

Highland Park Vetoes Vietnam Referendum

Carlotta Henderson

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In contrast to the Dearborn decision on a Vietnam referendum, Highland Park's City Council voted, 4 to 1, on Oct. 17, not to place the issue on the November ballot. The vote was surprising in a community which is more urban, more sophisticated than Dearborn, with a high percentage of Negroes, active in civic affairs.

Prof. David Herreshoff, sponsor of the referendum request, the Councilmen Robert Blackwell and James O'Connell were appointed by Mayor Glusac at the Oct. 10 meeting to proposition. The following proposals were submitted, Mr. O'Connell approving neither:

"Do you favor an immediate cease-fire and withdrawal of United States troops from Vietnam?" and "Do you favor continued participation of United States troops in Vietnam?"

In a heated debate on a rather uneven level in the public session of the Council, the issues boiled down to the right to vote on the Vietnam war, especially since it has never been declared by Congress, and the opposition theory that any vote at all was a risk to the morale of our boys in Vietnam, and would strengthen the hand of the "enemy," whoever that may be.

It was clear that those who support the war want no referendum even though they might win it, and equally clear that those who oppose the war are willing to risk the vote. Ranged against other WSU professors, clergymen, including Rev. David Gracie, teachers and representatives of the Highland Park High School chapter of SDS, were an assortment of Veterans of Foreign Wars, city employees, a former mayor and one clergyman.

The hero of the evening was Councilman Robert Blackwell, who not only spoke for the referendum, defending the right of free expression, stating his confidence in the maturity and judgment of the citizens, but reminded the all-white VFW that although he was a veteran of World War II and had lived in Highland Park many years, he had never been invited to join their Post.

Councilman James O'Connell then launched a violent attack on the supporters of the referendum (including some "Communists from Dearborn"), sneered at the youth, implied that others were Communists. Mayor Michael Glusac who chaired the meeting with impartiality and patience, explained that under the rules of the Council he could not stop Mr. O'Connell.

Councilman Blackwell left the Chamber, in pro-test against O'Connell's tirade, and some left with him. Lloyd Weaver, a VFW and city employee, began heckling residents as they walked out. Mayor Glusac slammed down his gavel and told Weaver he would have the police remove him from the room if he created any further disturbance. Mr. O'Connell then shouted, "There they go, look at the Communists leaving the meeting, that's the way they do." At this many more left the meeting, including several prominent Negro leaders and some people who had opposed the referendum but were appalled by Mr. O'Connell's abuse.

Mr. Blackwell returned to the Chamber later, as did those who had walked out, and the vote was taken, 4 to 1. Even though the referendum had lost, the issues of the war had been aired in two successive meetings of the Highland Park City Council.

The meeting began to break up, but Mayor Glusac had an announcement. For well over a year Highland Park has tried to secure funds for an antipoverty program, meeting every requirement, guideline, making proper appli-

cation. After months of what Glusac described as “a beaut of a runaround,” word came through that very day that there will be no funds available from the Office of Economic Opportunity. Who’s paying for the war, anyhow?

The Highland Parker, community weekly, gave extensive coverage both weeks; its first editorial was against the referendum but this week O’Connell and Weaver were both scolded for “unforgiveable rudeness.”

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