

Snippets

1. Background: This is taken from a speech by Vincent Stone, president of the Marijuana Education Society of British Columbia, as reported in The Silhouette (November, 1979):

The growing gay population is largely due to cannabis [marijuana]. Marijuana contains female estrogen [a hormone] which is affecting the male users.

Thanks to David Hitchcock of McMaster University for the above and the following example.

2. Background: This excerpt about marijuana use comes from Science News (December, 1975):

Two of the most serious charges [against marijuana] are that marijuana reduces motivation and lowers testosterone (male hormone) levels. . . . A clinical sample of 41 pairs (users and nonusers) was selected and matched for age, education, marital status, tobacco and alcohol use and education. . . . The researchers were careful to test serum testosterone levels and could find no difference between users and nonusers.

3. Background: A quote from Oscar Wilde:

All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their own peril. It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors. Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital. When critics disagree, the artist is in accord with himself. We can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely. All art is quite useless.

Thanks to Dan Passell at Portland State University for this example.

4. Background: The following three excerpts deal with a proposed "voucher system" in California which would provide parents some element of choice in deciding how their tax dollars would be spent for education. The first, "A Boost for Vouchers," by Joseph Sobran, appeared in the Sacramento Bee (August, 1979):

One advocate of the public school system, R. Freeman Butts, defends it because it imposes uniform values--"common commitments"--on students. Its whole purpose, he says, has always been to make them "self-governing citizens rather than...private persons loyal primarily to their families, their kinfolk, their churches..."

There we have it. The mission of the American school is to homogenize American children. Not for their sake, but for the State's. The best way to

make them "self-governing citizens" is apparently to take them from the plural influence of their parents and to submit them to a monolithic state program.

If this is the defense, the prosecution rests.

Comment: Perry Weddle submitted this material. Here is his analysis of this passage: "By unfairly dragging up the specter of the totalitarian State, thus unfairly exaggerating Butts's position, Sobran knocks down a straw man. That American public schooling imposes "common commitments" on its students, attempting to make them "self-governing citizens rather than...private persons loyal primarily to their families. . . kinfolk . . . churches," as Butts claims, implies nothing about American schooling being "monolithic" or "state." Public schools in the U.S., unlike Russian or French schools, say, are not controlled by a central government. Local school boards have always had considerable autonomy, and the 50 individual states vary in their educational approaches. There's enough wrong with public education already that Sobran could attack, rather than engaging in the emotionalism suggested in his pejorative language."

5. Background: This response to Sobran's argument by Edd Doerr appeared in the Sacramento Bee (September, 1979):

Are public schools "anti-pluralist," as Mr. Sobran asserts? Hardly. Their rich mixture of teachers and kids of every faith, race, class and condition make them far more pluralistic than parochial/private schools, which are generally rather homogeneous religiously, ethnically ideologically, and in other ways.

Comment: Weddle's reply: "Against Sobran, Doerr concludes that public schools are not anti-pluralist, and that it is parochial/private schools which are more likely to be anti-pluralist, because whereas a public school generally mixes races, faiths, etc., a parochial school or private school generally does not. Even if Doerr is right about the difference (which he may exaggerate) his point fails to tell against Sobran's. Rightly or not, Sobran maintains that by tending to impose uniform values on society, public schools are anti-pluralist. But wouldn't they tend to do that, if they do, regardless of the make-up of their faculties and students? And just because a private or parochial school was homogeneous (all Catholic-Chicano boys, say) doesn't mean that it will produce a homogeneous society, for a voucher educational system would produce all sorts of schools. The schools may be homogeneous, but the society would be, if anything, more pluralistic than before. Doerr equivocates on "pluralist" and "homogeneous." What Sobran was writing about, pluralism in a society--many viewpoints and ideals--differs from Doerr's pluralism--many races, faiths, etc. So by only seeming to answer Sobran, Doerr ignores the issue."

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6. Background: A letter to the editor of the Sacramento Bee on the topic of the voucher system stated:

Wilson Riles says that a voucher system would "pave the way for state financial support of schools run by cults." Why is he afraid of letting parents select schools for their children? Is it because they will run away from his system if they have the chance?

Comment: Weddle's analysis is as follows: "This letter's author could easily show that most if not all private and parochial schools under the voucher system would be run by major religious groups or by responsible private organizations, not by the Charlie Mansons and Rev. Joneses which Riles's pejorative term "cult" implies. Instead the author forgets the issue--vouchers--and attacks Riles ad hominem. Even if he were "afraid," as the author's two improper questions unfairly assumed, Riles may be right. Therefore the author should address Riles's arguments, his position, not attack Riles himself."

7. Background: An advertisement sponsored by Chevron about gas prices:

Gasoline prices: what pumped them up? There are some very real but not always recognized reasons why the price of Chevron regular line has gone up an average of 62.3¢ per gallon since the pre-Embargo days of 1973. (The price increase includes Chevron's profit increase, which averages 1¢ per gallon on crude oil and petroleum products sold worldwide.): Increase in cost of crude oil, 35.6¢; increase in refining and distribution costs, and miscellaneous taxes, 15.0¢; increase in dealer margin, 7.8¢; increase in sales tax, 3.9¢. In other words, while gasoline prices have gone up 62.3¢ per gallon, in the last six years, little of this represents Chevron's increase in profit. Thank you for listening.

Comment: Weddle's evaluation goes as follows: "Seeming to conceal more than reveal, Chevron needs to answer the following:

A. If the issue is gasoline prices, then why focus only on regular? At least Chevron could state that profits on other kinds of gas are comparable.

B. More importantly, Chevron reports their profit increase on "crude oil and petroleum products sold world-wide." But that's not U.S. retail gasoline. One might as well say, "My savings account income went up 1% last year, so my total income went up 1%!"

C. Isn't Chevron just one link in a multinational conglomerate? If so, the whole story concerns total profits from all divisions--Chevron and all the rest. For all we know, the conglomerate's tanker fleet also made a penny more, their refineries another, their holding companies another, their drilling subsidiaries another, etc.

D. The biggest increase, 35.3¢, is in crude. Since oil companies have no incentive to keep the price of crude low. how much, if any, of that increase did Chevron "pump up"? (Chevron needs at least to address the matter.)

E. Given the high turnover rate in gas retailing, a penny/gallon profit would be tremendous; Chevron's increase since '73 has been a penny. Now granted, that's not much compared to the 62.3¢ increase in the price of regular, but for motorists using a tank or two a week, it's still maybe \$10 or \$20 a year just in extra profits, those on top of already high profits.

F. Chevron could be concealing the lack of increase in "miscellaneous taxes" by lumping them with strange companions, namely, "refining and distribution costs." (Chevron could bother, notice, to provide a special category for sales tax, which rose sharply.) Although like point E. above, this point is not directly relevant to the specific issue, Chevron's share of gas price increases, it does touch the general issue, public alarm at spectacular oil profits, and the implied conclusion, that Chevron is a good guy after all.

So if Chevron wants public favor, it should improve its image by telling the whole truth.

(Editors' Note: Weddle did his commentary on the last four examples under the constraints typically put on students: i.e., in class, with a 50 minute limit. Under these circumstances, we think his comments quite perspicacious, as did his students, who gave him a B+!)

8. Background: This letter to the New York Times (November, 1978), from a retired deputy inspector of the police department, is in response to a Times editorial (November, 1978) about discrimination against homosexuals:



I am in complete agreement with the last paragraph of your November 10 editorial on discrimination against homosexuals as a generality. However, unless a specific exception is made relative to "on the street" police work, we might be opening Pandora's box.

It is a well-accept fact in police administration that recruitment of stable personnel is hampered by the inability of science to determine an adequate psychological test. In order to prevent the employment of an unstable police officer, with all its concomitant woes, every effort must be made to recruit only those whose personality traits fit within the parameters of normalcy, whatever that might be. Throughout the years, the news has been replete with instances of recruitment failures in this area. No one yet has been able to determine what kind or degree of pressure will trigger a flawed personality.

Unless we are ready to accept homosexuality as totally normal, we must

consider it as being at least a flawed personality trait. Other flawed personality traits, if known to the recruiter, have been sufficient grounds to exclude an applicant from obtaining entry into the police profession. In most instances, court action to brand this recruitment policy as arbitrary and capricious has been turned aside.

To legitimize one form of flawed personality trait would place New York City and the Police Department in a very tenuous legal position if, as a result of the employment of someone with an admitted personality flaw, injury to life or limb occurred.

My 35-plus years as a member of the New York City Police Department, I believe, qualify me as an expert with the right to urge caution on this issue.

Thanks to Elizabeth Wing of Hamilton College for sending us this example.

9. Background: In an article entitled "Don't shoot the messengers! We didn't do Joe Clark in," Allan Fotheringham, a columnist for Maclean's (March 17, 1980) took notice of what he perceived to be the Progressive Conservative party's tendency to blame the media for their losses in a previous election. He stated:

It is all doubly puzzling, this viewing of the facts of politics through the wrong end of the telescope, because there has probably never been a time when the press was less powerful in its ability to affect elections. Every major English-language newspaper in Canada, with the exception of the Toronto Star, backed Joe Clark and the Conservative party in the election. Practically every single commentator on the campaign trail, not to mention the meat-and-potatoes reporters, was openly contemptuous of the cynical, insulting Liberal campaign run by Pierre Trudeau and his packagers. Little good that did anyone. The voters went their own blissful way, as always, and did what they were going to do in the first place.

Comment: Fotheringham's point here appears to be that the press has very little power to affect elections; hence the PC's are wrong in blaming their defeat on the media and the press. Let us suppose for the moment that Fotheringham's is correct in his attribution: i.e., that some PC's do blame the press. The question is, then, has Fotheringham provided compelling evidence for his claim that the power of the press is at an all time low? One certainly tends to think his conclusion is a bit hasty: it would be interesting to note what possible influence the press had in previous recent elections. As well, the power of the press to influence readers' opinions is notoriously subtle and certainly not restricted to manifest statements on the editorial page. There is the whole problem of the sort of coverage given to the candidates in terms of placement, balance, etc. Fotheringham doesn't touch on these points at all. (The Editors)

10. Background: Much publicity has recently been given to the case of Margaret Shafai, an immigrant who was being required to leave Canada because she did not have a visa. One letter to the editor of the Thunder Bay Chronicle-Journal (Winter, 1979) argued as follows:

Either way the government is doomed to lose. If she is allowed to stay, then what about the tens of thousands of illegal aliens that are in the country?

She had a job and has contributed to the country while she was here. Her two children are Canadian born. It seems a bit ludicrous to deport her, a tax paying, upstanding citizen with Canadian children, when the government is letting FLQ terrorists back into the country.

Thanks to Charles Ripley, Lakehead University, for submitting this example and the two that follow.

11. Background: The present, separatist government of Quebec has been promoting "sovereignty association," an arrangement in which Quebec would be a distinct nation from Canada but would have currency and certain other institutions in common with Canada. The following letter on this topic was printed in the Thunder Bay Chronicle-Journal (Winter, 1979):

The subject of sovereignty association means you keep us under your wing, 'til we get established, then Canada, you will become all French.

It seems that not so long ago Adolf Hitler proclaimed a superior race; do not some Quebecers have the same opinions of themselves?

Sovereignty-association seems somewhat like a rapist being helped to gain access to the bed of a virgin.

This is a big country but not big enough for a divided Canada. I believe in the words: One flag, one speech, and one Canadian with a big 'C'.

12. Background: Profits made on the sale of liquor and wine by the Liquor Control Board of Ontario have been much discussed in recent weeks. The following letter from K.M. of Ottawa appeared in the Toronto Globe and Mail (April, 1979):

If 98-million in Liquor Control Board of Ontario operating costs can return 444-million in profits, as reported by the LCBO's public relations director Bob Purcell, this confirms a government-sanctioned monopoly profit of more than 350%.

Doubtless the Conservative government thinks that wines, etc., are "luxuries." Curious therefore that the current citizens' protest movement (as reported by Hugh Winsor) is headed by a church organist. But then, everybody knows that church organists are rolling in money.

And anyway, why is the provincial Government in the wine business in the first place? Wines should be handled by people who know what they are doing, as in any civilized country.

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