

Off Center

Sol Plafkin

1967

A “dark-horse,” William Cahalan, has been named new Wayne County Prosecutor to replace the evasive Sam Olsen, who captured a Recorder’s Court post last fall, and hopes are up that there will be a more liberal spirit in law enforcement.

Cahalan, another alumnus of the University of Detroit, appears to be another crony of Mayor Cavanagh—and that’s neither good nor bad in itself, except that it adds a little more fuel to the potent “Irish Mafia” political machine in Wayne County.

The new prosecutor is also a buddy of Joe B. Sullivan, who tried unsuccessfully to knock off Olsen in Democratic primaries in 1962 and 1964. Joe B. carried the “liberal” banner against the now-retired prosecutor and had the full support of the Negro community in both contests.

What can we expect from the new DA? He talks nice. “The prosecutor should give leadership in all areas of law enforcement and carefully guard the rights of all citizens,” he expounded as soon as he was informed of his appointment by the majority of 26 Wayne County Circuit Court Judges.

Does he really mean what he says or will he prove to be another George Edwards? Edwards stepped down from the Michigan Supreme Court to become Detroit Police Commissioner with all sorts of high-sounding progressive and civil libertarian ideals—only to find himself rapidly enmeshed in the Morally corrupt, basically bigoted attitudes and machinations of our local law enforcement agencies.

What will Cahalan do with the pending prosecution of the defendants involved in the Kercheval fracas last summer? Will he insist on bringing to trial those ardent civil rights advocates who have been the subject of constant police brutality and harassment for the past three years?

Or will he assert real “leadership” and drop the trumped up charges and let the Detroit Police Dept. know that they no longer can get away with Gestapo tactics on the streets of our town?

Will Cahalan prosecute Donald Lobsinger and his “Breakthrough” cohorts for clear violations of state law in constantly “disturbing meetings?” And will he file criminal warrants against police officers when they are charged with illegal assaults and beating of innocent citizens on our avenues?

It’s time, we think, that somebody in the community started putting pressure on the Board of Education to hire all duly-qualified applicants as substitutes. They seem to have a distinct fear of hiring people who have a record for themselves in the civil rights movement here in Detroit. One need only have two years of college to qualify, yet Ken Cockrell, with a BA and practically an LL.B. can’t quite meet their allegedly high standards. What is the Board afraid of, that Ken might be able to really communicate with the kids—something very few of the 12,000 teachers in the system seem able to do?

Hats off to Mel Ravitz for raising the issue of possible profits to members of the Cavanagh political family in the disposal of urban renewal property. We’ve always felt that there’s been something pretty fishy about the manner in which Cavanagh and his Housing chief, Bob Knox, have been so adamant about clearing hundreds of acres of land for urban renewal (sometimes called “Negro Removal”) without much regard for the people being ousted, frequently at their great inconvenience.

Just recently, when Bob Tindall, executive secretary of the local NAACP (no extremist group, that!) criticized Cavanagh's "model city" project for the so-called rehabilitation of part of the "inner city" as being another plot for more "Negro Removal," Cavanagh really lashed out at him for daring to question the integrity and motives of our great city leaders. Come now, Jerry, why are you so sensitive?

Cavanagh, by the way, really flubbed the dub when Councilman Nicholas Hood proposed a new attempt to enact an "open occupancy" ordinance for the city. Cavanagh recited some bunk about the state (through the civil rights provisions of the 1963 Constitution) pre-empting the field and prohibiting local governmental units from enacting their own legislation in the area of civil rights.

I was disappointed to hear our mayor talking that way after he had supported a futile battle to enact an open housing law in 1963. The "pre-emption" argument was used by some of our lukewarm "liberal" councilman in voting against the ordinance in 1963 -when they were really trying not to alienate the Poindexter Homeowners' combo with their tremendous "backlash" voting strength.

Actually the "pre-emption" argument is based on an opinion that Attorney-General Frank Kelley issued just before the disastrous 1963 vote in the Common Council. Our legal research indicates that an opinion of the Attorney-General is only "advisory" to state officials and carries no legal weight at all. In fact, in 1964, conservative Washtenaw County Circuit Judge James Brekey, Jr. upheld the constitutionality of an Ann Arbor "fair housing" ordinance and it would seem that this official legal determination should have a lot more weight than a mere Attorney-General's Opinion.

I'm happy to see Judge Bob Colombo come out for the rights of the "little man" like he promised me he would during his campaign for Recorder's Court. Colombo, after releasing a man charged with felonious assault on personal (no money) bond, refused to let officers return him to the cell for \$41.00 in outstanding traffic tickets. This is one of the many little indignities poorer people in our town have had to go through once they get involved in the bureaucratic inhumanity of our so-called "law-enforcement" system.

Colombo did not run out of the "liberal" bag in last fall's election, but may prove to be one of the top men on our new bench. As one of the attorneys for the police in the Piggins grand jury probes, he got a big kick out of showing his co-clients that "constitutional" safeguards were also for their benefit.

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