

School Secret

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would permit the Board to carry out the provisions of the state of Michigan statute prohibiting these secret high school societies.

The Michigan School Code of the laws of the State of Michigan makes it unlawful for any pupil in any public school "to organize, join or belong to any high school fraternity, sorority or other secret society."

Societies Defined. It further defines these organizations as those "whose active membership is composed wholly or in part of pupils of the public schools."

The law provides that each school board "prohibit the organization or operation of such . . . within the school system."

The resolution was opened for discussion and Board member H. Rose-Mack, of 1160 Lake Park, rose to object to the motion.

"My objection to the motion to control these societies is just that I feel that it is the policing of a social activity which rightly is the province of the home," stated Mr. Mack. "Naturally, we have to have local bodies to look after us and to protect us, but this problem tonight is a 35-year-old situation. Since the time the original law was passed, little or no effort has been made to solve it. I think this law governs social gatherings, an activity which legislation has no right to cover."

Fill Social Gap. "Juvenile delinquency in Birmingham is practically non-existent," he continued. "I feel that these clubs have a right to do in keeping this factor to a minimum. However, I do believe that we should do what we can to do in keeping these activities strictly outside the school. These organizations fill a big social gap, and till something is found to replace them, we had better be careful of our policing of them."

Mrs. Lyle brought up the legal obligations of the Board when she stated, "My three children deny all members of these organizations, and I can say that not any of them appear to have been damaged from their associations in these societies. But when I became a member of this Board, I saw the law regulating them and believe it should be enforced."

"We cannot run through any red traffic light we care to, nor can we park any place we like to. There are laws which regulate these traffic precautions. Thus it is in the case of high school fraternities and sororities if it is to be law, then we must obey it. If we don't like the law, we have to obey it until we get our legislative rep-

resentatives to change or abolish the law. I believe it is my duty as a board member to enforce the law until it is changed."

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Dwight B. Ireland injected into the discussion the feelings of most educators on this controversial subject. "Educators generally hold a feeling against these organizations," he explained. "The educators maintain that those who are members of fraternities and sororities are biased with the advantages that accompany such a society, while those who are left out are damaged by the exclusion. This problem has been debated everywhere I have been and I am not now making any comment of a positive kind."

Controlled Membership. "These groups are in homes, therefore the membership is controlled by what the homes can reasonably accommodate at the meetings. A society may discover ten eligible members, yet have room for only five. And the five who cannot become members going to take their rejection lightly?"

Dr. Ireland stated that he never had been in a community such as Birmingham which afforded such inadequate meeting facilities. "We can't hold a really nice dance in a high school gym which being used by these organizations won't permit us to decorate it. A new high school has been proposed with a first-class gymnasium, auditorium and cafeteria."

"If I had such modern facilities as those which are proposed the schools could put on activities which would overshadow those now being put on by these fraternities and sororities. Yes, we can do it—but we have to have the facilities first," Dr. Ireland concluded.

George R. Averill, of 669 Rivendak, stated that in his opinion "the houses tonight is a clear cut one—shall we obey the law or not? If it is on the law books, it must be obeyed to. If it is an undesirable law, then it must be disposed of in legal fashion. Are we going to tell our youth to operate in any other way than that?"

Contrary to Nature. "The matter of abiding by the laws leaves me cold," declared W. D. Hooper, of 665 Ridgeland. "How many of us here tonight violate the old prohibition law? My point is, if the law is no good, get rid of it in my estimation, this law against fraternities and sororities is contrary to human nature. Kids naturally gang up, whether it be called society or clique. I'd rather see a big fraternity under adult control."

"I'd just like to see the Board move slowly on this problem and not be sorry of the decision it makes," Dr. Hooper stated.

Nancy Kotts, a senior at Baldwin High School and daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Donald P. Kotts of 19135 Riverside drive, remarked, "These fraternities and sororities promote the friendship of different grades. I would say that about 50 per cent of the high school students are members of at least one of these societies. They have nothing to do with the school; they are purely social with their activities outside the school. If we didn't have them, I believe juvenile delinquency in Birmingham would go up."

Admitting he wrote a letter to the School Board that touched off the recent investigation of these secret societies, Mr. Nelson A. Miles, of 560 Woodland, declared, "I am not speaking tonight to defend my action in writing the letter to the Board. I would be the last person to deliberately injure the standing of any young people in school or life."

"Nothing has happened to change my feelings about fraternities or sororities. However, I do feel deeply about the law now on the statute books. Pupils must be taught to obey the law; therefore, they must obey this law. But I am thoroughly convinced we cannot enforce this law unless the parents cooperate. If we didn't, obey laws, you know what would happen to this or any other community. There have been many laws which in the opinion of the people are not

wholesome, and these laws have been repealed. But as long as it is on the books, it is the duty of the parents to back the School Board until the law is changed or eliminated."

Go Underground. Expressing a fear that the enforcement of this law would drive the societies underground, W. A. Kleiner, of 454 Yarnmouth road, Bloomfield Village, said "Before I was graduated from a Detroit high school I was a member of a high school fraternity. When it was attempted to enforce this law in Detroit, it drove the fraternities and sororities into bars and hotels to hold their meetings rather than the former practice of meeting in private homes."

"I am afraid that if the Board here tries to enforce this law, that this is what will happen to fraternities and sororities in Birmingham."

The recently-organized "Teen Center" at the Community House is a step in the right direction toward providing other activities to take the place of fraternities and sororities. B. F. Connor, of 482 Westwood, pointed out.

"I have wondered how long this situation would go on," Mrs. H. D. Harris, of 281 Euclid, said. "I think it will continue until the schools and the Board find reasonable substitutes. Otherwise, it will drive the children underground to operate in the city and do much worse than breaking this law as far as effect on their citizenship is concerned."

Mrs. S. James Duncan, of 688 Westwood, differed with Mrs. Harris' opinion. "I think our young people of today are fine. I resent any statement that would lead us to believe that if these organizations were removed from the youngsters' lives that it would make sneaks and liars of them. I don't believe it of these young people."

Schools as a Discipline. "Children have a way of disciplining, of criticizing each other, thereby learning to take in discipline," expressed Mrs. W. W. Raymond, of 772 Willetts. "Sororities, for instance, have rules which demand that each member maintain at least a certain grade average, thus helping scholarship."

"I believe that the number of children who find themselves excluded from these societies and thereby feel hurt is greatly exaggerated. Children know how to take the hurt. I feel that more often it is the parents who are hurt by the failure of their children to make the membership of these societies."

George D. Miller, 948 Fairfax, sides with the Board members on this problem. "The Board must act as representatives, not as individuals. Some of us are talking about the social evils of these organizations, some about the bad. It is a case of an organized minority of the school to their own benefit and depriving the majority of the school of their social activities. The high school social functions are appreciated by fraternities and sororities to the detriment of the other children."

Because of the excitement of the discussion, there were a number of parents and high school students who arose to speak and were not identified. The following is a digest of some of their statements:

"We are dodging the issue tonight. . . the blame falls back on the parents."

Girls Left Out. A high school girl posed the question: "Why do parents who have children that are members of these societies permit their youngsters to remain members? It is because of the dances they give, the charities they contribute to, and the other benefits which come with working with an organization."

"Another girl remarked, 'The mothers permit it because otherwise their daughters are left out of things.' A high school boy declared that after a recent athletic contest, he knew of a truck load of Birmingham boys who drove down the street and picked a fight with three Ferndale lads. Several of these Birmingham boys, non-members of a high school fraternity, used brass knuckles and inflicted serious cuts on several opponents' faces."

Another youth mentioned that those who were not fraternity members didn't have anything particular to do during the evenings and frequently got drunk and in general acted as irresponsible children."

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