

“Crude, Obscene and Illiterate”

The Fifth Estate at Southfield-Lathrup High School

J.R. Kennedy

1970

“If your children ever find out how lame you really are, they’ll murder you in your sleep.”

—Frank Zappa, December 1965

Some very strange action has been coming down at Southfield-Lathrup High School. Rick Cricow, a student there, has been selling Fifth Estates in the area and distributing them at his school. Last month the Assistant Principal of the school, Richard Leland, confiscated the papers and instructed Cricow to discontinue selling them on school property.

Rick Cricow then contacted the Fifth Estate and we agreed to visit the school. An interview was conducted wherein we discussed the Fifth Estate’s role in the alternate culture with a group of journalism students who put together the student newspaper, “Dimensions.” When we arrived at the school, we were greeted with warm smiles and handshakes by the Assistant Principal, Leland. He bid us welcome, talked with us briefly, and then showed us the way to the interview.

At the interview, we were greeted in an even more friendly way by Robert Longe, the faculty advisor to the student newspaper. Both men were later quoted in “Dimensions” as describing the Fifth Estate with varied combinations of “crude, obscene, profane, illiterate, grotesque, and trash of no redeeming literary value.”

In the next issue of “Dimensions” two of the three top editors, Ken Arfa and Mitch Ross, backed the sale of the Fifth Estate. The Student Congress also approved its distribution after the second session dealing with the issue. Richard Leland predictably declared the Congress decision as unimportant and the outcome of the matter is yet to be tested.

This entire incident, as it unfolded, exposed the central conflicts that have created the psychological and cultural separations that exist in Amerika between youth and the “adult world.” Leland and his lackeys have demonstrated to the individuals involved in the controversy that the school administration is totally hypocritical and inconsistent.

Leland, known at the educational compound as a right-wing authoritarian, first stated that the question of newspaper sales would be brought before the Student Congress for the final decision. He then decided that, really, the only reason Cricow could not sell the paper was because by selling them he was realizing a profit, and this was not allowed under school regulations. When Rick Cricow proposed that he could sell the paper at his cost or distribute it free, he refused to comment. Leland then completed his turn around and said that even if the Student Congress did approve the paper he still would not allow it.

However, the obvious inconsistencies of this behavior is not the only important aspect. These actions reveal an overall repressive mentality; they clearly illustrate the Assistant Principal’s attitude toward youth and their culture; and they further demonstrate the actual negative feelings that Leland holds in regard to the Student Congress.

Leland believes that it does not matter if he gives the kids a straight line or not. He believes that if he can waver, stall, and confuse the students long enough, they will forget the issue. And even if they do not forget, he feels he

can dictatorially demand compliance. His undisguised contempt for the students is indicative of the fact that he underestimates student strength and their ability to know who the pig is.

Though Richard Leland sports long sideburns and a ready plastic smile, the students who are into culture and politics understand that his actions identify him as a senile old man that is totally alien to the young. Most adults, unable to relate to the function, form or content of the alternate media, scorn it as “trash of no redeeming literary value” in an attempt to discredit its revolutionary purpose.

In fact, adults attempt to discredit youth culture at all levels, and try to force youth into the confined plastic cubicles that they themselves are trapped in. Youth who want to know about their culture will continue to read the Underground Press, and no amount of repression is going to change that.

When Leland first tried to avoid the issue of selling the papers by alluding to the Student Congress, and then arbitrarily decided that their decision did not matter, he revealed his autocratic attitude toward that body. He assumes that students cannot, and should not, be allowed to decide for themselves what material they want to read. His actions demonstrated publicly the fact that the Student Congress at Southfield-Lathrup is a powerless body created to serve the administration’s interests. It functions only as a means to divert students away from serious political activity.

Aside from the conflicting moves described earlier, Leland’s hypocrisy was demonstrated when he did not confront us directly with his real opinions about the paper, but instead greeted us warmly.

Richard Leland did not confront us honestly because he is a liar and a fraud that is well trained in deception and misrepresentation. Which face that he greets one with, the opinions that he holds, and the stands that he takes, are not based upon values or personal belief, but instead are matters dictated by convenience. He is a classic example for the students of Southfield-Lathrup of what it means to be a product of the corrupt, alienating Amerikan culture that brings you polyethylene flexibility.

Robert Longe, the journalism advisor who sat in on the interview, is also guilty of similar hypocrisy. He not only turned his liberal smiling face toward us, but pretended to sympathize with our efforts, identify with our politics, and relate to the struggles of youth culture. He never, during the entire interview, expressed any dislike, disgust, or negative criticism concerning the Fifth Estate. When we talked about the need for revolution, he spoke about the urgency of radical social change, and it was he who characterized Richard Leland as being a right-wing conservative. When we were searching for a solution for the newspaper issue, it was Robert Longe who put forth the suggestion that the students and the Fifth Estate attempt to work through the Student Congress to get the paper placed in the student bookstore. Yet, when the next issue of “Dimensions” appeared, the following “advisors note” was attached to the bottom of a favorable student editorial.

“ADVISOR’S NOTE: Though many of Mitch’s points are well taken, I disagree with his conclusion. I consider ‘The Fifth Estate’ crude, obscene, profane, and illiterate. Material sold in the school has the sanction of the school; surely, the school should not sponsor the sale of a periodical which is a prime example of tawdry journalism,, unimaginitive expression, grotesque reasoning, and substandard English.”

—R.C. Longe

If Robert Longe felt that the “school should not sponsor” the sale of the paper, why did he promote the idea and suggest the bookstore location? If he felt so strongly about the paper, why did he pretend to empathize? Not only are these contradictions readily apparent, and the hypocrisy blatant, but Mr. Longe himself is practicing some rather “grotesque reasoning.” He fails to realize that profanity, perversion, and obscenity exist only where there is a conflict between normal sexual impulses and ill-conceived social/ civil laws. He further fails to realize that role playing, phony and hypocritical, is far more corrupt and profane than any word in or out of Webster’s.

To resort to a discussion of the efforts of the Fifth Estate to be a revolutionary organ only in terms of “tawdry journalism” and “substandard English” is a typical cop out. Our critics seldom confront the political content of the

paper. They, as did Mr. Longe, only nebulously allude to the form. They only talk about this gross word or that bad structure.

Well critics, we don't give a rat's ass about any inhumane, constricted notions about obscenity, and even less about some obscure, arbitrary norms of grammatical structure. This culture has long since rejected the senile old farts who make and perpetuate those ridiculous rules. We are aware that pornography is not the issue and that it is only used to protect your position.

Mr. Leland and Mr. Longe, how long do you think you can continue to fool yourselves and the students? They are not blind to your inconsistency and to your real motives. Your fragile culture will become increasingly irrational as it collapses. We totally understand that your shallow complaints and epithets are no more than fronts for a political decision to resist the side of America presented.

A teacher or administrator who smiles and contradicts, who smiles and pretends, who smiles and lies, will, in the final analysis, be no more than a pig up against the wall with his teeth showing.

fifth Estate

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