

# OVERGROUND

INTERVIEWS WITH EDITORS OF ESTABLISHED HIGH SCHOOL NEWSPAPERS.

Armed with facts, opinions, and newsprint, the high school press continues to battle its foe the censor.

The battle may be a minor skirmish over an article believed to be in bad taste, or it may be a full-scale war over the proper place of the newspaper in a high school.

It hasn't always been this way. "Some years ago, newspapers tended very much to be bland and non-controversial," said Professor J.C. Sim, Director of the Minnesota High School Press Association.

Now school papers are treating things like "sex education in the schools, drug use in the schools, and the power role of the student and student body," according to Sim. "There is more direct criticism of faculty and administrators."

The Buzzete, Edina High School, was named one of the top five high school papers in the country in 1968. It is printed on a special high-quality "coated" paper, and the school board picks up over 70% of the printing costs. The Buzzete is tactful in criticizing school officials.

"We have no censorship, but we have been advised by the adviser not to print things," said Carol Zempel, editor-in-chief of the Buzzete.

This year the Buzzete "kind of denounced" the principal for his cancellation of a school play. The play, *Marate Sade*, contained what the principal regarded as "sexual perversion."

"The principal has given us little reprimands for instance, 'you shouldn't print things like that,' and so on . . ."

Last year the Buzzete reprinted parts of the controversial essay, "Student as Nigger."

"The principal almost confiscated that issue before it could be distributed."

"This was one of the instances where we had a little foresight and went down to the principal and asked, 'Is it okay?'" said Carol.

The Valley Viewer, Golden Valley High School, had been "pretty much a public relations organ for the school," according to Paul Flum, Viewer editor-in-chief.

This year's Viewer has taken an in-depth look at the school and the community.

In an editorial the Viewer criticized the presence of Golden Valley police at football games, and referred to them as "notoriously unjust and prejudiced."

"The principal almost confiscated that issue before it could be distributed," Paul revealed.

Censorship became Paul's Christmas present when the principal bought up a two-page insert of student-placed advertising in the Christmas issue. The principal regarded the ads as "obscene and pornographic."

"I didn't feel it was my place to censor student body opinion."

"We wrote an editorial deploring the principal's action," said Paul. "We resented him setting himself up as the standard of good taste for the high school."

The school board took up the issue and decided that there would be no censorship of the paper. But it also commended the principal's action and advise.

"There are some very conservative board members," Paul commented. "There are some who are 50 years behind everything."

"I guess it wouldn't really be that free."

The Viewer has changed its deadlines schedule so that the adviser does not see the paper before it is printed. "It's our paper," Paul says with pride.

The next issue of the Viewer contains a story about physical violence between a teacher and student.

"Apparently the principal is very upset about it. It's a touchy thing. He didn't want it going in. But I was firm about it. And it's going in."

The Johnson Courier, Johnson High School, St. Paul, has written few controversial articles. It has printed even fewer.

"Mr. Grant . . . he's our adviser . . . and he kind of has to see the stories that we write. So I guess it wouldn't really be that free," said Chris Keller, news editor.

The only incidence of censorship that she recalls concerned a story on marijuana.

"She (the reporter) talked to some university

students, and they told her that it wasn't that bad, so he (the adviser) didn't think we should put it in."

The adviser has final say on all stories to appear in the Courier.

According to Chris, the Courier's major problem is "getting kids interested."

The Courier has been challenged by an underground newspaper. "That was a really bad one!" was all Chris would say about it.

The Central High Times has lost an editor-in-chief to the underground press. The principal at Central High School, St. Paul, reads all copy before publication.

"I just progressively got fed up with it and decided that to say what we wanted to, we had to go underground," said Kevin Tighe, former editor-in-chief of the Times.

"We wanted to run an article called *Keno's Restaurant*. *Reno Rossini* is the principal of our school. Of course it got censored."

"They had my mother in there and it was almost like the FBI."

The Times had also tried to print a cartoon depicting the student council adviser holding up a puppet labeled "Student Council . . ."

"Of course, they wouldn't let that through either."

"Institutional Graffiti-Central Style" is the name of Central's underground. The underground staff is composed almost entirely of former Times staffers. Some of them still write for the Times.

"They just said, we've got to get a release. We can't keep writing this straight kind of crap. We've got to find someplace else," said Kevin.

"All these straight looking kids are writing now, saying that the underground is really screwed up or that it's really good. We're involving a lot more kids than the established paper did."

The school administration suspended Kevin for distributing the underground in the Central halls.

"They had my mother in there, and it was almost like the FBI" Kevin commented.

School authorities also sent a copy of the paper to Kevin's father. An obscene word was underlined.

"We're not afraid to publish what we want. And we will publish what we want, and what we think is right," Kevin declared.

Kevin's paper is open for anybody's articles. Said Kevin, "I told my principal that if he wants to write anything we'll print it."

The Stillwater Pony Express deserved to be censored, according to its former editor-in-chief, Nancy Quammen.

"He said he hadn't seen such stuff since the service."

Nancy says she resigned due to a personality conflict with her adviser.

"We didn't have any problem with censorship, really," said Nancy.

She does not recall dealing with any controversial school-related topics. There are no undergrounds at Stillwater High School.

The one case of censorship of the Express involved a sports column that Nancy now believes was obscene.

"I read it, and I didn't understand most of it," said Nancy.

The printer telephoned the Stillwater principal and refused to print the article.

"So the principal runs down to the printer and takes a load at it and says where does this kid get all this stuff. He said he hadn't seen such stuff since the service."

The principal finally cut several short paragraphs, and let the rest of the story run.

"I would have done it too, had I known what it said," stated Nancy.

Professor Sim cites a few cases of "poor judgement," but believes that no censorship generally produces better high school papers.

"The staff is therefore more responsible and more interested and willing to put forth the necessary effort to get facts and not depend merely on off-the-cuff opinions."

The censorship battle may escalate as high school papers become even more controversial.

"I think there is an interest in more depth in news reports and opinions, rather than serving solely as a bulletin board for the school," said Professor Sim.



## The press vs. the censor

by Jeff Holman