

EDITORIAL/OPINION

McNamara's the one

Some were shocked, some dismayed and others just disgusted when the Portland School Board's screening committee failed to select Herb Cawthorne as one of the three finalists for selection to the School Board.

With school desegregation and related issues being one of the most serious issues faced by the School District over the past two years, increasing Black hostility toward the district, building white awareness of the unfair treatment of Black children, a proposed school boycott and the real threat of court action, most thinking members of the public had expected that a Black would be named to the Board. More than ever before the Board needs a member who is an active participant in the Black community—one who not only can articulate the concerns and demands of Black people but who can interpret those concerns and demands to the Board and the white public. The Board needs a person who is trusted by Blacks and believed by whites.

Cawthorne does not take his candidacy to the School Board lightly—it is not the result of political ambition. Although urged by supporters, he did not seek vacancies that were filled last year by Joe Rieke and Evie Crowell. Now, he feels that he can fulfill the function of bridging the widening gap between the Board and the community.

Board members Scott, Steve Buel and Wally Priestley could add Cawthorne's name to the contenders. Then the decision would be squarely up to Frank McNamara, who just a year ago expressed his regret that Cawthorne had not sought an earlier vacancy and indicated that Cawthorne was his first preference. Now McNamara has a chance to fulfill that wish—he could put Cawthorne on the Board.

A time to act

The anti-busing amendment proposed by Representative Ron Mottl was defeated in the House of Representatives by a 216 to 209 vote, an even greater margin than the opponents of the bill had expected.

The Mottl amendment would have prevented effective racial desegregation in many cities by requiring that children who attend public school be assigned to the school nearest their homes. Not only would those desegregation programs now in effect be destroyed, but the whole issue of school desegregation would have to be fought all over again—in the courts and in the streets. The amendment's failure to pass should end, for now, the efforts to forbid busing for desegregation.

... continue—and that it must be accomplished in an equitable manner—has again been upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in its recent decision that court-ordered desegregation can be applied to districts that were segregated by school board policy as well as by law.

The handwriting is on the wall for the Portland School District. Portland has been fortunate in that it has until now been able to avoid the conflicts of court ordered desegregation. The district has, for nearly 20 years, been able to convince some Black parents that it knows best and other Black parents that they are powerless to resist. It has been able to convince the white population that desegregation is progressing well, that they will not be involved and that Blacks are happy. No one, not even the school district

personnel, fully realized the extent of destruction that their ill conceived, crisis-directed program wreaked on Black children. It was only after the facts and figures were gathered and published by the Community Coalition for School Integration that the full picture was finally revealed.

In light of these revelations, which only serve to verify what parents already know, the school district cannot hope to continue in its blatant denial of the rights of Black citizens. If the School Board cannot find an answer—and quickly—it faces a difficult year ahead.

Thus for the District's response to the Black United Front has been neither responsible nor productive. First came Dr. Blanchard's remarks that the responsible leaders and thinking parents will not support the boycott. Ernie Hartzog, Assistant Superintendent, said the District had no intention of talking with Black United Front leaders. When the Board finally decided to act, it called a public meeting—a "forum"—for the Black community to come to Benson High School and express its views. This recalls the meetings last January when the Board went to Benson High School to listen to the concerns of the Coalition with deaf ears and to respond with rhetoric.

In its usual paternalistic manner the Board failed to invite the Black United Front before making its public pronouncement, so had to cancel that meeting. Chairman McNamara has voiced a willingness to meet—but this time the Board will have to do more than talk—they will have to act.

Dellum's bill best

The Kennedy national health insurance bill is getting a lot of attention, and the support of the vast majority of those people who believe this country—like all other industrialized countries except South Africa—should provide some type of health care for its citizens.

Representative Ron Dellums is sponsoring his own bill—one which gets little publicity but which is the real answer to the health care problem in the U.S.

The Kennedy bill will provide comprehensive, mandatory, universal health care. The employed will be covered through the purchase of health insurance by their employers; the unemployed will be covered by the federal government. Hospital and doctors' fees will be set by negotiation among the medical profession, the insurance companies, and the consumers.

This bill is not expected to curb health costs or effect the quality of care. Costs under premium-financed insurance are higher because the insurance company must make a profit. Estimates are that profits and overhead account for 40 per cent of the premium.

The Dellums bill would set up a national health service. Doctors, nurses, and other health workers would be employees of a decentralized national health service, which would be elected by community, regional, state and national boards. The source of funds to provide free medical and preventative health care to all Americans would be a national progressive income tax. This bill, by taking the profit out of medicine, is expected to cut health costs by 20 per cent.

In the face of the powerful American Medical Association lobby, the Dellums bill is not given much chance of even being discussed by the House. Our elected representatives will settle for second best—if anything at all.



The Organization of African Unity

by N. Fungai Kumbula

The Organization of African Unity held its annual meeting in Monrovia, Liberia, this past week. This African body, more popularly called the OAU, was founded in 1963 and its primary aim was to repair the damage, undo the harm that decades of colonialism had done to Africa. Prior to the onset of colonialism, there were no definite boundaries and, consequently, no real separate 'countries' in Africa. The whole continent was just one large land mass and the people moved from place to place, hampered only by minor language differences and difficulty with transportation.

To say Africa was united would be an oversimplification but, to say it was not united would be an exaggeration also. There were major settlements all over the continent but a substantial percentage of the people lived in small settlements and moved from place to place in their constant search for better grazing lands for their animals and good soils for their crops.

Though the Africans did fight one another from time to time, it was usually on a very small scale, what would be called 'minor skirmishes' by today's standards. True, there were such brilliant military strategists as the Tshakas, Monomotapas, Mzilikazis, and the Ghana, Mali, Songay, Sudan and Ethiopian monarchs but, on the whole, the average African never did develop killing to an art form as did his European counterpart. This was why when the Europeans came to Africa, it was not so difficult for them to overrun a whole continent.

It was with these thoughts in mind that the OAU was born: to address African problems, unify and, consequently, strengthen Africa, bring the people closer together, pool resources, energies and ideas so as to make Africa's independent more meaningful. Colonialism had left a painful legacy behind and the OAU was to

attempt to eradicate all traces of colonialism as quickly as possible and make Africa Africa once again.

Just to point out some of the problems that the OAU set out to address: after the Europeans came to Africa, they carved up the continent into 'British Africa,' French, Belgian, Portuguese, Spanish, German, Dutch, Italian Africa; and each as different from the next as France was from Spain. We still suffer from that legacy today: if I meet any of my comrades from either Kenya, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Zaire or any country other than my own, I cannot converse with them except in a foreign language. Sometimes it gets to a point where we cannot converse at all because, whereas I speak English (in addition to Shona and Ndebele), this other African student may speak only French or Portuguese (in addition to his local language—which I do not understand).

The Europeans actually tried to make the parts of Africa they colonized 'Little Europes.' When they built transportation systems, for instance, they made a point of never connecting adjoining countries if they happened to be under different colonial 'rulers.' For example, Ghana is next door to Togo but, when they built railroads, the respective rail lines ended at the border: they deliberately used different gauges so as to limit cross border travel and keeping the people further divided.

Telecommunications: when the telephone was introduced to Africa, the exchanges were maintained in some European capital. If one wants to make a call from Accra, Ghana to Abidjan, Ivory Coast (West African neighbors), the call has to go through London first, then Paris before being re-routed to Abidjan!

It is these kinds of problems that the OAU was born to address. Over the years, it has met with some suc-

cess and some disappointments. One of the most ambitious projects to be born and carried forth largely due to the OAU has been a complete overhaul of the entire continent's communications system. As of this writing, work is proceeding on a Trans Africa Highway that will eventually extend all the way from Dakar, Senegal on the west coast to Nairobi, Kenya on the east coast, a distance of well over 5,000 miles. When completed, this highway will also have arteries linking it with North Africa, Northeast Africa, and Southern Africa. It will be the most extensive highway network on the face of the earth.

Along the same lines too, the OAU has worked to facilitate travel between various African countries by easing restrictions on visas, promoting more sporting events such as the Pan African Games, Africa Cup soccer matches, etc., working on building more direct telephone and telegraph links (work is in progress at the moment on a multimillion dollar Inter African Communications System) and, probably the most important and one long overdue, the establishment of a lingua franca for all Africa. Swahili has been mentioned as a possibility and now that it has been accepted as one of the languages to be used at the United Nations, that should boost its chances even more.

A language, a single language for all Africa has been long overdue. We all know, I am sure, that language promotes a people's culture much faster than just about anything else. The very fact that you are speaking in someone else's language is in itself an acknowledgement.

We hope these good efforts envisioned by the OAU will soon be realized and, when they are realized, Africa (and all Africans) will once more be poised to enter another Golden Era, no, make that Black Era.

The sell-out of Black construction workers

by Bayard Rustin

In an odd way, people like Bull Connor, George Wallace, Lester Maddox and other outspoken racists unwittingly provided Black people with some useful tactical advantages. First, the bitterness and harshness of their rhetoric alienated them from many decent white people. And, second, their unambiguous and starkly honest support for segregation helped to unify and mobilize the Black community. Moreover, we had no difficulty in distinguishing our friends from our enemies.

Today, however, much of the bombast, crudity, and overt racism of the recent past has disappeared. Discussion of "racial issues" has become more refined and civilized. But this "cooling-off" of racial rhetoric raises a new and perplexing problem: many subtle, almost invisible assaults on Black people now slip by us unnoticed and therefore unchallenged. Such a "sneak attack" on Black people is now underway within the construction industry. Allow me to explain.

After years of difficult and painstaking work, Blacks have finally begun to obtain their fair share of good-paying, relatively secure jobs in the unionized skilled trades. Indeed, Black youngsters now fill nearly 20 per cent of all new apprenticeship slots among cement masons, steamfitters, plasterers and operating engineers. Significant progress has also been realized in other trades as well, trades which back in 1940 had something like one Black for every 20 whites.

But now, just as we begin to see some encouraging advances, we also witness the emergence of a bold

movement among employers to undermine the wages, job security and working conditions of their new Black workers by promoting something known as the "merit shop". This of course is not done in the name of racism, it is done in the name of competitiveness, cost-cutting and economic necessity.

What exactly is the "merit shop" and how does it affect Black workers? Stripped of its alluring trappings, the merit shop is nothing more than a non-union shop in which the employer—and the employer alone—sets wage rates, working conditions, vacations, fringe benefits, and work rules. Workers have no say, and they lack the protections afforded by a solid collective bargaining agreement. In short, Blacks who flocked to the unionized construction trades in that non-union construction employers—who are expanding every day—are becoming as arbitrary, and tight-fisted as "Old Massa" on the plantations.

It is no surprise—and certainly no coincidence—that the low-paying "merit shops" have become so popular in areas with large Black populations and high unemployment rates which make labor cheap and docile. Data in a recent issue of *Fortune* magazine, confirmed this point by noting that "merit shops" account for 85 per cent of all construction work in the Baltimore area, 83 per cent in Houston, and 75 per cent in Washington, D.C.

All this is just the beginning for the "merit shop" proponents who are organized in the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC).

This powerful, well-financed organization—which has two full-time lawyers in Washington, and the services of 60 law firms across the country—now hopes to significantly increase the number of "merit shops" in urban areas, which of course have the largest concentrations of Black union construction workers. By focusing its anti-union, wage-cutting efforts in the cities, ABC will in effect be undermining the position of Black workers, workers who have enjoyed the benefits and high wages of union jobs for such a short time. Additionally, ABC has launched a major—and so far unsuccessful—campaign to repeal the Davis-Bacon Act, a law that requires contractors on federal projects to pay prevailing union wage rates.

By describing the activities of ABC, and the adverse economic effects of the "merit shop" on Blacks, I am not asserting that ABC and its member companies are consciously racist. Most are not. But as shrewd businessmen who want to make a fast buck, they are all too willing to ignore the broader social consequences of their wage-cutting, and job destroying actions, especially as they affect Black workers.

Because the "merit shop" threatens the livelihood of so many minority workers, Black leaders have a serious obligation to raise this issue forcefully and with a unified voice. If we ignore this "sneak attack" on Blacks, we will be silently accepting the cruel destruction of opportunity for the Black working class, a group which has overcome numerous obstacles in the long struggle for equality and economic security.

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A mind is a terrible thing to waste.



ALFRED L. HENDERSON
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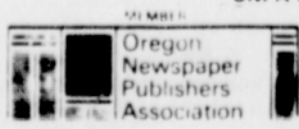
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