

# Off Center

Sol Plafkin

1967

Rep. John Conyers, Jr. cast, as he promised, the only dissenting vote in a House judiciary subcommittee against that idiotic, probably unconstitutional, law which would make it a Federal crime to burn, deface, etc. the American flag. (The “offense” is now only covered by individual state laws.)

He predicts that only about 23 congressmen will have the guts to vote against the bill when it hits the floor of the House.

Conyers is part of a hopefully increasing segment of “new left” politics on the local and national scene. When I criticize him for occasional screw-ups, it is because I feel that he is capable of doing a lot better and that constructive criticism will be much more appreciated when it appears in print, rather than expressed privately. (The “responsible journalistic role,” according to Walter Lippman).

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Rumors are around now that the United Auto Workers—which cannot rid itself of its patronizing attitude towards the Negro community—is out to get Conyers in 1968. A possible opponent is Horace Sheffield, an intelligent and articulate U.A.W. staffer and big wheel in the once-powerful Trade Union Leadership Council (TULC).

Although there are some militant folks in Conyers First District who are not completely happy with him, they are unlikely to support Sheffield who represents too much of the Negro “old guard” in Detroit.

Sheffield’s latest stand against thrdistrict- plan of electing councilmen is hardly likely to gain him favor among most Negroes and thinking whites who see the plan as a simple method of providing instant and, hopefully, effective representation for the now under- and misrepresented Negro community...

Speaking of the “district” plan, it is unfortunate to see Councilman Mel Ravitz sticking to his adamant opposition to it. Ravitz predicts that it would lead to increased segregation.

Well, the segregation is already with us—and the district plan just recognizes its existence and provides a much better opportunity for the expression of already—segmented interests on the Common Council.

(Latest unofficial statistics give the Negroes 37-1/2% of Detroit population. The only have one out of nine councilman—or 11% representation.

Of the 24 equally—divided state House districts in Detroit, 9 are represented by Negroes—which comes out exactly to 37-1/2% representation.)

Ravitz, a basically forward-looking guy, has been amazingly isolated from the mainstream of thinking in the Negro and young progressive white community. (Even the once-“finky” Americans for Democratic Action has endorsed the plan of Rep. Jackie Vaughn III for council districts which swept through the House and was killed by Senate committee).

Ravitz still talks dreamily of a labor—liberal Negro coalition—which, while it played a significant dynamic role in past Detroit politics, no longer has the flexibility and breadth of approach now necessary to meet the increasing tensions in Detroit.

The esteemed liberal councilman probably likes the present cozy relationship on the Common Council where no single member has to worry about a specific constituency and can sit back complacently while a strong Mayor (who can make all appointments without council conformation) pretty well runs the City Hall ball-game.

Ravitz is also probably concerned about the great difficulty he personally would have in getting elected in the “outer city” district where he presently resides.

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While the U.S. Congress seems to be ready to violate the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution by punishing flag-burners, our present unrepresentative Common Council is seriously considering an ordinance to require permits of motorcyclists before they enjoy our city parks. This would seem to be a clear violation of the ‘due process’ and “equal protection” clauses of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

I wonder what criteria they can use to judge who is eligible for a permit. Shaves and ties—perhaps?

# fifth Estate

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