

Police committee disputes minority focus

by W. C. McRae

The Police Cross Cultural Communications Committee was "like the UN," according to committee Chairman Nick Barnett. The committee, made up of representatives of Portland ethnic and cultural minorities and the police, was convened last summer after the death of Lloyd Stevenson exacerbated tensions between police and the black community. Members of the North Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods, voicing black outrage, met with the police and city officials. These meetings concluded with an agreement to establish a "hands-on" cross-cultural education for police officers. NNE Coalition members then contacted representatives of local ethnic and cultural minorities, who were asked to present letters from minority organizations attesting to their legitimacy. The resulting 14-member committee, meeting at a variety of locations and with no fixed schedule, undertook the establishment of criteria for an eight-hour practical training in minority issues for police officers; issued a request for proposals offering a \$20,000 consultancy fee; reviewed 15 proposals from interested consultants; and financially sent three recommendations for trainer to Chief Harrington.

The training is currently underway, directed by Michael Benjamin Associates. The committee continues to meet sporadically and in a truncated form, to monitor the training.

But the workings of the committee in process — the trade-offs made between minority solidarity and ethnic self-devotion — provide a droll commentary on local inter-minority relations.

An irony of the Cross-Cultural Committee was that it could not agree on what "cross cultural" functionally meant. That is to say, members could not agree, in terms of minorities represented in the training, how wide a focus would be effective, but how narrow a focus would be equitable. One school of thought, propounded by the police, called for a minority extensive approach — Portland as a "global village" as put by Captain Inman of the Police Bureau — which would provide training about several minorities and police/public relations in general. An alternative philosophy held that Cross-Cultural Communications training should be *minority intensive* and in this instance present training about ethnic minorities — specifically black —

most impacted by the police. Once those structures were in place, they would then be available to other minorities.

With these two philosophies as points of departure, this "modern UN," was then open to politics. No savvy and enterprising minority representative, having stood for his/her constituency on the committee, would then care to return to that constituency not having gained representation in the training. Also complicating the issue, some black members of the committee suspected that the police's seemingly benevolent injunction to include all minorities was actually a ploy to avoid dealing directly with black issues. But other committee members felt that behind such black suspicion and disgruntlement was black self-interest and discontent with the equal involvement of other minorities.

"Everyone else wanted to become part of the stew on the pot" once the black community had demanded the training, says black committee member Robert Phillips of Multnomah county Affirmative Action, referring to other minorities' involvement. "Eight hours is not a lot of time to devote to a lot of different groups," claims Phillips, and by expanding the focus of the training to include more minorities, "you dilute a concentrated approach" that would emphasize black/police issues. Adds Chairman Barnett, "It was blacks who were in uproar, not the hispanics."

Other committee members dissented and were concerned that the training be more broadly multicultural. "We were set the task of getting total representation," says Maria Marin of Oregon Council for Hispanic Advancement, emphasizing that *cultural* and not just *ethnic* minorities must be included in the training.

The issue was moved to center stage when training regarding gays was discussed. A proposal submitted by Dr. Darrell Millner of Bus-Com Consultants, heavily favored by black and American Indian members of the committee, did not include a training about gays. When asked by committee member Keeston Lowrey, chair of the Right to Privacy, PAC, why gays were not included in the proposal, Millner, chair of PSU's Black Studies Department, reportedly replied, "We talked about gays and decided it wasn't important."

When contacted Millner said he could not recall making the statement, though he "may have." I am not a smooth public-relations type," he stated.

When it seemed that the black-sympathetic portion of the committee might choose to ignore the criteria established and not include cultural minorities, exclusion of gays became the issue which focused dissatisfactions felt by some members with black intransigence on the committee.

Lowrey says that other sympathetic committee members realized that "specifically excluding one minority would effectively exclude others." These members "decided not only to support gays, but to stick together." "Some members of the committee felt that gays were not an issue," says Bong Wellerton To, of Chinese Social Services, and adds that these members "maybe forgot" that all minorities were to be represented.

The perception that the committee might be steamrolled into making a recommendation favoring specific interests was intensified at the final meeting when the vote for trainer was taken. According to the protocol of the committee, rather than vote for or against a proposal, each committee member was to give to each of the top five proposals votes out of 100, based on how well each proposal matched the already-established criteria. At the last minute a move was made by the chair to recommend out of committee only the top vote-garnering proposal. This was followed by a voting process that four committee members described as having been "askewed" by two members voting 100 points for the Millner proposal while voting 0 points for competing proposals, which "purposefully distorted" the voting to favor the Millner proposal. The Millner proposal received the most points and was recommended to Chief Harrington as such.

Harrington later went against the committee's recommendation and chose the proposal submitted Michael Benjamin Associates.

Robert Phillips hints that those who did not side with blacks in the voting naively played into the hands of the police, who wanted "to dilute a pure black approach" by including cultural groups such as gays in the training.

Burnett claims that "no one was insensitive to the gay issue," and goes on to say that Lowrey's contribution to the committee was "hesitant" because Lowrey assumed "that gay issues won't be put on the front burner in a committee like this." Faith Mayhew of Affiliated Tribes of North America says "some members were playing politics with the gay issue" and the Benjamin proposal, adding that gays already have an established liaison with the police. Mayhew claims Lowrey thought he was being "unfairly treated because no one backed his candidate." The Benjamin proposal did specifically include a gay training, the only one of the 15 original proposals to do so.

Lowrey says "the gay issue is sensitive to several black leaders." But another member admitted off the record that under the guise of gay inclusion was actually being fought fair representation of any minority but black.

"It was the most diverse groups of minori-

ties ever assembled in the city's history," concludes Chairman Barnett, who hopes that the committee can serve as "the pattern for other inter-ethnic cooperation."

Despite Lowrey's efforts, the inclusion of gays in the Police Cross Cultural Training may have been somewhat of a Pyrrhic victory. Although Michael Benjamin Associates has pledged in his training to inform police officers about gay concerns, his approach has been questioned. Helen Lottridge of Phoenix Rising reports that, while Benjamin has hired a minority member to do the training for each particular minority, a straight psychologist is training the police on gays and lesbians. When approached by Lottridge with an offer to subcontract for the gay training, Michael Benjamin and Steven Willard (the psychologist presently responsible for the gay training) stated that they couldn't afford it. Lottridge says Willard justifies his expertise on gay issues by claiming he has had "a lot of gay patients."

CHES Awarded \$30,000

The Multnomah County Board of Commissioners, in its final meeting of the year, voted unanimously to award a lump sum of \$30,000 to CHES for social services to persons living with AIDS and related conditions. The authorization, introduced by Commissioner Gretchen Kafoury, transferred funds within the Human Services department budget to fund a contract over the next six months. Under the terms of the contract, the funding may be used at the Board's discretion, with regular reports made on expenditures and services provided. This funding was requested as an emergency measure to provide for additional professional support for CHES/PAL Project's volunteer forces.

This one-time-only budget transfer marks the first time that any government body in Oregon has provided funding for community based *social services* to persons and families living with AIDS, so the Board will be exercising special care in its use.

This financial support was desperately needed and will be needed again, so it would help a lot if you thank your commissioner. Messages can be sent to Ms. Kafoury, or Presiding Officer Earl Blumenauer, or your own commissioner, c/o County Courthouse; 1021 SW 4th Ave., Room 605; Portland, OR; 97204. Let them know that you appreciate their continuing support!

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