

EDITORIAL/OPINION



Neighbors meet no (K)nock

By Fungai Kumbula

Racial harassment in Blue

Portland needs to take a long look at its police force and the relation between the police and the Black community. For years there has been increased concern about police harassment and brutality, particularly against Blacks but also against others who are seen as vulnerable.

The Bureau is involved in an investigation of its narcotics officers that has already led to the conviction of one officer for drug sales. It also brings serious questions about the legality of the police raid of the Outsiders motorcycle club which resulted in the death of a police officer. A number of convictions based on evidence provided by these officers are questioned.

What is operating within the Police Bureau that allows officers who apparently joined the force in good faith to turn to crime and brutality? Is it the absolute control over other human beings? Or is it a symptom of a sick society?

The highly publicized act of ten officers placing four dead opossums in front of a local Black owned restaurant has shocked and appalled a large portion of Portland's population.

The idea that grown men - paid and pledged to uphold the law and protect the people - would kill helpless, peaceful animals and use their dead bodies to harass a Black business man is almost unbelievable to many of Portland's residents who have not been exposed to a steady diet of police brutality. It is not shocking to those who have witnessed Black men and women snatched from their cars, knocked up against the wall, pushed to the

ground, or just verbally abused - all for a minor traffic infraction or for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Those who are in a position to observe actions on Union Avenue and other busy streets are aware of increasing police harassment.

There are those - locally as well as nationally - that say this will be a long hot summer. Unemployment, lack of programs for those in need, rising living costs - all will lead to tension and frustration. This is a time for increased understanding and tolerance on the part of the police and those who are in positions to determine policy and program. The worst possible scene in coming months would be violence promoted by the police.

Those within the Police Bureau and the police union who would like to discount charges or racism against certain police officers should now be willing to admit that racism and racist activity does exist. They should be willing to work with the community - including the Black United Front - to correct those problems that reflect poorly on all policemen and endanger the public.

We believe that all of the policemen involved in the harassment of Burger Barn, before and during the opossum incident, should be terminated from the police force. Their actions have gone beyond what is acceptable for public employees. The City should also consider bringing criminal and civil charges against them - conspiracy, harassment, intimidation, misuse of city equipment, etc.

Unless the line is firmly drawn now, the police will become a law unto themselves.

There was one a wise old African King in the heart of Africa in the good old days before the white man (in his supreme wisdom) came to "civilize" Africa. The King had a beautiful Queen who had done him the ultimate honor of bearing him seven sons and a daughter. King and Queen, therefore, had everything to be happy and contented about, but they had one nagging problem: the children could never agree on any one thing; they were forever quarreling.

The King and Queen were worried that after they were dead and gone, their beautiful and peaceful kingdom would probably be wrecked asunder since none of the children could get along. They were sure if they left the throne to Prince Musekiwa, the oldest, Prince Farai, the second oldest was likely to break away and take part of the kingdom for himself. They were almost sure that Prince Fadzai, Tendayi and Kudzai would do the same and the result would be a fragmented and much wrecked Kingdom of Umtali.

One day the King called all of his sons together and showed them a huge bundle of wood. He told them he felt the time was drawing close when he would have to go and join his forefathers and so he felt it was time for him to decide who was going to be King after he was gone. Immediately, the Princess started arguing about who should succeed their father. The King held up his hand and said, "I have already decided who will be King after me. Do you see the bundle of wood? Any one of you who can carry it across the courtyard will be the new King."

With that, each of the seven sons went and attempted to lift the wood, but it was too much for any of them. After they each had their turn and failed, they sat down suddenly to hear what their father would say.

"Well, it looks like none of you are strong enough to be King of Umtali. Maybe I will have to look outside the royal family," but at this point, Princess Tsitsi who had been watching, stepped forward and said, "Why don't you try carrying the wood together? If you cannot do it singularly, isn't it just possible that maybe the way to go is to cooperate?"

Looking sheepishly at each other, the brothers got up and easily

picked up the bundle of wood and carried it across the courtyard. The King smiled and said, "This is the one lesson I hoped you would learn before I died; that your strength lies in unity. As long as you work together, you will always be strong, prosperous, influential and invincible."

Upon the death of the King (he was briefly succeeded by his Queen but she did not live too long having lost her beloved husband) the seven sons reigned over Umtali for many a long and prosperous years.

The above is an ancient African story that has been passed through countless generations of Africans and African descendants throughout the world. (Thanks, Art!) The lessons to be learned from this simple story are as valid today as they were when it began to make the rounds a thousand or so years ago. However, looking at our people today, one would have to conclude that either this simple lesson has not been learned or it has simply been ignored, with disastrous results for us all.

A case in point is the on-going conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia. How long that has been going on is hard to document. The reasons for the conflict are just as hard to pin down. What is not so hard to see is the suffering the conflict has brought to both nations. Currently, the Horn of Africa (where both countries are) has the world's largest refugee population. Estimates range as high as 4 million which would make it larger than the population of the entire State of Oregon; all refugees!

The suffering of the people is heart-rending; children so emaciated from hunger you cannot only count all the ribs but you can actually see the backbone sticking through the stomach! In most cases, bloated stomachs, an unmistakable sign of severe malnutrition, are evident everywhere. The hands are so skinny they look as fragile as matchsticks.

The mothers trying to breast feed these pitiful infants, some of whom are two and three years old, look just as emaciated themselves. It is hard to tell the adults from the infants. If the children get to eat once a week (once a week!), they are lucky. In this on-again off-again war, as in every other war, it is the

women and children who suffer the most. The people who are waging the war, as always, escape unscratched.

The Ethiopia-Somalia conflict essentially pits the Soviets on the one hand and the Americans on the other. Needless to say, both superpowers will escape unscratched but what of the Africans - the Somalis and the Ethiopians? Isn't it time our leaders learned that as long as we allow it, we shall always be used as a testing ground for the latest and most lethal weapons? What do they care if all Ethiopians and all Somalis are totally annihilated? They are only Africans. "We must stop the communist menace, right? Or Communism forever."

What's happening to our African heritage? Do we forget that as recently as 96 years ago, there were no such states as Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda or any of the little African countries; that Africa was just one vast continent without any real rigid boundaries? Do we forget that all of Africa's current boundaries were drawn up in Berlin, Germany, in 1884 so the Europeans could more systematically cut up and exploit the African continent? Now that we supposedly have thrown off the wolves of colonialism, isn't it about time we went back to the Africa of yesterday? An Africa when we were all Africans first and "Socialists, Capitalists, upper class, middle class, professionals, laborers, and whatever other labels we have begun to apply to ourselves, second?"

After all, what is a Somali? What is an Ethiopian? Aren't they all Africans like Zimbabweans, Zambians, and Zanzibaris? Don't we all have the same objectives, the same goals and face the same problems? Africa lags behind developmentally now because of these artificial differences we place amongst ourselves.

I would certainly hope that we will see our plight and make the necessary corrective measures before it is too late. The suffering of all those women and children is a nightmare that haunts me night and day, especially as I tell myself it is African killing African for the benefit of an outside power.

Princess Tsitsi, where are you now when we need you so?

Racism as national policy

The nations of the world are aghast at the murders of Black children in Atlanta - a series of killings that is unprecedented. It is seen as a symptom not only of the racism that pervades US society but of the conduct of the US toward the world.

At a time when half the world is hungry, there is talk of increased use of food as a political tool. Recent examples are the wheat boycotts of the Soviet Union and Iran. Another prime example that has continued nearly 20 years is the US boycott of Cuba - forbidding shipment of any goods, even food and medicine to Cuba by the US or its allies.

The nations of the world are concerned about the Reagan Administration's attitudes and policies toward the Third World. Reagan has announced his preference to improve relations with South Africa - an ally through many wars and a provider of minerals essential to the US war effort. Reagan also favors removal of the law that forbids US intervention in Angola on behalf of South Africa.

On the eve of his visit to Canada, Reagan cancelled the Law of the Sea Treaty which had been worked on for years and was ready to be signed. This treaty would have controlled mining on the sea floor and insured that the Third World shared in the benefits. Reagan is more interested in profits for the US mining corporations than in seeing that the world's resources go to feed hungry children in poor nations.

The continuing North-South discussions in which the "have not" nations are seeking a more equitable distribution of wealth - fair prices for natural resources and wages, debt cancellation, realistic loan procedures, control of their own economies, etc. - are endangered by the US refusal to participate unless Cuba is

barred. This decision reflects a desire to maximize US profits regardless of the cost of human suffering.

These policies reflect the racism at home. The president still has not spoken out against the rising racial and religious harassment. He has spoken out against busing, has made jokes about Black welfare mothers, has cut funds for school lunches, job training, food stamps, education, etc.

Acts of racial harassment and brutality cannot be seen as isolated incidents. They are fast becoming the policy of our nation -- at home and abroad.

CIA in Africa

Early in February Joaquim Chissano, foreign minister of Mozambique, charged South Africa with creating a dangerous situation in Southern Africa that could lead to a war with unpredictable consequences.

Speaking to the Ministerial Meeting of the Movement of the Non-Aligned Countries in India, Chissano said South Africa is attempting to distract attention from its own internal problems by fostering problems elsewhere and is trying to intimidate countries in the area that support Namibian independence.

He accused South Africa of conspiring to destabilize progressive governments in the area.

Last weekend Mozambique accused the US of using its embassy as a CIA base to plan the overthrow of the government and the assassination of its president.

The US (CIA) and South Africa have been heavily involved in Angola. Are the charges by Mozambique an indication of further collaboration between the two?



Chasing the Cat

By Calvin O. L. Henry

"The cat is out of the bag," and it is difficult for some of the people's representatives to appreciate it.

The cat, in this case, is racism in Oregon. The legislators are the people's representatives and the eyes are upon their actions during this 1981 Legislative Session.

It was Governor Vic Atiyeh who let the cat out when he gave his State of the State message on January 12, 1981, before a joint house of Oregon Legislative Assembly.

Really, the cat has always been out in the open since the days of the Oregon Territory. But Oregonians have largely ignored it because it was being expressed only in the stories and complaints of the victims. Their stories, often did not warrant the attention of the media and the press. However, when the highest state office reveals the truth about the cat, it is hard to be ignored.

Atiyeh reported that Oregonians witnessed shocking and damnable incidents of racial intolerance in 1980. He stated, "nothing defiles humanity as much as outrageous acts of racism. That such terrorism could happen in Oregon today is a sobering reminder of the dormant seeds of bigotry."

Appealing further to the Legislature, Atiyeh noted, "...when that covert bigotry is manifested in malicious and wanton racial harassment...when citizens fear for the safety of their lives and property then we must be prepared to do more than sit back and call those depraved persons who are responsible 'cowards' and 'bullies.'"

Governor Atiyeh called upon the 1981 Legislature "to make the act of racial harassment a crime in Oregon -- a felony, punishable by fine or imprisonment or both." He urged them to join him in a resolute stand

against bigotry, in the name of justice and equality.

Some legislators have quietly expressed that Atiyeh was using isolated incidents of racial harassment for his political fortunes, and that his proposing the racial intimidation bill, HB 2479, was only a partisan gesture. The Governor is a Republican and the Oregon Legislature is controlled by the Democrats. But, should the crime of racial intimidation be a Democratic or Republican issue?

One State Senator was very upset with Atiyeh's comments concerning those "isolated incidents of racism." This Senator stated that the Governor showed a rare liberal side of himself for civil rights and he questioned the sincerity of Atiyeh. Yet, this Senator was willing to introduce his "Mexican friend" to individuals in the Capitol Coffee Shop.

A State representative wanted the Governor's racial intimidation bill assigned to his committee so that he could kill it in committee.

And some groups and individuals are saying that the Governor's bill may be in violation of the First Amendment, freedom of speech. Should this be left to the courts to decide?

HB 2479 provides that a person commits the crime of intimidation if, intentionally and with intent to intimidate another person because of such other person's race, color, religion, ancestry or national origin, the person: causes physical harm to the other person; by word or conduct places, or attempts to place, the other person in fear of imminent physical harm; or tampers with, interferes with, damages or destroys the property of the other person. This is the Governor's bill.

Incidents or revelations since the

Governor's State of the State message adds additional justifications for the passage of HB 2479 by the Oregon Legislature.

Racism in Oregon is blatant. It exists in housing, public accommodations, education and employment. Open signs of it can be seen in economic development, politics, the trades, labor unions and the criminal justice system. Groups like the Urban League and the NAACP have been working to remove all forms of racism since their establishment in Oregon.

In response to Atiyeh's message to the Legislature, the editorial writer of the *Corvallis Gazette-Times* noted, "Whatever inspired the remarks, the Governor was right in urging the lawmakers to allow the state to step hard on those who jeopardize others because of the color of their skin. The state must protect all of its residents and visitors regardless of their origin."

It is hard for anyone to disagree with Van Eisehnut, managing editor of the *Statesman-Journal*, when he stated, "News of racial and religious bigotry is unpleasant. But reporting it is necessary if a newspaper is fulfilling its responsibility to the community it serves." The cat must continue to be exposed by the press, as the incidents occur.

What Governor Atiyeh did was to appeal to the common decency of the people of Oregon through their legislators. Other public officials should follow suit. He said what many Oregonians wanted to say. And the Legislators should not let the people down.

And the Governor should be commended for his bold approach to protect the citizens affected by racial harassment. The cat reflects on all Oregonians.



Bruce Broussard
Editor/Publisher



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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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