

This was not democratic discussion

Enclosed are some remarks concerning the Region One School District Board of Education (BOE) meeting of February.

The first part of the meeting consisted of an unscheduled species of inquisition targeting Canaan (Falls Village) Region One BOE Representative Gale Toensing.

My first reaction to the commencing of this drama was "for God's sake, this isn't high school." Of course, I was wrong. It was high school. Except the stream of recriminations, the petty back-biting, the juvenile meanness were not the conduct of some adolescents, it was that of the adults.

The contretemps concerned Toensing's interactions with the Regional Schools Services Center office. One would have supposed that she kicked the door in and overturned the furniture. But no, all this hysteria was about several email memos.

Did all this unseemly commotion signify anything? Unfortunately, it did. Upside-down civics lessons were taught: there can be only one side to a story, and that the heavy hand of

government can come down on a citizen in an adversarial proceeding without the slightest regard for the accused's right to due process.

Also, in a previous board meeting, Philip Hart, the BOE

chairman, felt free to denounce Toensing for, in effect, declining to misrepresent herself in order to support the party line of the majority of the board. In this latter instance, Toensing voted "no" to adopting the spending plan to be referred to referendum. She was expected to go against her conscience and conceal her convictions on the subject by urging others to vote for the same thing that she opposed and would vote against.

These civics lessons are those of a banana republic enforcing a party line. The civics lessons of our republic protect honorable dissent and respect loyal opposition, even when it may be inconvenient or annoying.

The above-referenced segment of the meeting ended with a long, long monologue of self-congratulation by Chairman Hart, concluding with a trifecta of ironies. Hart appealed for comity among board members, after orchestrating about an hour-long beatdown of one of the members. He counseled tolerance for diversity of opinion after leading the attack on the one board member who provides counterpoint to the go-along-to-get-along sleepwalking of the majority.

Finally, of all things, he lauded the development progress of the Housatonic Valley Regional High School's technology center without "getting it" that the building would have been a pile of rubble to be carted away to some dump except for the inconvenient, annoying dissent of a bunch of troublemakers from my town (also, including valuable support from Gordon Johnson, then of Salisbury.)

I left the meeting after the above business. I did so with little anger, but with lump-in-the-throat sadness that this malign, disgraceful spectacle must pass for an example of democracy in the backyard of my own hometown.

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