary of Schoolcraft College. I tend to think they were right, but that's not the point. The point is, why did her fellow trustee, Arch Vallier, wait until the final days of the campaign before suggesting with a public letter that Mrs. Dumas be relieved of some of her college duties?

On the Saturday before the election, I received in the mail a newsletter from State Rep. Marvin Stempien (D-Livonia). It was mailed in what appeared to be official state stationery (at

least there was no disclaimer, "not printed at state expense"). It discussed the ballot issues and bade farewell to his old legislative district.

But why did Stempien wait until the weekend prior to the congressional election to send out a newsletter on state issues? Why did he use his congressional campaign picture, and his congressional campaign logotype with the arty "S", on a legislative newsletter? Granted, he didn't mention his congressional campaign directly, but anyone who thinks Stempien wasn't

practicing the Madison Avenue technique of image building is a fool.

ON TOP of it all, there was little discussion of some of our real political issues: The approaching energy crisis, integration of the suburbs by other-than-busing means, the disposal of that mountain of trash we're placing at our curbs each week, America's weakening competitive position in foreign trade, the resulting unemployment...

This has to be the most unpleasant political campaign I've ever covered.

Local Politics

Superintendents Show The Strain

Not too many years ago, the toughest job in society was the policeman's.

Then the national columnists, newsmagazines, and pundits reached the conclusion that possibly the toughest job in America was a high school principal's because of student strikes, protests, and school activism that reached a peak in the late 1960s.

But now there seems to be a new successor to the policeman and high school principal — the school superintendent.

In large cities, superintendents are damned by white homeowners' groups if they recommend integration of the public schools and damned by civil rights' groups if they are too slow in integrating.

SUBURBAN superintendents also have their problems as evidenced by Observer stories over the years.

The drug problem — including the hard drug problem — has moved out from the inner city to the suburbs, and parents are demanding that public schools do something to solve it.

When college students in the 1960s demanded more relevancy in their classes and curriculum,

the public schools responded by expanding their class offerings to cover more than just the basic three R's.

Plymouth's James Rossman was fired by his school board nearly a year ago in a controversy that isn't resolved yet.

Harry Howard, in the Wayne-Westland school system, was well-liked and considered a competent, top-notch administrator during his more than six years there, but he too has given notice that he will look elsewhere for a job when his contract expires in June 1974.

Dr. Don Shader of Garden City, also admired and well-liked in the job he has held for more than five years, is leaving in a few months to accept a more demanding job as No. 2 man in the State Dept. of Education.

But the job of directing a suburban school system, keeping everyone happy isn't an easy one.

This was pointed out recently when a teachers' union member commented about Harry Howard that he was surprised to know that he was "only 48 years old — he looks closer to 60."

As Press Improves Attacks Increase

EDITOR'S NOTE: The author is president and chief executive officer of Dow Jones & Co., Inc., publisher of the Wall Street Journal and other business publications. The article (copyright 1972 by the University of Michigan, reprinted with permission) is excerpted from his address upon being named "businessman of the year" by the U-M Graduate School of Business Administration.

By WILLIAM F. KERBY

The current paradox is this: Never has any nation had so many newspapers (and news periodicals) of such high quality, with such varied and sophisticated newsgathering resources...

The other side of the paradox is that never in the history of this country has the press been under such consistent and widespread attack from so many sources...

I THINK the real crux of any credibility gap between the press and its audience is that never before in the history of this country have so many divisive issues arisen in so brief a span. These are issues on which thinking people have very strong and very personal views.

One of our periodicals recently published a long, and in my professional opinion right-down-the-middle, news article on Vice President Agnew and his views... My desk soon was piled high with letters about equally divided between those denouncing our article for making a hero of the vice president and those maintaining we had slandered a great patriot.

I assure you that any news article on Southeast Asia policy, women's rights, ecology, student activism and Mid-East policy results in the same sort of response.

Personally, I figure that when we get attacked by both sides, we must have done a good, honest job of reporting and editing. But many people today tend to see events in black and white — when, in all truth, most occur in varying shades of gray. And they bitterly resent the press's reporting of events which they find disagreeable or at variance with their point of view...

No longer is it possible to count the really good American newspapers on the fingers of your two hands. Today many of the finest newspapers in the country are in the 25,000 to 100,000 circulation area...

FROM THE DAY this republic was born until 1971, it was the consistent policy of the federal government to encourage and facilitate the rapid and economical distribution of news and information. That policy apparently now has been reversed...

The United States Postal Service, operating on the basis of a cost accounting study which is as mysterious to outside experts as it appears inexplicable, apparently will succeed in raising second-class (publication mail) postal charges by astronomical amounts in the next few years. In the case of some large national publications, the increases will approximate 200 per cent.

CURRENTLY, and for the first time in the history of this nation, newspapers are subject to economic controls.

If improperly exercised, these controls could be used to punish newspapers whose policies are disliked by the government and to reward those who are "good boys." I am not in any way suggesting that any such thing will be done... But the power is there.

THERE IS A well-defined and organized campaign to limit severely the right of newspapers to report all the facts on individuals arrested and indicted for serious offenses. The argument is that such reporting could prejudice the accused's right to a fair trial.

Just a few weeks ago in New York City, a local judge actually conducted a trial in private (the public and all newsmen being excluded) because he said he feared that the reputation of the accused, previously identified as a gangster, would be so mentioned in news stories and that it would prejudice the jury.

Bad habits spread quickly... A judge in Sullivan County, N.Y., decided that an arson case should be tried in secret.

Editorial & Opinion

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