



Adams demonstrating (1969): "The critic has a noble role"



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Ferency protesting (1978)
"I'm not afraid of the fray"

MSU's Gadflies

GADFLY: A usually intentionally annoying person who stimulates or provokes others, especially by persistent, irritating criticism. A person who annoys or stirs up from lethargy.

By Jan Brydon
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Gadflies. Those buzzers can drive you right up the wall. You gotta keep moving to keep them from biting. That's true wherever the gadflies fly. That's true at Michigan State where three professors in particular — Lash Larowe, Zolton Ferency and Walter Adams — keep up a persistent, irritating buzz, true to the gadflies' tradition of keeping their targets moving.*

"What? Them again? What have they done now?" winced one MSU faculty member, as if just the mention of their names pinched a nerve.

"They've never come after me," says Executive Vice President Jack Breslin, "but I expect sooner or later they will."

Well, probably. Over the years, they've managed to take a few dives at almost everyone — from MSU presidents right on down the line. Nothing's sacred. But, they'll tell you, that's the role of the critic in

*Dr. Charles P. Larowe is professor of labor economics, Zolton Ferency is associate professor of criminal justice and Dr. Walter Adams is a distinguished professor of economics and a former MSU president.

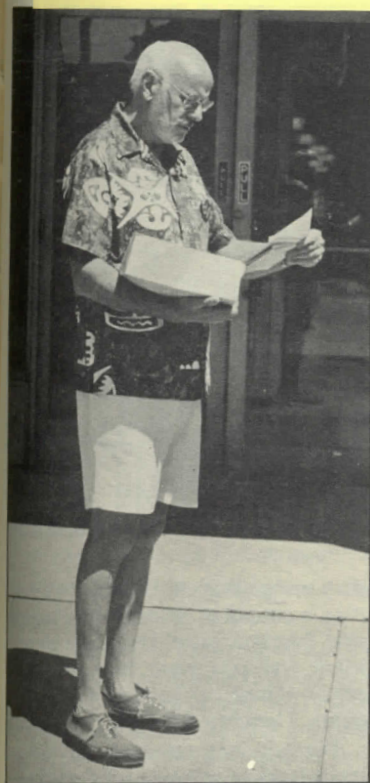
a society. Adams calls it a noble role. ("This is certainly patting myself on the back," he says.) "The critic has a noble role in any society. It's that of making that society a better place than it is."

They may very well be noble, but their virtue stops short of modesty. As "four disgusted sophomores" once wrote Larowe: "Every time we pick up that rag [the *State News*], you're in it. Anytime they hook up a microphone on campus, before it's even warmed up, you're speaking into it." Whether it's seriously running for Congress (which Larowe did unsuccessfully in 1974), defeating a female colleague in a friendly tennis bout or sponsoring the Lash Larowe Cocoa Butter Classic suntan contest, Larowe tries to capture adequate media coverage. And shying from publicity is not the forte of Adams, who gained a reputation for wit during his unorthodox tenure as MSU's 13th president in 1969, or Ferency, who has run unsuccessfully six times for political offices and managed to keep his sense of humor. ("If I were elected governor, then who would be Zolton Ferency?" he asked reporters during last summer's Democratic primary race.)

Says Ferency, "We're not afraid to move out from ourselves into the fray, into the controversy. And doing that, you are quick to run into people who are quick to tell you what they think of you and why. You find ready criticism. If you fail to evaluate yourself, there is always somebody on hand to do it for you."

Adds Adams, "Every time you make a public statement, you're escaping from the cloister and that's why so many academics find a refuge in esoteric methodologies so that only a small circle of their peers understand what the hell they're talking about." Ouch! Walter, that stings!

But while individuals on and off campus are shoo-flying the MSU gadflies, others believe that the university wouldn't be as well-off without them. For example, when Larowe was appointed faculty grievance officer in 1976, one colleague commented, "At last he's being paid for things he did free of charge for years. Larowe has a sympathetic ear for people chewed up by bureaucratic insensitivity, and will go to bat for them." Larowe, whose specialty is labor relations, says that he is just putting into practice what he has been



Larowe campaigning (1974):
A one-man eyesore, said one reporter

teaching for years. Last year 25 faculty grievances were settled — ranging from complaints about salaries and promotions to concerns about teaching and other work assignments. In addition Larowe works to settle misunderstandings before they progress to the formal grievance stage, often getting faculty members together with their department heads or the provost to hash out their differences. Says Larowe, "It's safe to say that in most cases, it's a breakdown in communications."

In the early 1970's Larowe went to bat for two young natural science teachers whose contracts had not been renewed. They convinced the Board of Trustees of the need for a review policy to insure that temporary faculty were not unfairly dismissed. But, recalls Larowe, it took two years for the mostly-tenured faculty to develop a workable grievance procedure. "When people criticize these trustees, I feel exactly the opposite," says Larowe. "As far as human relations and civil liberties of the faculty go, the trustees have pulled this goddamn university by the scruff of its neck into the 20th century, with the faculty kicking and screaming."

While Larowe can often be seen around campus adjudicating grievances, he is probably most widely known for his regular *State News* column in which he takes on everything from tripling in MSU dorms to MSU's projects in Brazil and

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Uruguay to his FBI file. Larowe began those columns during the later years of the Hannah administration when Hannah reportedly assured a Lansing audience that there would be no student unrest on the MSU campus. The FBI had informed him that there were only three trained communist agitators on campus, and the university could keep an eye on them. The only three agitators on campus Larowe could think of were the members of the Committee for Student Rights who were calling for elimination of arbitrary dormitory rules (they felt that men shouldn't be required to wear a coat and tie to dinner and that women shouldn't have one curfew during the week and a different one on weekends); open housing for black students in East Lansing; and improvements in the library. Could these be the communist infiltrators? Larowe couldn't resist poking fun at Hannah's proclaimed threat to campus tranquility.

In the following years he was writing so many "Point of View" guest columns that he asked the *State News* editor if he could become a regular columnist. The answer: Only students can be regular columnists. So Larowe enrolled as a non-degree graduate student in business and took a typing course.

Larowe's activism goes back to the 1940's when he was president of a CIO office and professional workers' union in Seattle. Later, in Lansing, he helped found the local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union. And during the turbulent Sixties, he served as advisor to the radical Students for a Democratic Society and the Young Socialist Alliance.

Yet Larowe isn't a peacenik. During World War II, he threw himself into combat as eagerly as he threw himself into anti-war activity during Viet Nam. An article in the May 12, 1945, *Honolulu Advertiser* reported that Sgt. Charles Larowe, age 29, complained that his assignment with the medics was too soft, so he was transferred to Okinawa as assistant flamethrower in a flamethrower platoon. Even that wasn't uncomfortable enough. Larowe told his exasperated commanding officer, "I want to pack a rifle up front so I can have the satisfaction of killing Japs." He was given the go-ahead.

His combat record later gave him leverage when he campaigned against the Viet Nam War. A one-man eyesore (as one reporter observed) wearing a Hawaiian shirt and devastated tennis shoes — but with a Purple Heart and Silver Star? It was enough to throw the most secure pro-war spokesman off-guard.

When he isn't promoting himself or some other underdog, Larowe does find time for scholarly work. He spent ten years researching a biography of longshoreman labor leader Harry Bridges. He first became interested in Bridges while working on his Ph.D. thesis at Yale, comparing labor relations on the New York and Seattle waterfronts. He held off doing the book for a while, however, because, as his wife told him, "You're so impressed with the guy now, you couldn't do an honest book about him." When *Harry Bridges: The Rise and Fall of Radical Labor in the United States* was published in 1973, it was proclaimed one of the best labor biographies ever written. A full-page *New York Times* Book Review described it as "beautifully researched . . . excellent . . . often reading like an adventure story."

Poppycock, said Bridges: "I would say that it is hardly more than a series of distortions, half-truths and in many cases, outright lies." But that didn't bother Larowe. He points out that Bridges could have scuttled the project at any time, but he never interfered and he never prohibited his aides from cooperating with Larowe. In afterthought, Larowe says, "Someone told me that now I should write about someone I don't like and that makes some sense. It's really hard for me to write positive things about someone anyway."

Larowe says he prefers to tackle "tangible, small causes," but feels that any cause is better than no cause at all. "We should applaud students when they find a cause to speak up for. They will be stuffed shirts soon enough." No one can accuse Larowe of that.

If Larowe takes on any and all causes, some would say that Zolton Ferency, '46, M.A. '72, limits his scope to causes that are likely to be lost or at least unpopular. The son of Hungarian immigrants, Ferency grew up during the Depression in Delray on Detroit's southwest side. Perhaps he learned his optimism from the ethnic community. For sure, he never learned resignation. Ferency campaigned for the 18-year-old vote as early as 1965. As a lawyer (University of Detroit, J.D. '52), he represented students arrested in anti-war demonstrations, initiated a successful lawsuit to have 50,000 State Police "Red Files" destroyed, filed suit to stop putting prisoners in Michigan's overcrowded prisons, defended a student residence hall advisor who was dismissed because he had admitted that he smoked pot and acted as legal advisor to students who oc-

cupied the International Center to protest MSU's involvement in an Iranian film-making project. Prior to last fall's election, he tried unsuccessfully to get the tax cut referenda off the ballot.

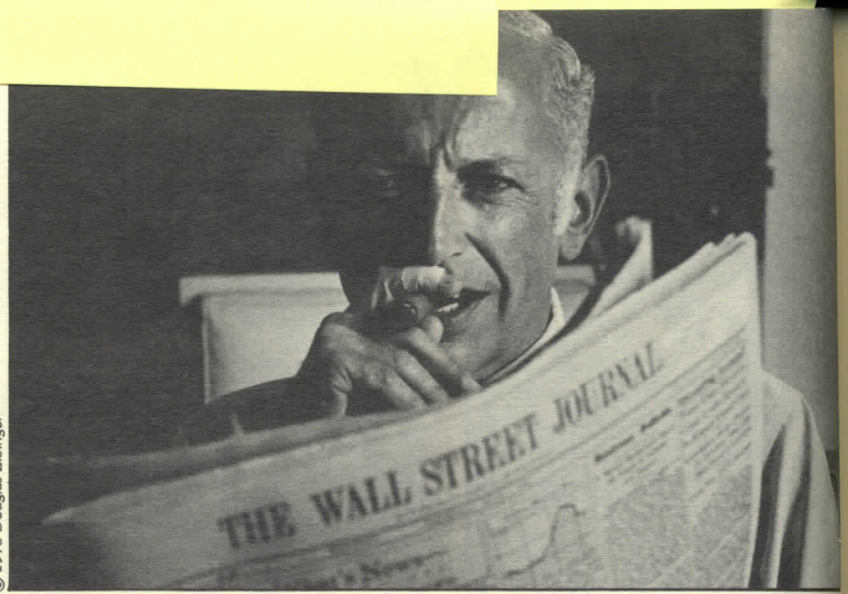
In 1976, Ferency and several colleagues filed a grievance against then-President Clifton Wharton because he failed to consult the faculty before naming Lawrence Boger as acting provost. "The grievance doesn't touch on the competency of Boger," Ferency said. "It doesn't matter whether that post is occupied by an acting provost or a permanent provost. We'd have felt the same way if Wharton had appointed John the Baptist to that position."

Ferency had established a reputation as a black sheep in Michigan political circles long before he joined the MSU Criminal Justice faculty in 1972. In 1965, as state Democratic Party chairman, he was the first party official in the nation to differ with the president on the Viet Nam War, a stance which earned him the wrath of Lyndon Johnson. Johnson retaliated the following year when Ferency was running for governor against Republican George Romney. Introducing Ferency to a capacity audience at Detroit's Cobo Hall, Johnson mispronounced Ferency's name. It brought down the house.

In 1970 Ferency left the Democratic Party to found the Michigan Human Rights Party; in 1976 he rejoined the Democrats. Since 1966, he has made two unsuccessful bids for election to the state Supreme Court and has campaigned four times for governor.

Assesses Walter Adams, "If you look at Zolton's track record, the impressive thing is that he, of all people, would have the right to say that he's discouraged, that he's beaten to a bloody pulp, but he always keeps coming back. That's the kind of person any establishment, for selfish, Machiavellian reasons, ought to seek because he shows that he gives a damn. The easiest thing would be to slink away and say, well, the system is no goddamn good. But he keeps coming back, trying to make the organization of which he is a part a better place. People who are not particularly sophisticated view his kind of activity as making trouble, eccentric, radical or an ego trip. They use all kinds of silly adjectives which are not descriptive of a person's role."

But to Ferency, staying in the game is as important as winning. "I think the public is entitled to have both points of view on controversial issues," he says. "My fear is that we really don't have enough resources in the community for people who are in trouble to turn to. I think that is a very, very serious lack. Legal services have improved to a degree for people who cannot afford expensive lawyers, but not always. Sometimes it involves taking a po-



Walter Adams, the teacher: "Learning isn't a spectator sport"

sition on a particular question. For example, the pending decision of the Lansing Board of Water and Light to purchase approximately eight per cent of a nuclear facility in Midland is a matter of overriding concern. The powerful interests in our society have the resources to communicate their point of view to the public and they do. They hire expensive public relations people. They do advertising. They hold press conferences. They are important and they're covered by the press and so on. And yet so many of the activities they engage in impact on ordinary people and they have no way of either knowing it's going to happen or of responding. Somebody has to do these things. I've decided that's an interesting lifestyle for me. I think the basic decision is whether or not one wants to be a political activist. Does one want to be totally and completely informed on all the issues all the time?"

Ferency's ability to keep popping up on the "other side," caused some consternation by the trustees when they were asked to approve his faculty appointment in 1972. One trustee voted against the appointment fearing that "all hell is going to break loose if he gets appointed." But Walter Adams assured him that Ferency on the faculty wouldn't be a threat for two reasons: "One, most students do not listen to what their professors say. They memorize enough from their lectures and from their readings to regurgitate it on the final examination, but it never passes through their minds really. Secondly, after

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they are graduated they acquire a wife, a dog, a couple of children and a mortgage and become members of the establishment and you have them forever. Ferency, at best, can have them for only four years. Therefore he's really not a threat."

Ferency has watched the universities grow from an intimate college in the Forties where he earned his bachelor's degree to today's megaversity where he earned his master's in criminal justice. "I have a very, very soft spot in my heart for MSU," he admits, but adds, characteristically, "I think it's a fine institution and can be even better. I think there are things we could do to improve vastly the amount and quality of communication between the students, the faculty and between disciplines and make it truly a university, rather than a disparate group of colleges and departments that seemingly spend most of their time training people for occupations rather than imparting to them an education of which they can be proud and which will serve them for many, many years to come, regardless of which field of economic activity they find themselves. I think that's missing and I don't think it's missing only at Michigan State. It's missing in every large modern multiversity. I think that's a very serious loss and I would like to find a way to restore that."

By the same token, Ferency believes alumni should take a broad view of the university, beyond their own college. "They should support MSU in all of its activities to the extent possible and they should share with Michigan State any benefits that they may have derived as a result of having made use of our resources here. That way they can maintain a connection with the university. They can watch its growth and development and they can assist in that for the rest of their lives and I think that's not a bad idea."

Unlike Ferency, Walter Adams has a clear disposition toward the classroom, as