

EDITORIAL/OPINION

Who, if not us, will be responsible?

Two years ago Steve Buel was elected to the School Board, joining Wally Priestley, who had already served for three years. Those were three miserable years, under constant attack by the six establishment-oriented Board members and their Superintendent.

Not long after Buel's election a vacancy developed. There was no Black on the Board and desegregation had become the major issue - the coalition had recommended school pairings, the Black United Front was threatening a school boycott, HEW was investigating charges of discrimination. Herb Cawthorne - BUF organizer, Coalition co-chairman, writer for the *Observer* and *Oregonian*, TV host and Portland State University employee - accepted the challenge of seeking the appointment. With the solid support of Priestley and Buel, he finally received the appointment.

Cawthorne wept at the podium that night, believing that for the first time a Black person had been selected for a political position from among the ranks of Black militancy. His pledge was to always represent the interests of all the students of the district - but most of all to remain true to the community that had made his selection possible and to the Black children who had suffered the abuse of an unjust system.

So upset was Jonathan Newman over Cawthorne's appointment and the changes it foretold, that he resigned. His position was filled - with the solid support of Buel and Priestley, joined by Cawthorne - with Sarah Newhall who became the fourth member of the tenuous coalition that became known to its detractors as "The Gang of Four."

Months of agonizing work followed as the board attempted to write a new desegregation policy that would be equitable, would stay within the law, and would satisfy Black demands. After months of committee work - with Cawthorne unsure of what he wanted and under pressure from both sides, Joe Rieke and Blanchard stalling, and Frank McNamara becoming increasingly hostile - the decision passed from the committee to the full Board.

Then, Buel and Priestley gave their full support to the Black United Front's proposals and to Cawthorne's efforts; Newhall joined on most issues. The final policy was not brilliant or innovative, but after more threats of boycott it became acceptable. Although there is no evidence that the quality of education was greatly enhanced, many of the injustices were removed.

After making every attempt to work with the Superintendent, Cawthorne finally decided that Blanchard could neither implement the new policy nor work effectively with the Board. Finally, in July, he joined with Buel, Priestley and Newhall and voted to terminate the Superintendent. An unsuccessful recall attempt and personal attacks by the press and

the business establishment followed, but Cawthorne weathered the storm.

Why was the Superintendent fired? Quite simply, to enable the Board to hire a new Superintendent who would have an educational philosophy and a moral commitment to educate all of the district's children in a humane and just manner, who would deal openly and honestly with the public, and who would be responsive to the direction of the Board.

The most serious question facing those who voted to terminate Blanchard was, who will select the new Superintendent? Will the same establishment - oriented faction select a new Blanchard? Or will the four School Board members who consider themselves populists make that choice? Surely, the new Superintendent will reflect the philosophy of those who select him.

After discussions with several consultants, the decision was made to recruit a new Superintendent early this Spring, when the best candidates are available - and before the board members elected in March take office in July. This not only assured looking at the best candidates but allowed the current Board - with heavy influence from the majority coalition (Buel, Priestley, Cawthorne and Newhall) but with assurance to respect the wishes of the three remaining Board members and any new members that might be elected - to choose the new Superintendent. Thus, the four members who had rewritten the desegregation plan and who had fired the old Superintendent would set the stage for the future.

Monday night, Cawthorne changed all of that. He - along with Newhall - voted to abrogate his responsibility to the people to select a proper Superintendent. He denied Priestley and Buel the right to influence the decision. And he denied himself a deciding role.

Priestley will not be on the Board next year when the decision is made. Whether Newhall is reelected or not, the power will shift. McNamara, Scott, Rieke and the new member or members will make the decision. Buel's opinions will be discarded by the majority. Cawthorne will have his choice - be ignored with Buel or approve the selection of the others.

The momentum for change has been thrown away. The choice of the new Superintendent - the most important decision the School Board will make in this decade - will be made by Frank McNamara and Bill Scott.

The opportunity for the Black community and others who have struggled so long for quality and equity in education to participate in the selection of the new school Superintendent has been lost. Now who will represent Black children?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters are welcome, but only those bearing Signatures, current addresses, and telephone numbers where the writers may be reached during the day will be considered for publication. If the *Observer* cannot verify authorship, the letters will not be published. Letters

are subject to editing and become the property of *The Portland Observer*. Writers' names may be withheld should unusual circumstances dictate anonymity. Letters should be addressed: Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 3137, Portland, Oregon 97208.

Correction: The picture of Frank Turney attributed to Thomas Gordon was taken by Denise Bartless.



Bruce Broussard
Editor/Publisher



Portland Observer

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The *Portland Observer* was founded in October of 1970 by Alfred Lee Henderson.

The *Portland Observer* is a champion of justice, equality and liberation; an alert guard against social evils; a thorough analyst and critic of discriminatory practices and policies; a sentinel to warn of impending and existing racist trends and practices; and a defender against persecution and oppression.

The real problems of the minority population will be viewed and presented from the perspective of their causality: unrestrained and chronically entrenched racism. National and international arrangements that prolong and increase the oppression of Third World peoples shall be considered in the context of their exploitation and manipulation by the colonial nations, including the United States, and their relationship to this nation's historical treatment of its Black population.

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Mr. Tekere goes out

By Fungai Kumbula

There are twenty cabinet ministers in the government of Zimbabwe. In the eight short months that Prime Minister Robert Mugabe has led the new nation, none has attracted more attention than Edgar Zivanai Tekere. He is the Zimbabwe African National Union's (ZANU, the governing party) secretary general and, as such, the third most powerful figure in the government hierarchy. At 43, he is also one of the youngest and was widely regarded as the leader of the so-called left wing of the party. He was appointed Minister of Manpower Planning and his ministry was praised as the one making the fastest progress in the Zimbabweanization campaign.

He had been very impatient with what he regarded as the slow pace of Zimbabweanization and was openly critical of the "lingering remnants of the Smith-Muzorewa era." He has equally harsh words for Joshua Nkomo, the then Minister of Home Affairs and head of ZAPU, the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union, the junior partner in the governing coalition. He talked of a need to "crush Nkomo, the self-styled King of the matabele" - the Matabele are

the second major ethnic group in Zimbabwe forming 15% of the total population. The Shona make up the bulk of the other 80%.

Only a few months after he assumed his post as Manpower Planning Minister, he was arrested and charged with the murder of an elderly white farmer. As was to be expected the international media had a field day: "it couldn't have happened to a nicer guy," the headlines screamed, barely able to conceal their glee. They immediately started speculating that the "removal of the hot-head would rid the moderate Mugabe of his most pressing embarrassment." Through his lengthy trial, he maintained a constant vigil, like a death watch, and kept insisting that the outcome of the trial would be the true test of the road that Zimbabwe is to take in the days ahead. In spite of the fact that this was only one man involved, the international media opted to put the whole government on trial.

Late in November, The Zimbabwe High Court found Tekere innocent of the murder charge and released him. The trial judge, an elderly white hold-over from the Smith years, declared Tekere guilty

but he was overruled by the two assessors, Zimbabwe's equivalent of a jury. Thus absolved, Mr. Tekere went back to his job as Manpower Planning Minister.

This past week, in the first major cabinet shuffle, Mr. Tekere was dropped as Zimbabwe Manpower Planning Minister. Prime Minister Mugabe, in announcing the change, stated that Tekere was not being fired, just relieved of his duties for the time being to give him time to recover from his trial ordeal. So for now Mr. Tekere leaves the spotlight and we shall just have to wait and see what his exit will mean.

In the same cabinet shake-up, Home Affairs Minister Joshua Nkomo was transferred to the less powerful post of Public Service Ministry. His handling of the Home Affairs Ministry which is in charge of the police had come under increasing fire from various segments of the Zimbabwean populace. This move alone places all security responsibility directly under the Prime Minister's control. Former Public Services Minister Richard Hove, a ZANU confidante, merely traded jobs with Nkomo.

Red Year of 1980

By Dr. Manning Marable

In a year when Black politics was dominated by white terror, the bizarre and tragic story of Buffalo, New York stands alone. On the night of September 22, fourteen year old Glenn Dunn was sitting in a parked automobile when a lone gunman shot him in the head with a .22 caliber revolver. Within 36 hours, three more Blacks were executed in similar fashion; 32 year old Emmanuel Thomas, gunned down at a street corner; 43 year old Joe Louis McCoy of Niagara Falls, and 32 year old Harold Green. Two vehicles carrying white men invaded the funeral services of Dunn, screaming racist epithets in front of a Black church. One of the vehicles exhibited a mannequin's head mounted on the hood.

Several weeks later, two more bodies were discovered. Parler W. Edwards, a 71 year old taxicab driver was savagely beaten to death and stuffed in the trunk of his automobile. 40 year old Ernest "Shorty" Jones was bludgeoned to death and was found on a boat launching ramp in the Buffalo suburb of Tonawanda. Incredibly, both men's hearts were removed from their bodies. The day after Jones' death, 37 year old Collin Coll was almost strangled to death as he sat in a local hospital recovering from surgery. A white man entered Coll's room and proceeded to choke him while shouting "I hate niggers."

Eyewitness descriptions of the assailant, who escaped, were similar to those of the gun murderer. Barbara Banks Editor of the *Buffalo Challenger*, a Black weekly newspaper, observed that in "at least two separate incidents Black victims of attacks or harassment by white (one incident very possibly involving the killers) gave statements and license plate numbers to police and the authorities either lost the information or did not report it." As late as mid-October, only 3 white men had been questioned by police officials. District Attorney Edward Cosgove admitted that the investigation had made little if any progress. To Banks, most Buffalo Black people were "able to place this particular tragedy in a historical and nationwide perspective. In short, aside from understanding that violence against us is nothing new, most of us know that it's happening all across the country."

Black and progressive white people rallied against the new rise of racism. On October 19, five thousand people demonstrated at Buffalo City Hall to denounce the murders. The rally was sponsored by two hundred religious, educational, socialist and labor groups. Speakers included Black Democratic State Assemblyman Arthur Eve, the Reverend Charley Fisher of BUILD, a civil rights activist coalition, and the Reverend Bennett Smith of Buffalo's Operation PUSH.

In Atlanta, over two hundred people volunteered to make door-to-door searches for the missing Black children. Over 1500 people

demonstrated against a rally of Ku Klux Klansmen held in Scotland, Connecticut. Hundreds of people participated in a national march for "Freedom, Justice and against the Klan in Wrightsville, Georgia, on September 20. Akbar Ahmad of the African Peoples Party, the Reverend Herbert Daughtry, founder of the Black United Front, and the Welfare Rights Organization's Ethel Matthews participated in the four mile march against white racism.

As the storm clouds of racial conflict gathered, members of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights met in Washington, D.C., in October, 1980, to express "alarm at what they see as growing public hostility to vigorous enforcement of civil rights laws." Commission Chair Arthur S. Flemming informed the conference that the new segregationist strategy to destroy the Civil Rights Act of 1964 "is to put riders on appropriation bills which, when added together, can lead to (its) virtual repeal." House and Senate conservatives had already drafted amendments to prevent the Education and Justice Departments to halt school busing for desegregation; prevent the Internal Revenue Service from revoking the tax-exempt status of private schools; prevent federal spending on programs that use numerical goals for hiring women and minorities. In short, "today's civil rights problem have become more complex...than in the 1960s when Governor George C. Wallace of Alabama stood in the schoolhouse door to oppose integration."

For better or worse, many Blacks concluded that an informal coalition of white racist vigilantes, the police and government officials were conspiring to kill Blacks. "There is almost a hysteria in Black communities because of the belief that there is a conspiracy," stated the Reverend Jessie Jackson to the *New York Times* in late November, 1980. "Racism has become fashionable again and feelings of guilt toward Blacks have turned to feelings of hostility. This country has taken a definite swing toward facism." Jackson was also convinced that he and NAACP secretary Benjamin Hooks were would-be targets in "part of a calculated plan to murder Black civil rights activists." The interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, a predominantly Black religious organization, requested that the

Justice Department investigate the possibility of some sort of national conspiracy of white racists. "We are concerned because looking at the national trend, the killings of Blacks in Buffalo, the missing Black children in Atlanta and the assassination attempt on Vernon Jordan, there could be a line," stated the Reverend Lonnie Smith, an Alliance spokesperson. "We don't know, but we want it looked into."

Historically, the "Red Year of 1980" has several parallels within the Black experience. For some commentators, the modern white backlash which has followed the Civil Rights and Black power movement was similar to the restoration of Bourbon Democratic control and white supremacy in the South after the Compromise of 1877. For others, the turbulent events of 1980 amounted to another periodic rejection by whites of the historical demands of Black people for political equality and economic opportunity. Edward E. Elson, chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' advisory panel in Georgia, expressed this view: "the mood of (white) people toward civil rights now is 'Enough.'" But the parallels must be taken one step further. When a white mob tortured and lynched Blacks in Coatesville, Pennsylvania in 1911, Dr. W.E.B. DuBois advised Black Americans to begin to resist by any means necessary. "We have crawled and pleaded for justice and we have been cheerfully spat upon and murdered and burned. We will not endure it forever. If we are to die," DuBois thundered, "in God's name let us perish like men and not like bales of hay." Responding to the bloodbath of 1919, Black poet Claude McKay stated the inner feelings of every Afro-American then, as in 1980:

If we must die/let it not be like dogs/hunted and penned in an inglorious spot/while around us bark the mad and hungry dogs/making their mock at our accursed lot./If we must die, O let us nobly die/so that our precious blood may not be shed in vain/then even the monsters we defy/shall be constrained to honor us though dead/o kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!/though far outnumbered let us show us brave/and for their thousand blows deal one death blow!/what though before us lies the open grave?/like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack/pressed to the wall, dying/but fighting back!

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