

The View From The Beat

Hitchhiking Meets A Need-Ban Would Infringe On Rights

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"Do you think hitchhiking should be forbidden by law?"

That question, in one form or another, has been fired at me often these past few weeks by concerned adults and young people in the northern Santa Cruz County newsbeat.

Whenever possible, I ignore the question. Not everyone agrees with my answer, and people who do not are perfectly willing to debate the issue for hours. I have little time for such debates. The rural area I cover is large. To cover this area adequately, I must pick up news quickly and keep moving.

But, certainly, the readers of a newspaper are entitled to know the viewpoints of the reporters who serve them. So I'll answer the question here.

I do not think that hitchhiking should be forbidden by law. I think the reasons advanced for such a law are absurd. I think that enactment of such a law would be shameful because it would violate our national concepts of individual freedom and fair play. I think it would be doubly shameful because it would serve no constructive purpose.

It should be unnecessary to discuss our national concepts of individual freedom. Suffice it to say that these concepts include the right of an individual to give or to receive a helping hand, as he chooses. Like all civil rights, this is an important right. I could not relinquish it, for I think that to deny anyone the right to give or to receive a helping hand warmly and graciously is to deny him to some degree fulfillment as a decent human being.

I would oppose the law, too, because I think it would violate our national concepts of fair play.

Such a law would make it legally difficult, if not impossible, for some human beings to travel simply because they cannot afford to buy a ticket or a would exalt the "haves" to a privileged status and degrade those who have not to the status of second-class citizenship. This, mind you, in a country that was built by the have nots, men and women and young people who somehow overcame unspeakable rigors to make something of this land and themselves.

I recall the Okies of the 1930s, who were abused at the state borders but somehow got in and helped to create the fantastically rich California of today.

The third reason I am opposed to such legislation is that I think the reasons advanced for it are absurd.

Because my work keeps me on the road at all hours of day and night, I am entirely familiar with problems hitchhiking can create. There are many, and some of them are quite serious. But it really is quite absurd to amputate an arm to solve the problem of an infected finger.

I think the hitchhiking problems of today can be solved readily without a preposterous docking of our national concepts of freedom and fair play. The problems are not new. They ex-

isted in World War II, when it was thought that sharing vehicular transportation was the patriotic thing to do. The nation survived.

The traffic hazards posed by hitchhiking can be eliminated through establishment of hitchhiking stations and zones wherever needed.

The personal hazards posed by hitchhiking can be mitigated through thoughtful development by all segments of society of a control system entirely fair and reasonable to everyone.

My fourth and final reason for opposing a legal ban on hitchhiking is that the intent of such legislation is to rid the streets of so-called undesirable elements. This is the reason I think that enactment of such a law would be doubly shameful. No good law has ever been sired by hate. To yield to the forces of hate extant in our society is unthinkable. It is also, I believe, unforgivable.

I think that hitchhiking meets an urgent need of today. We have a young population. Most people, when young, just do not have money enough to pay for transportation, just as many do not have sufficient money for food. As these people get older, complete their education, find decent jobs, their economic position will change, just as ours did once upon a time.

But, meanwhile, they have this need to get from point to point, either from home to school or from city to country or from state to state. Whether it is occasioned by a desire to learn or by the tensions of growing up is quite immaterial. Youths of today have this need, as manifested by their presence at the roadsides.

Meeting that need is all that should concern we older members of society, for surely it is our obligation to see our boys and girls safely and agreeably through their development years. They do, after all, belong to us.

So I would prefer to hear the end of attempts to develop absurd legislation such as a proposed ban on hitchhiking. I wish to see our young people free, as we were free before them. And I wish to see our young people helped and safeguarded, just as we were helped and safeguarded before them.

It is a misfortune, but not a crime, to have little or no money to support your attempts to get an education or to travel or to do all those things young people should do before they take up the world's burdens.

But it would be both a crime and a misfortune were we to enact a law that would have the effect both as degrading people and of making temporary poverty even more difficult to endure.

I think we should stop talking about repressive legislation.

I think we should start rather building roadside shelters in zoned hitchhiking areas, to protect those who need a lift from the elements.

The rainy season is almost here.

As many of us now older should recall, it is unhealthful to stand out in the wet and the cold.