

The need for quality public conversation

The Bethlehem Gadfly Budget, Lehigh Valley Good Neighbors Alliance, Police December 1, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police* 

Quality public policy starts with quality public conversation.

Glen Ragni, July 21

ref: **“We encourage Council not to proceed recklessly”**

ref: **The Bethlehem conversations on defunding the police (7): Greg**

ref: **The Lehigh Valley Good Neighbors Alliance gets air time to seek followers and rouse action**

Yesterday Glen and Carrie of the Lehigh Valley Good Neighbors Alliance were on the Bobby Gunther Walsh radio show to alert local residents of possible action related to the Bethlehem police in the current budget hearings, encouraging people concerned about “defunding” the police to make their voices heard at tonight’s City Council meeting and Thursday’s last budget hearing.

Gadfly loves good discussion, good argument, good conversation.

And he has complimented Glen for his comments to that effect **July 21** and **August 11**.

“Quality public policy starts with quality public conversation” has common sense bumper-sticker clarity and concision.

Gadfly is not sure when the Good Neighbors group was formed — perhaps after August 11? — but he has been **disappointed** in the rhetoric lately coming out under the aegis of LVGNA.

And he was disappointed in yesterday’s conversation with Gunther and wonders what call-in comment from LVGNA supporters tonight and Thursday will be like as a result.

First, there was a failure during the show segment to recognize and communicate to others that “defunding the police” simply means reducing police department budgets and redistributing those funds towards essential social services that are often underfunded, such as housing, education, employment, mental health care, and youth services.

LVGNA has recently called attention to the fact that the police answer c. 60,000 calls a year. If the number of calls were reduced to 55,000 or 50,000 by siphoning off some mental health and other type non-criminal calls without compromising public safety, would some reduction in the police budget be unreasonable? That’s the kind of thing mainstream “defunders” are talking about.

Next, Marxism gets mentioned a half-dozen times on the Gunther show.

What has Marxism got to do with moving funds to social workers or the Health Bureau?

To Gadfly the repeated references to Marxism on the show seem an odd throwback to the Cold War. What Gadfly hears is echoes of the 1950s hysteria: there’s a Communist cell (“a small noisy, vocal group”) in Bethlehem pushing a Stalinist 5-year plan (“they have a master plan for

us”) involving brain-washing (“Dr. Roy is indoctrinating your kids”), with the idea of “infiltrating” (ha! when is this word ever used except in relation to Communists) our government — we’re in an epic battle between the forces of GOOD and EVIL right here in our “home town” — a struggle to the death “to repel a Marxist crusade to destroy our quality of life.”

Gadfly had a flashback while listening to the radio show to standing out in front of the Drexel Hill Furniture Co. in the early 1950s watching the McCarthy Hearings on one of the few televisions in town set up in the showroom window.

Moreover, can’t we dispense with incendiary labels like leftist, activist, radical activist and, instead, refer to our fellow residents who don’t share our views by name — as individuals — and show we respect their views by understanding them?

And do we need *ad hominem* slurs like “she’s a doctor, as if I give a blank”? Or “self-proclaimed expert”?

How, Gadfly wants to know, is what Gunther’s listeners heard yesterday fostering the “quality public conversation” that develops “quality public policy”?

The Bethlehem Gadfly