

Drive-in Policies Spark Protests

Pat O'Dea

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Up to one hundred young people from South Oakland County have spent three nights of the week of April 17 at the Elias Brothers' drive-in, at Woodward and Normandy in Royal Oak, informing their elders that they are tired of being pushed around.

The drive-in has recently blockaded their parking lot to make it impossible for cars to cruise through, and soon plans to add a fifty cent cover or minimum charge. As one picket put it, "They have forgotten that we are the attraction here, not the lousy food or the lousy service or their SS guards. If the kids aren't here, they have nothing to sell."

Another complaint was that the "rent-a-cops" at the drive-in were over-enthusiastic about breaking heads to enforce the drive-in's rules. When asked about this, a demonstrator said, "As close as we can tell the guards are out of work, ex-stormtroopers here on some kind of lend-lease program. There are two guys here somewhere, who were clubbed around recently by the rent-a-cops."

When one of the guards was asked about the beatings, he said, "No comment, and don't try to talk to any other guards." In all fairness, two demonstrators, Pat Katte and Don Jones, remarked, "the Royal Oak police have been very fair and cooperative with us." An officer at the scene said, "We're only here to maintain order and control the crowd."

A combination protest march and Love-In, which was scheduled for Saturday, April 22, had been postponed for lack of a parade permit. It will happen as soon as the permit is obtained. The march will start on the Boulevard at Woodward and Thirteen Mile, and end at the Love-In directly across from the restaurant. A band, The Sleepless Nights, will be featured.

In the suburbs, drive-ins have become a center of teen culture. The average young person spends about 75% of the time he is away from home in or around a drive-in restaurant. Even with the advent of the teenage "nightclubs," the drive-ins are still the cheapest way to spend an evening. An average evening at a teen nightclub will cost about seven dollars, whereas in the course of an evening on Woodward you would spend about a dollar and a half.

If the fifty cent minimum or cover charge does go into effect, the Royal Oak City Commission will be turning thousands of teens out into the street, with no place to gather and be. The resulting havoc will be blamed on the kids, and not on the commission. With teen crime on its way up, it would seem the commission might find it more rewarding to spend its time looking for things for young people to do, not things for them not to do.

As one of the pickets said, "If they make the drive-ins so expensive we can't go there. What will we have left?"



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