

The Rolnick Administration

By the end of the Fall 1975 semester, just about everyone in Hinman knew that the college and HCC was in trouble. Besides Co-Rec and Hinman Little Theater, and the Semi-Formal, virtually no other social or academic programs of substance were developed and the few that were developed were grossly under attended. President-elect Sy Rolnick spoke on behalf of the entire Hinman community when he said:

We have a new year upon us and a new slate of executive officers. I would like at this time to put it on the line as Hinman President. We are in trouble but many of you do not care and are not interested. Under no conditions will Hinman council or the executive council plan anything socially or academically next semester unless the participation increases or the complaining stops. The money is yours but if you don't have any ideas or want to help then it will be spent in the way that Hinman executives feel fit. Many of you will be returning next semester and it is you who will have to help make Hinman a better place to live. There are many ways to improve this place but you must open your eyes and ears.¹

Following up on this letter, Sy Rolnick wrote another letter with hopes for a new semester in Hinman, but also making a bold statement that neither he nor anyone on his E-Board would go out of their way to put on social and academic programs unless regular Hinmanites rose to the challenged and helped them.

It is a new semester and one that your executive council hopes will be very enjoyable and worthwhile. We have begun to plan for the spring and what has been outlined by both our academic and social Vice Presidents are both new ideas and old ideas being tried again. The main concern of the entire executive council is to make Hinman College a better place to live and an enjoyable one. The problem we contend with is the apathetic attitude that is evident all through the students of Hinman College. We have the money to make this a great semester, but if apathy reigns then there will be as many flops as last semester and we also will be forced into having many cancellations in terms of academic and social activities. Neither Ken O'Brien, Doug Schain or myself are going to sit around and worry about planning activities if you do not step forward to help, make suggestions or turn up to the activities and courses planned. We are at the point where the college can either improve or go downhill. I would really like to see this place return to what it was in the past, a place where everybody enjoys the activities. Remember it's your helping us that will make things go.²

Ken O'Brien, the Social Vice President of HCC, reiterated his President's sentiments with his own letter.

This is a new semester in Hinman and it can be a flop like last semester or it can be a great place to live. Everything will depend on your attitude and cooperation.

Last semester Sy Rolnick put a lot of hard work into all the events only to be made a fool. He was made a fool because nobody turned out. He tried a few new things: a hay ride which nobody went to, and a Dunkin' Donut party where only one third were given away until Sy began delivering them. The Supper Club and Semi-Formal went over well but the response was poor, so poor that Hinman lost a lot of money. The dances in the commons were also poorly attended.

...I have a few new ideas but I would like comments on them before they become a success or failure. We could try a Hinman Ski night and/or Dusters night. In addition to Co-Rec basketball maybe we can have a Co-Rec tennis tournament and Co-Rec softball.

These events can occur and turn out well as long as I have cooperation and there is a general concern. However if this semester's outlook is like last semester's all activities will be cancelled. Face it, Hinman's social life is what you make it...³

Rolnick and O'Brien were pleading with the Hinman community just as much as they were venting their frustrations. Their message, though, was clear: either regular Hinmanites step up to the plate and advance social and academic activities in their college or else there would be none at all. The HCC E-Board would no longer be solely responsible for programming in Hinman. Any failure of these activities would be placed on the regular Hinmanite.

The issues that plagued HCC in the past still plagued them now. Besides the ever-present specter of student apathy, Hinman was still without a Treasurer because for reasons unclear the election was invalidated. The Hinman Judiciary Committee was supposed to make a decision regarding the invalidated elections but failed to do so in a timely manner. For weeks, Hinman was without a Treasurer and therefore could not make any financial transactions. Business in Hinman College was at standstill. Hinmanites became so disgruntled with the entire process that some even called for a complete revamping of the election process whereby (with the exception

of HCC President) every other position would be filled by a popular vote of those representatives in HCC as opposed to the popular vote from the entire community. Granted this would be less democratic than the existing election rules, but it would appoint better qualified candidates, or so it was argued.⁴ After two invalidated elections, John Bansbach of Lehman Hall defeated Hughes Hall's Debbie Foster.⁵

In an interview with the *Hinman Halitosis*, President Rolnick was asked many questions about the state of Hinman College. Rolnick talked about his discouragement over having 206 people attend the Semi-Formal, but with only getting help from six individuals. He also stated that he had high hopes for the ad hoc social committee being spearheaded by Social Vice President Ken O'Brien. He also stated that he believed that the elections should be revamped and that a constitutional amendment be made. The two botched Treasurer elections had left a bad taste in his mouth just as it had with everyone else involved in HCC politics.⁶

With the election of Treasurer, most thought that this would be the end of HCC's financial troubles. This was far from the case. SA Treasurer Mike Powers alerted Rolnick that he would be forbidden from signing any vouchers. The President's signature was required on the vouchers in order for them to be cashed. This essentially would prevent Hinman from using any of its allotted funds. Powers argued that he took this drastic decision because HCC was allowing staff members (who paid no student activity fee) to vote on matters that related to the student activity fee. Vouchers without Rolnick's signature could be directly given to Powers's office, but Powers said that they would not be given priority. What this meant was that Powers could sign off on the vouchers whenever he pleased and could essentially freeze Hinman funds indefinitely. Powers promised that until this practice was terminated he would not accept any vouchers from Hinman. He cited a passage in the SUNY Fiscal and Accounting Procedure that

stated “Purchase requisitions, orders, and contracts, in support of approved budgetary allocations, should be approved in behalf of the student organization by a responsible officer of the organization, and the treasurer of the student organization or his designee...”⁷ Rolnick, as Powers’s designee, would be unable to sign the vouchers, therefore Powers could review and sign off on the vouchers whenever he felt like it. To those involved in HCC, Powers was abusing his authority and had the potential to not only bring business in Hinman College to a standstill but to ruin their credit as well.

In a special two hour meeting, HCC decided, unlike the other college councils, to challenge Powers and what they viewed as his abuse of authority. The overwhelming majority of HCCers believed that the SA had no right to overrule their constitution (the HCC constitution said nothing about staff members being unable to vote). Rolnick and the rest of HCC were not going to take this lying down. They were not about to allow the SA to hold them hostage. While they may have been divided before on the issues of academic and social programming, they joined ranks in the fight to preserve their financial independence.⁸

While the rest of the residential colleges caved into what they viewed as the invincible power of Mike Powers and the SA, Hinman dug in for a long and bitter fight. In a highly anticipated meeting between Rolnick, Powers, and the Assistant Vice President for Finance and Management, Eugene Kirch, Kirch defined the role and powers of the SA Treasurer. Kirch clarified for all that the SA Treasurer did have the authority within reason to control the financial activities of those in the collegiate structure. While not a glowing endorsement of Powers, this did lend credibility to his case.⁹

Hinman College struck back with a vengeance when they authored a resolution calling for an investigation into possibly recalling Powers from his position as SA Treasurer. New

information arose that suggested that Powers may not have been an enrolled student at the university at the time he was elected to office. If this were the case, then Powers would be ineligible to hold his position. After getting the tip, Rolnick visited the university Registrar's office and found that nowhere on the official rolls was Powers registered as a student. Rolnick then questioned the Registrar himself who reported that he would not sign any official documentation stating that Powers was an enrolled student at SUNY Binghamton. HCC then authored a resolution calling for the establishment of a committee to investigate Powers's eligibility for office, to oversee the recall of Powers should it be determined that he was not an enrolled student, and for the Academic Standards Committee to inform HCC of any other SA members who were not enrolled students in the past semester. HCC was pulling no punches. Powers had declared war on the wrong student government and was about to get what he had coming to him.¹⁰

While Powers vehemently denied the charges, saying that he had won an appeal in a decision that had declared him as un-enrolled during the time of the SA election. Most members of the SA backed up their fellow SA member. Heated and vicious verbal attacks from the pulpits of both HCC and the SA thundered throughout the realms of student government. A disagreement over a relatively petty financial procedure had erupted into an all out war between HCC and the SA. In the end, with the firestorm of controversy sweeping through the greater SUNY Binghamton student government, and with the fear of recall on the minds of many SA leaders (who had the same enrollment issues as Powers), Powers quickly and quietly reinstated Rolnick's power to sign vouchers and returned fiscal freedom to Hinman College.¹¹

This victory was desperately needed in the fight over the future of HCC and the overall identity of Hinman College. For nearly ten years Hinman had been fighting hard not only to

make an identity for itself, but also to show the rest of the university community, and more importantly itself, that it could manage an efficient and effective student government. HCC had had its fair share of trials and tribulations over these years. Most of its problems had stemmed from student disinterest and apathy. Many did not want to take part in HCC meetings nor did they care about the outcome of such meetings. HCC perhaps hit a low point when it saw staffers Bob Giomi and Gabe Yankowitz prepare to run for positions that nobody else would fill. However, what this fiscal crisis involving the SA showed was that Hinman and especially HCC came together and backed not only their President but each other. HCC was, whether anyone believed it or not, becoming a united organization and an instrumental piece of Hinman College along with Co-Rec and HLT.

Like most victories in those early days of HCC history, it was short-lived. Shortly thereafter there was a student takeover of the Couper Administration Building to protest substantial budgetary cutbacks. The cutbacks had led to a decrease in the number of RA's who were hired, along with an increase in tripling, the elimination of the Russian and Geography Departments, a decrease in in-patient care for the infirmary, and a decrease in overall student services. As a result a large number of students swarmed the Administration Building. Binghamton was not the only place to see students take over administration buildings in New York. Demonstrations and takeovers were also occurring at SUNY Purchase, Old Westbury, New Paltz, Fredonia, and many CUNY schools. Many students at Binghamton and these other SUNY campuses saw Albany's budget cutbacks as negatively affecting their educations and academics and they saw non-violent demonstration as the only effective way to fight back.¹²

During the course of the takeover, student demonstrators from all over campus, including Hinman protested inside the walls of the Couper Administration Building. The demonstrators

met with President Clifford Clark and other university administrators who tried to offer the demonstrators a deal. After fifty-eight hours the occupation of the building finally ended when word came that the state police was planning on taking the building back by force. The administration reluctantly agreed to meet four of the students' demands.¹³ Protests and demonstrations continued to occur at campuses across the state, but the student action at SUNY Binghamton was effectively over. The fallout from the student takeover, however, was only beginning.

Near the center of this protest was HCC President Sy Rolnick and Hinman's SA representative, John Huntington. Both Rolnick and Huntington had gone on the record as being opposed to the takeover, stating that it was done by a minority of students who were the most radical on campus and that their views did not reflect the majority of students on campus nor did it represent the views of most residents of Hinman College. They even went so far as to send a letter to President Clark stating just that.¹⁴ However, a large number of students on campus and in Hinman agreed with those who stormed the administration building. The position that Rolnick and Huntington took on the issue was very unpopular with the student body all across campus. The demonstrators were seen as heroes in the eyes of not only students but also many members of the CSEA union (an organization which was in solidarity with the student protestors) and other organizations that saw the university and the state as the enemy of the student body. The SA, still hurting from the embarrassing move by Rolnick and HCC that humiliated their own Mike Powers, saw this as an opportunity to draw blood. The SA publicly condemned Rolnick, Huntington and their supporters as being against the best interest of the student body and for being in bed with the President Clark and the rest of the university

administration. These vicious attacks roused the ire of many students across campus, many of whom called for the heads of Sy Rolnick and John Huntington.¹⁵

While Rolnick and Huntington could accept the condemnation of the SA and from students of other residential communities, the worst attack of all came from a resident of their very own residential college. One Hinmanite wrote a letter highly critical of Rolnick and Huntington:

During the past few years I have worked closely with Hinman President Sy Rolnick in many activities of student government. I have found him to be one of the most hardworking and most concerned presidents that we have had. However, because of his recent actions and statements concerning the fight against cutbacks and the recent take over the administration building, I have lost a lot of respect for Sy as a president...

Sy Rolnick and John Huntington...issued a statement concerning the takeover saying that they were "extremely disgusted and personally offended that some members of the university are acting in a most rude and irresponsible manner." I wonder if these people were speaking for themselves or Hinman College? I would hope that if they were speaking for Hinman they would consult with some students. A majority of the people on my floor had been at the administration building and more sympathized with it. They were certainly not disgraced or offended. Were Sy and John speaking for them?

...The takeover was a necessary progression of steps. It was non-violent and only slightly disrupted services on campus. The students acted responsibly, using little confrontation and mostly realistic negotiations as a tool. When the students voluntarily left the building, effort was made to clean it...

...I have never heard students discuss student and university politics so much in all my four years here. Everyone on this apathetic campus was formulating opinions on their school, their future and their life. It was the first time students acted decisively at a time when students are working together and must cooperate even more in the future. Sy and John were opposed to the illegality of the takeover, yet what does that say about Martin Luther King and Gandhi? Although not comparing the demonstrators to them, these two people who our society has glorified for their use of peaceful, effective, but illegal means.

All in all I think the takeover was the best thing to happen on this campus in years.¹⁶

While Rolnick and Huntington may have been correct that the takeover was illegal and not the best way to solve the problems facing the university or of Hinman, their popularity in Hinman suffered considerably and the power of HCC was severely questioned. Some the gains they had

made during their fight over vouchers with the SA were lost with their condemnation of the student protestors.

As the Spring 1976 semester neared to a close one Hinmanite, Steve Gersh, did come to the aid of Sy Rolnick by publishing an letter in the *Hinman Halitosis* praising him for all the hard work he had done.

Before we all go off on our merry ways for vacation, there is something we all should do. I don't mean harvest those plants that Mom wouldn't want to see. I don't mean put the bong in storage. I think what we all ought to do is thank ol' Sy Rolnick for a job very well done. For those of you a bit behind on Hinman current events, Sy is President of our elite little college. He served as Social V.P. in the fall, and last Spring. Sy is the most unselfish person I have met here. There is no one willing to give more to his fellow students, while getting nothing in return.

When Sy took over the job of President in January, I believe that he thought it would be easier than being Social V.P. It would have been for someone else, but not for Sy. When he found that his Social V.P. was having a difficult time getting the job done, Sy basically just took over. In effect he was both social V.P. and President at the same time. He directed the semi-formal and cleaned up until five in the morning, all alone. He runs co-rec basketball and has been involved in every other social, academic, and political event in Hinman College this semester.

It is Sy's nature to be generous and friendly. Some say that he is foolish to do so when he receives nothing in return. I don't understand why he does it either. Perhaps it is just his personality. Sy is a giver, not a taker. We are most fortunate to have him here. We owe him much. Without him, life in Hinman would be nothing like it is. I try to appreciate what Sy has done and I thank him. I wish that you would also. He certainly deserves that and more, much more.¹⁷

Sy Rolnick deserved this accolade. More than any other HCC President before him, he had worked through overwhelming odds and had done everything in his power to make HCC a better organization and Hinman a better place to live. The close of the tumultuous 1975-1976 academic year was hopefully the close of a troubling chapter in the history of HCC.

The following year opened up with great expectations on the part of regular Hinmanites and those who ran the student government. Sy Rolnick began the year with an open letter to all of Hinman. The letter read in part:

The Executive Committee of Hinman College will be meeting and planning in the next week and is looking forward to improving on last year's performance. Many activities are already in the planning stages, but we, as the Executive Committee, cannot do it alone. We need help to make sure all projects are successfully carried out. Last semester, there was a lot of disappointment in terms of help, and hindered our programs both socially and academically. I hope that this semester, with the aid of the new students in Hinman and those returning, that we are able to bring about a change in this. If everyone would just devote a little of his or her time and participate in Hinman affairs, not by just coming to events but by serving on committees or lending a hand at various functions, then a lot more will be accomplished and more can be planned. A little effort on everyone's part can make this coming year a most enjoyable one.

For those coming to Hinman from high school, other campuses and other places on this campus, I would like to extend an extra special greeting and give a brief background on life in Hinman. Hinman has taken great pride in being the most innovative of the on-campus colleges. Activities initiated here have included co-rec football and basketball, Little Theater, Supper Club, Hinman Follies, semi-formals, a trip to Monticello Raceway, and speidies and beer party on the patio. Hinman has also been a leader in the establishment of credit courses such as Law and the Family, freshmen-sophomore seminars and others. In the area of non-credit courses, we have been innovative with gourmet cooking, horticultural [sic], exercising and ballet...

...I just hope everyone will make some effort to get involved in Hinman activities. It does little good to sit on the sidelines and complain, give us some help and, hopefully, you will be able to improve Hinman life. I promise you will have a good time and gain satisfaction by participating...¹⁸

Paul Caruso, the HCC Social Vice President, also extended his request for participation.

This coming fall term promises to be both innovative and exciting in terms of the social activities available to the students living in Hinman.

To take steps so the social wishes of the students are heard, now Hinman has an elected social committee [sic]. These two members of each dorm will report to their respective dorm's meetings about what the social committee [sic] is planning to do. Students make suggestions to the social reps concerning events they would like to see take place in Hinman...¹⁹

As in all previous years, the HCC E-Board was begging people to get involved. During the course of the semester there would be some programs that were successful and there would also be much student apathy. When election time came around Sy Rolnick, the incumbent President,

decided to run again. His campaign promised that effective leadership was what was needed to make Hinman great again.

...The position of Hinman President is very important to the success of Hinman social life, academic life and collegiate policies. In the past year, as President I have attempted to represent the interests of Hinman students and to better the college. I feel that to be a successful President, one has to give the time, be prepared to sacrifice part of your social life, part of your studies and maintain a close relationship with the staff and administration. I have tried to keep in contact with people from all dorms and listen to what they are thinking and want done. We have accomplished a lot and will continue to accomplish things. We will continue to fight for our individual autonomy, we will attempt to improve the social life and we will attempt to do what is desired by Hinmanites...An issue in my running is that I will only be here one semester and the job is a year's position, but what is the matter with this? The job should be done by somebody willing to give the time no matter what their semester standing and I have proven in the past that I will give this time. I will not leave the college without a trained President, but if I win we will hold elections early enough for the new person to be trained. Also, you want experience and somebody concerned, not a person who is doing this job with an ulterior motive. I feel you have to consider all this at voting time. I know over the past three years here I have made friends and enemies but I think when it comes to an election you should put this in the back of your mind and vote on past accomplishment and experience...²⁰

Rolnick and the E-Board had another challenge to face besides the elections. During this time smoking was allowed in the dining halls. Rolnick along Hinman's SA representative, John Huntington, petitioned and eventually were able to ban smoking inside the Hinman Dining Hall. Shortly thereafter the other dining halls on campus followed suit.²¹ The hope was that HCC could continue the streak of accomplishment in the spring semester.

A crisis hit the entire Hinman community early in the spring semester when without any reason or notice, mail service virtually ceased. HCC decided to form a special Postal Committee to investigate the issue. After two weeks the committee members were finally able to get in contact with the proper authorities. John M. Adams, the chief supply clerk at the Campus Post Office, informed the committee that the reason behind the nearly nonexistent postal service in Hinman was that in an effort to save money work-study students were hired to deliver the mail.

The students, who had classes and examinations at all different times, were unable to deliver the mail as regularly as the usual full-time staffers could. “According to Mr. Adams ‘Students don’t always get to the mail on time because of classes and examinations. And, sometimes they don’t come in and don’t bother telling us, until it’s too late to get a replacement.’”²² After HCC applied pressure to the proper authorities, mail delivery improved greatly.

Following the post office fiasco, another issue was brought before HCC’s attention: the unionization of students. Many students on campus felt that the Student Association was ineffectual in dealing with their problems and a new organization, the Student Union, should be introduced to deal with the problem. President Rolnick was in favor of the organization. Rolnick, like many others, believed that the SA was too bureaucratic and no longer represented the students well. However, he also stated that if a new Student Union should come into existence, it should be moderate. Gabe Yankowitz, while not against the Student Union, believed that it really was not necessary. While certain issues such as the allocation of money (such as the freeze on funds imposed on Hinman by the SA) and property rights (the university had been trying to confiscate Hinman land to make a parking lot) would be addressed by the new organization, the major belief among the student body was that the Student Union would really just be duplicating the role of the SA.²³

¹ Sy Rolnick, letter to the editor, *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. VI, No. 14, December 11, 1975.

² Sy Rolnick, letter to Hinman residents, *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. VI, No. I Spring, January 22, 1976.

³ Ken O’Brien, letter to editor, *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. VI, No. I Spring January 22, 1976.

⁴ Steve Gersh and David Eiskowitz, “Election Process Outmoded,” *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. VI, No. 3 Spring, February 3, 1976.

⁵ “Bansbach Defeats Foster For Treasurer, Election Valid,” *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. VI, No. 4 Spring, February 12, 1976.

⁶ Steve Gersh, “Halitosis Actions Interview: Sy Rolnick,” *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. VI, No. 5, February 19, 1976.

⁷ “Hinman Council Feuds With Powers,” *Pipe Dream* Vol. XII, No. 18, March 16, 1976.

⁸ “Hinman Council Rejects S.A. Treasurer’s Spending Freeze,” *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. VI, No. 8, March 11, 1976.

⁹ “S.A. Treasurer Responsibilities Defined; Hinman Challenges Power’s Status,” *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. VI, No. 9, March 18, 1976.

¹⁰ Nigel Allen, “Hinman Moves To Oust Powers,” *Pipe Dream* Vol. XII, No. 20, March 23, 1976.

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- ¹¹ "S.A. Treasurer Responsibilities Defined; Hinman Challenges Power's Status," *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. VI, No. 9, March 18, 1976.
- ¹² Ronald Brownstein et al, "Students Take Over Admin. Building," *Pipe Dream* Vol. XVII, No. 19, March 19, 1976.
- ¹³ Ronald Brownstein et al, "Occupation Ends After 58 Hours," *Pipe Dream* Vol. XII, No. 20, March 23, 1976.
- ¹⁴ Nigel Allen, "Hinman Reps Protest Takeover," *Pipe Dream* Vol. XII, No. 20, March 23, 1976.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Jim Lombardo, "Fight With Them, Not Against Them," *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. VI, No. 10, March 25, 1976.
- ¹⁷ Steve Gersh, "Sy, Yo're Our Guy," *Hinman Halitosis* May 6, 1976.
- ¹⁸ Sy Rolnick, "Open Letter to Hinmanites," *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. VII, No. 1, August 30, 1976.
- ¹⁹ Paul Caruso, "To All Hinman College Residents," *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. VII, No. 4, September 16, 1976.
- ²⁰ Sy Rolnick, "My Fellow Hinmanites," *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. VII, No. 12, November 18, 1976.
- ²¹ "Fall Semester 1976...Encore," *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. VII, No. 15, December 9, 1976.
- ²² "Post Office Mess," *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. XI, No. 19, February 24, 1977.
- ²³ "Attitudes On The Student Union," *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. XIII, No. 21, March 10, 1977.