

EDITORIAL/OPINION

Convicting the innocent

The statement of police Chief Bruce Baker that "I don't know of a single case which has involved a totally innocent person" while discussing the practices of police officers planting narcotics on suspects, obtaining search warrants illegally, and committing perjury in court to insure conviction, is extremely distressing.

Whether the practice was used against known drug dealers, suspected drug dealers or innocent persons is of no consequence. The manufacture of evidence to convict a person - who according to our Constitution must be innocent until proven guilty - negates not only that individual's civil rights but the entire criminal justice system. To give even the slightest excuse for this practice against anyone is to negate our entire system of laws - our entire system of government.

The sloppy policies and practices that allowed this abuse of power by some police of-

ficers is not news. It was all brought to light over a year ago in the Christopher trial. That it has taken an entire year to make procedural changes is still a mystery. To compound that fact by even the slightest hint that perhaps the illegal activities of the officers involved were not so bad after all cannot be tolerated.

Chief Baker needs to explain his thoughts more adequately and insure the public that conspiracy against citizens will not be tolerated within the police department.

The City will be faced with multitude of lawsuits and hundreds of persons convicted of drug crimes will seek reversals. The City needs to supply them and their attorneys with all pertinent information immediately - without legal hassles about which is and what is not confidential - so that innocent persons will not have to spend more months in jail while attorneys make repeated efforts to obtain records.

Cutting the pie

This Friday the Committee on Elections and Reapportionment will make its final recommendations on how Multnomah County should be divided among thirteen legislative districts.

Ten years ago the area of North/Northeast Portland that includes the largest proportion of Black residents was divided, and portions of it were placed in four different legislative districts. The theory then - and the theory now being espoused by those who promote a similar division this time - is that Blacks will have more influence in Salem by having a little influence on four legislators than they would if they controlled the election of one legislator who would be responsible to them. The other implication is that by being divided into three districts, Blacks could potentially elect three Black representatives. The history of the last ten years should refute that claim.

Legislators involved in this decision must put aside their own interests and put aside the interests of those Blacks and whites who seek to enhance their own power by preventing the development of a strong Black voice in Portland and those Blacks and whites who seek a district that would further their own ambitions. They must look at the community in light of their own rules - that no community of common interest be divided and that the political influence of a minority group not be diluted.

The area of North/Northeast Portland commonly referred to as "Albina" or the "Black community" has a common history. It is an interracial community that was formed out of racism - the refusal to sell or rent to Blacks in other areas of the City. It is a community that has unique problems: discrimination in education, unemployment, police harassment, redlining, neglect. It is a community that has been devastated by state sponsored removal of its residential areas for highways, hospitals and public buildings.

It is also a community that is starting to build - a community that is developing a sense of pride.

This community was the first in the City of Portland to develop a network of neighborhood organizations - community people together to effect the common good. In 1968 the Irvington, Sabin, Vernon, King, Eliot, Boise, Humboldt, Woodlawn Neighborhood

Associations became the nucleus of the Model Cities Citizens Advisory Board that was responsible for planning and operation of the Model Cities Program. When Model Cities was phased out, the board was incorporated as the Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods. The Piedmont and Concordia Neighborhood Associations joined in 1974 and 1976. The Coalition along with the Neighborhood Associations - continues to be the planning body for this community and is so recognized by the City of Portland.

The community is working together to rebuild its economic base, provide a more liveable environment, meet the social needs of the residents and develop community pride. The Union Avenue Redevelopment Program and the efforts of the Inner Northeast Economic Development Council to attract new business development are examples of these efforts.

In the last couple of years a new sense of community has developed - largely due to the work of the Black United Front. Some small battles have been won. A school boycott involving 85 percent of the district's Black students, and a recent march involving 1500 persons, is proof of the concern of Black people for their community. It is also proof that when allowed to come together for a common purpose, Black people can effect change.

The drawing of a new legislative district will either enhance the efforts of the Black community to organize, to define its own goals and to work together to attain those goals - or it will be a move to dilute that effort. There are those who fear allowing the Black community a strong voice in Salem - a voice that will address the deep economic and social problems facing the residents of the community, to deal with the discrimination that still prevades our State.

But if the legislators now in office are true to their own rules for reapportionment they will find that they must draw a district that will incorporate the Eliot, Boise, Humboldt, Piedmont, Woodlawn, Vernon and King neighborhoods and as much of the Irvington, Sabin and Concordia as is possible under the numerical restrictions.



A place called Brixton

By Fungai Kumbula

The scene could have been Watts, (Los Angeles); Harlem, (New York); Liberty City, (Miami); Wrightsville, (Georgia); Soweto, (South Africa) or any other such place. In fact, as the ruins lay smouldering after the two days of rioting, they were referring to it as "the new Harlem." The victims were the same; the system the same; the grievances the same; the "shock" the same and the response the same. The only thing different was the locale -- a section of London called Brixton.

It also started out basically the same way; a "minor" incident that sparked off the biggest riot and most extensive orgy of destruction England had seen since the Nazis were bombing London in WWII.

Brixton, a sprawling London ghetto made up mostly of West Indian Blacks, Indians, Pakistanis and other East Asians, finally exploded as if on cue. To a country that for so long has sought to hide its racial problems or sweep them under the rug, this was a most embarrassing occurrence. Anybody who knew the plight of these immigrants was surprised not so much that it happened but that it took this long. Like the other powder kegs throughout the USA, South Africa and other areas plagued by racial strife, Brixton was just waiting for the spark to ignite the fuse.

Unemployment statistics in this section of the capital of England range from an official low of 27-40% to a more realistic street figure of 67-80%. Compounding that is the endless clash between the police and the community. Incidents of charges of police brutality and harassment have escalated significantly over the past several months as Brixton has been targeted a "high crime" area and been assigned the largest contingent of

police than any other community in all of England. Adding insult to injury is the notorious "sus" laws which empower the police to stop and search anyone "who looks suspicious and might be seen as looking like he may commit a crime." Community leaders and residents in Brixton charge that this law almost always is invoked only in cases involving Black people and other minorities.

Police and official denials of these charges of racism notwithstanding, a look at the number of inmates in British penal institutions shows a disproportionate representation of minorities. Of course to us, whether here in Oregon or in South Africa or Namibia, this should come as no surprise, right? Who do you think the police blame for these riots? Why, "outside agitators", of course, isn't that the same thing that is mouthed every time Black people demonstrate, strike or riot?

Black people can never riot on their own; they need some "outside agitator" to tell them that they do not have a job, their homes are falling apart; they are getting short-changed. They need someone else to tell them that they too are entitled to freedom, justice and equality like every other citizen, right?

The rioting in Brixton underscored one thing; that Black people are suffering not just in this country but the world over - any place where they are not in control of their lives. On the other hand, it was encouraging that after the rioting in Brixton, a number of white citizens stood up to condemn police harassment and to point out some of the real reasons for the disturbances.

On the other hand, it was discouraging that these demonstrations took place on the backdrop of increasing attacks on

minorities by gangs of neo-Nazis some of whom are barely in their teens. The rioting also gave vent to louder calls for the forced repatriation of all non-white Britons. Doesn't that also sound disturbingly familiar?

When will people ever learn to stop looking for scapegoats for the failures of governments to rule and start involving all citizens in the search for solutions to these failures? Let's just suppose that the extremists succeeded in their plans to repatriate all non-white Britons, who will they blame next for the next failures? The Irish? The Scots? The Turks? The Aussies? It's been three decades since Hitler faded from the scene, but with the recent upsurge in the Klan, fascist and other racial "supremacist" activities, one wonders whether another Hitler is not about to rise. Maybe in some "more respectful" form?

One lesson that seems to have been missed is that while Hitler was the leader of the Nazis, he was by no means the whole movement himself. A lot of people were just as culpable for the excesses of Nazism as those who actually pulled the switches because they stood by and did nothing.

After Soweto, Watts, Liberty City, and now Brixton, we all certainly hope that personkind (it used to be called "mankind" before we were better enlightened) has learned to be more tolerant of those of us who do not necessarily look like us. If not, that hell that was supposed to be way out somewhere back of beyond may be right here amongst us before we could say, "I'm not guilty."

"For evil to triumph, it is enough that good men do nothing," Edmund Burke.

Denying justice to the poor

By Norman Hill
A. Phillip Randolph Institute

While President Reagan's budget cuts will eliminate a number of vital programs, few of the cuts will have more far-reaching consequences than the proposed elimination of the Legal Services Corporation.

Created in the 1960s in the context of the Great Society, and the War on Poverty, the Legal Services Corporation has been the most significant instrument the poor possess to insure adequate representation before the courts. A number of President Reagan's ultra-conservative advisers have suggested that the federally-funded legal aid program is a hotbed of radicalism and leftist politics. In truth, the program's 6,000 lawyers who serve 330 communities throughout the U.S., are involved most often in such critical issues as landlord-tenant relations, welfare rights, and civil rights.

Over the years millions of poor and working poor have benefited from this legal aid network. The poor have used the system to challenge improper dismissals from work, landlord harassment and building-code violations, and discrimination in employment.

An important instrument by which millions of Americans have indirectly benefited is the class action suit. In such suits, often brought by legal aid lawyers, judges do not simply resolve a single dispute but impose remedial orders which have the effect of improving the lives of large numbers of Americans.

The elimination of the legal aid program will result in fewer such suits being brought to the courts and in fewer direct benefits to workers and minorities.

In the distant past lawsuits were relatively straightforward matters and the legal system was turned to only as a matter of last resort. Today, with the increased complexity of government regulations and laws, access to informed legal advice and legal aid is an absolute necessity. If the poor are to challenge eviction orders, or learn how legally to withhold rent from a landlord who refused to supply heat or hot water, the advice of a lawyer is indispensable. Moreover, it is the poor seek to dissolve a marriage through divorce, such procedures are often so complicated and costly as to be beyond the means of low-income Americans.

The legal aid program has also intervened in behalf of unemployed workers denied welfare benefits, illegitimate children, and Social Security recipients who couldn't get cases reopened for government hearings. This list of issues hardly suggests that legal aid programs are being run by ultra-leftist extremists. Rather it suggests that the legal aid system is truly defending the interests of the poor.

Our system has prided itself on its basis in equal protection under the law. The unfortunate consequence of President Reagan's proposed elimination of the legal Services Corporation is that it will make the courts accessible only to those who are well off. Putting the poor outside the law will lead to greater bit-

terness and alienation. It will serve to exacerbate class and racial tensions.

Conservatives have claimed that well-intentioned programs designed to deal with poverty have often resulted in consequences more harmful than the benefits that have been provided.

What we will learn from the Reagan era is that the elimination of certain government programs may have consequences which are in the long-run more costly and damaging than the immediate budgetary savings that they bring.

Roy Stubbs

(Continued from page 1 col. 6)

Black Studies Department, George Rankins from the Urban League, and Grant High's Gospel Chorus. Everyone's glad that's happened."

Never one to be satisfied with what is accomplished, Stubbs is already starting on a master's degree in music and claims, "After I get Catlin Gabel's music program on its feet, I'd like to work on a Black concert choir in Portland. I guess I'd like to go back south and teach in a college someday, but I've got things to do here first."

Black editor Frederick Douglass published the first issue of his abolitionist newspaper, The North Star, in Rochester, N.Y., in 1847.



Bruce Broussard
Editor/Publisher

Portland Observer

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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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