

High officials face White Panthers

J. Oint

1970

“What the fuck are we going to do about those crazy White Panthers?” “I don’t know, man...I’m too wasted to even think about it.”

“Me too, man, shit, how are we gonna have a legislative session this afternoon?”

“Look, go wash your face with cold water and drink some coffee,” the fat one said, “I’ll call Schweigert and tell him what’s happening. If we can’t get it together, we’ll call the State Police and have everyone thrown out. It’ll be rough for those junior high kids from Petoskey, but we sure can’t let them see us like this.”

“Cool. When you call Tom, tell him I might not make it in. My kid just got the new Led Zeppelin album and I could really dig hearing it on earphones.”

The two state senators went opposite ways down the capitol hall, chuckling to themselves.

Outside there must have been almost two hundred White Panthers, dancing to Bob Rudnick’s tape recorder (brought from Chicago just for the day), chanting and waving their flags and banners on the normally deserted capitol steps.

A few state senators and narcs “mingled” with the crowd, getting their pictures taken and snapping up the Panther literature as fast as it was offered.

“I got one in the mail this morning, thanks,” one senator said when he was given a leaflet explaining how to smoke dope.

Back inside, three more senators were having a heated argument in the bathroom.

“Look Bob, I can understand how those punks out there want Sinclair out of jail, but you and I both know that he poses a threat to our entire way of life. Our homes, our wives, our sons and daughters wouldn’t be safe with a monster like that on the loose. I used to think he was a hippie, but I’m fairly certain at this point that he is a highly skilled agitprop agent operating under orders from somewhere within the Soviet bloc.”

“Emil, I think you’re being a little paranoid about the whole thing. Sinclair is basically harmless; a drop-out with anti-social tendencies and culturally at — odds with the mainstream we represent. As for his jail sentence, Karpegian didn’t even obtain as much marijuana from Sinclair as each of us got in the mail this morning.”

“It wasn’t as good, either. I’m wiped out.”

“What dope?!!” The third man jumped off the bowl, enraged at his chums. “Which one of you cocksuckers swiped my mail this morning?”

By now, the Panthers and friends were already inside the capitol building itself, much to the chagrin of the pre-historic employees who run the marble and granite tourist attraction.

One lady in particular was disturbed, on the verge of tears as she saw three-year old Sunny Sinclair riding on the shoulders of her uncle, David Sinclair.

“Bringing young helpless kids into this,” she blubbered through her blubber, “that’s the worst part.”

A couple of senators didn’t even know that the dope was coming. Rep. Loren Anderson immediately called in State Police, who reported that there was “top-quality marijuana in his cigarette.”

Rep. Leonard Walton, of Detroit, was especially disturbed because the envelopes bore the stamp of the Wayne State University College of Education. Postal officials confirmed that the stamping machine permit through which the letters had been processed was indeed that of the university.

Rep. James Smith was so disturbed about it that he called the university. After arguing with the operator for five minutes to convince her that he was a state senator and not some kid playing a practical joke, he got through to President Keast.

Smith frantically described the events of that morning.

“Oh, so you got it this morning?” Keast paused for a minute, and composed himself. He knew Smith was a real “square” like most hick-town senators.

“Well Senator, about a month ago I was very depressed. Our little college is in the process of expanding its campus across the expressway. There’s a bunch of niggers and white-trash over there that seem to be determined to stay in their beat-up fire-traps in spite of the fact that we are prepared to offer them what we feel are eminently reasonable sums for their disgraceful hovels.

“A group has gotten together that call themselves PCAUR. The letters stand for People Concerned About Urban Renewal. I mean, I’m concerned too, but how these folks could be against urban renewal is beyond me.

“And let me tell you, Jim, these people are stubborn. The kids are just the worst. They’re determined to swim in the beautiful new pool that we built over on Warren Ave., but Representative, these children are filthy... we couldn’t even afford the chlorine it would take to make the pool fit for human habitation once these urchins had been swimming.”

“What does that have to do with the marijuana, President?” came the exasperated reply.

“Oh, yes. Well, I was just despondent one night, to think that a rabble-rouser might actually be able to interfere with the vital quest for education and academic freedom that we are engaged in. I decided to try some marijuana on the advice of a student I sometimes lunch with.

“Let me tell you, it worked wonders. I’m more relaxed, my appetite is much better, even my wife looks good to me. I thought I might mail some to you fellows because I know the pressure you’re under up there in Lansing.”

“But you don’t understand! Two hundred White Panthers are up here to protest the marijuana laws and the imprisonment of their leader, John Sinclair. Half the senators and representatives have their “minds blown” as the kids say, and we don’t know what to do.”

“Well Jim, all I can tell you is to have the police step in if things look bad. That’s what we do around here. And by the way, enjoy your mail.”

President Keast jerked the receiver away from his ear as Smith slammed his end down in disgust.

In the senate chambers, things were tense. Senate leaders conferred behind closed doors with state police and decided to hold the session as usual. It was decided that if any of the senators got too silly, the gallery would be cleared.

A few minutes after the invocation: Senator Basil Brown asked permission to make a few remarks.

“There is a group of people here who have some quarrel with our laws about drugs,” he said, making a peace sign and grinning mischievously at the gallery of Panthers who burst into cheers.

Senate president Thomas Schweigert banged his gavel for order and warned that, under the senate rules, “guests are indeed welcome. But,” he continued, “we will allow no demonstrations of any kind. Any further outbursts and the gallery will be cleared.”

Brown started in again, the Panthers cheered again and Schweigert ordered everyone—including schoolteachers and their charges—out of the gallery. State Police saw to it that the evacuation was speedy and painful.

At that point, something of a minor debate broke out in the senate, presumably between those who toked down and those who didn’t.

Sen. Roger Craig stood up to appeal the ruling but went unrecognized. “I think this time the president blew it,” he said.

Craig noted that “veterans’ groups have exploded into applause or its negative counterpart and -there has been no suggestion that the gallery be cleared. Those, like it or not, are citizens,” Craig said of the Panthers.

Others agreed with Craig and objected to the police violence employed in clearing the building.

Good old senator Robert Huber, of Troy, held up the other side as only he can do.

“They’re not concerned with an issue,” he shouted. “We are in the midst of a revolution—and this is only indicative of what we can expect in the future.”

The newspapers, who generally take these things seriously, responded to the situation with a wave of stories designed to camouflage the events of April 30th in Lansing. They went so far as to accuse the White Panthers themselves of mailing the dope, and reported that one House member admitted, “sticking my cigarette in the ashtray and lighting it. I never smelled marijuana before.”

We know better.

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