

Off Center

Sol Plafkin

1967

The champion fighter for civil liberties in this town may turn out to be that famous right-winger Donald Lobsinger, chairman of Breakthrough. His sometimes puerile and offensive tactics may help fortify our always precarious constitutional rights.

The latest Lobsinger incident raises a host of exciting issues which must elicit the sympathies of the civil libertarian.

First, he apparently was granted permission by one of the organizations entitled to be in the St. Patrick's day parade to carry his own banners honoring the late Sen. Joe McCarthy. As distasteful as this may appear to many of us, there is no question that one has the right to be as fanatical as he wants.

The police tried illegally to remove the banners, but Lobsinger refused and may have even jostled a few cops a little bit. So he is charged with resisting an officer who was attempting to perform an illegal act of squelching constitutionally protected expression. Too often the police use the legal weapon of a "resisting arrest" charge to intimidate people engaged in any sort of unpopular demonstration or citizens whom the police would just like to harass. This charge has been used consistently against civil rights advocates.

Just two weeks ago Frank Joyce, News Editor of this paper, Al Harrison of the Afro-American Youth Movement, and Cortland Cox of ANCC were found innocent of this charge in Records Court when Judge Brennan threw the case out for lack of evidence. This is all very nice, but the case had stretched out over two years causing the defendants all sorts of inconvenience to say nothing of the original arrests and incarceration.

So Lobsinger is arrested. He is about to be held overnight illegally when Judge Tom Poindexter comes to the rescue and pulls him out with no reason why Lobsinger or any other citizen in Detroit should be held overnight when an immediate appearance before a judge could lead to the setting of a nominal bond when the alleged offense is not serious and the defendant is fairly likely not to skip town to avoid his court appearances.

Perhaps, this is the beginning of a 24-hour arraignment service such as is being tried now in Manhattan with great success.

Lobsinger's job with the City of Detroit may now be in peril because he supposedly made a phone call to the mayor over city phones on "city time?" What about his ultimate boss, Mayor Cavanagh, who has been running for the U.S. Senate, President, and maybe even Pope—on "city time?" ...

The newest "dove" on the political scene may be Illinois Senator Charles Percy. He has come out for direct negotiation with the Viet Cong. He might be a pleasant alternative to LBJ in 1968...

As the Vietnam war is stretching out interminably, "inner city" teachers are facing a dilemma. How well should they teach their kids, especially boys, how to read? The less "literate" these kids are, the less likely they will be to risk their lives in the Vietnam mess...

The solid front of Michigan Negro legislators determined to withhold funds from the Civil Rights Commission until it begins acting more effectively is cracking a bit, but the CRC may be beginning to learn that it can't just sit on its rear end and issue pamphlets and engage in a few token enforcement proceedings...

It was nice to see Police Commissioner Ray Girardin testify before a U.S. Senate Committee on behalf of the recent Supreme Court decisions protecting individual rights in criminal proceedings. It's too bad that he can't get his local gendarmes in Detroit to follow the spirit of those rules in dealing with the man on the street...

The prospects of a Dearborn-type referendum in Detroit on the war in Vietnam seems to be ensnarled in legal red tape in the Corporation Counsel's office. Mayor Cavanagh, a supposed "peacenik", should get the Corporation Counsel, his personal appointee, to rule that a petition drive by the voters could put the issue on the ballot as an "advisory question." They are not as "enlightened" as their colleagues in Dearborn.

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