

EDITORIAL/OPINION

Where were you the day they sabotaged MHRC?

Citizen involvement can move City Hall. This was evidenced this week by the restoration of the Office of Neighborhood Association's budget. Once City Hall was hit by an organized mass of citizens, the Council realized a mistake had been made in the calculations and the ONA budget was restored.

Not so with the Metropolitan Human Relations Commission's budget. What could be more important in this time of rising bigotry and financial stress? Yet, MHRC was gutted—and by its own liaison Commissioner. Seldom do we see a Commissioner destroy her own bureau, yet those who did find their way to City Hall Tuesday heard Commissioner Margaret Strachan justify the destruction of MHRC—the elimination of its programs and most of its staff—in order to make it stronger.

No rationale appeared for this amazing display of will—no reason, no evaluation, no charge of ineffectiveness, nothing.

If the public had bothered to go to City Hall they would have seen a phenomenon new to the annals of City history. But they did not. So MHRC went down to defeat—doomed to a slow death; minority and poor residents of the County left to the whims of bigotry or apathy.

As one citizen said, to dismantle MHRC with-

out public discussion and debate is unconscionable and obscene.

We must wonder where all of the organizations that benefit from MHRC's expertise and who have been happy for MHRC's support and help over the years were Tuesday. The Black United Front, the Urban League and ACLU were there but where were the other minority organizations—the NAACP, the Hispanic organizations, the American Jewish Federation, the Japanese American League, the Albina Ministerial Alliance?

Where were the so-called liberals—Schools for the City, the Alliance for Social Change, the Democratic Party, National Organization for Women, Women's Political Caucus, YWCA, National Council of Christians and Jews, Ecumenical Ministries, the church organizations? Where were the "not-so-liberals"—the City Club, the Chamber of Commerce? Where were the citizens?

If those organizations that supposedly stand for racial justice had been present and heard, perhaps one vote could have been changed.

When racial incidents occur, when swastikas appear, when the city's image, so important to the business community, is further tarnished, they will be looking for MHRC.



Letters to the Editor

Washington has tough task ahead

To the editor:

Mr. Washington's victory in the Chicago Mayor's race was outstanding and has set the tone for even more accomplishments for all races. He worked very well under adversity. No one will ever know just how much harm or good the media did during a seemingly bitter campaign on all fronts.

When it was said by Washington that we (Americans) are supposed to be like partisans with each other as a "melting pot." The melting pot story really does not do a good job of describing the experience of blacks in the 20th century. First of all blacks did not migrate to industrial centers from Eastern Europe, nor as foreigners seeking a host country. They came as citizens of the host country fleeing its oppression. Therein lies a big difference.

Mayor Washington has an incred-

ible task ahead of him, not only managing the city's business but carrying people forward to a better understanding. Hopefully the well-entrenched patronage system will die a peaceful death.

It is more important than ever that blacks take control of their ideals and not hesitate to make judgement on issues which affect their communities. It is also imperative to be wary of "political

Thanks for support

To the editor:

We wish to express our appreciation and thanks to those who joined us in speaking out against the racist behavior exhibited in Chicago around the mayoral race involving Congressman Harold Washington.

Yes, it is unusual for citizens in one state to become involved in a local campaign in another state. However, many of us were so angered by the accounts of the activities report-

friends" who will often waffle and go which ever way the wind is blowing. Mr. Washington had a lot of that in his primary campaign.

I wish him well and feel confident he will do a good job. He may have appeared like a tough, well-seasoned man—he is that—but there is a great deal of compassion written between the lines.

Fran Ariniello

ed in the media we felt moved to respond in a positive way. Thus, our contributions to the Washington campaign.

Our hopes were realized and we rejoice with our Democratic colleague on his victory.

We know we speak for all who participated, in wishing Mayor-elect Washington well.

Gladys McCoy

Legal lynchings: law and racism

by Manning Marable
"From The Grassroots"

The cutting edge of Reaganism is white racism.

Part of this statement can be amply illustrated by the unprecedented levels of barbarism and enforced austerity which the present administration projects in its recent budgetary proposals. But a more dynamic method of relating the recent historical rise of white supremacy and the retreat from the "Second Reconstruction" in the past decade with the presentations of the Reagan Administration is through a brief critique of the utility of the law itself as a weapon against black, brown, poor and progressive peoples' movements.

In some instances, civil rights lawyers themselves have been the victims of attacks. Several months ago, for example, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against Lennox Hinds, former head of the National Council of Black Lawyers (NCBL) in his efforts to halt disciplinary proceedings by the New Jersey Bar. Six years ago, during the trial of Assata Shakur (Joanne Chesimard), Hinds accused the criminal justice system of conducting "a legalized lynching" against Shakur. The Middlesex County Ethics Committee of the New Jersey bar sued Hinds for his spontaneous remarks. By an 8-0 vote, delivered by Chief Justice Warren Burger, the Court sided with the New Jersey Bar. This decision, along with other rulings, can be construed to be a warning to all activist-oriented attorneys who take a prominent and public role in defending progressive and political prisoners.

Inside the U.S. penitentiary system, civil rights advocates and lawyers are finding it increasingly difficult to have access to their clients. Officials at the Illinois Department of Corrections, for example, have blocked legal workers from consulting with political prisoners held in maximum security. Federal authorities have consistently interfered with attorneys of the Marion Prisoners

Rights Project in efforts to work with prisoners held at the Marion, Illinois federal penitentiary. In Congress, a complimentary attack against black and poor peoples' access to counsel took shape late last year, when Congress voted to restrict the Legal Services Corporation's activities. In passing a continuing appropriations resolution, Congress ordered Legal Services to halt funding programs to represent clients in class actions, participation in lobbying efforts, and legal aid to undocumented workers.

Two key pieces of civil rights legislation are now becoming more vulnerable as to their enforcement. Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Equal Employment Act of 1972 outlawed discrimination by businesses which employed more than 100 workers. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was given the power to review workers' grievances against management and to sue racist corporations. The EEOC's mandate was reinforced with the 1971 Supreme Court decision, *Griggs v. Duke Power Company*, which declared that any employment practices which "inadvertently" excluded minorities and women from jobs was a violation of Title VII. Under Nixon and Ford, however, the agency was only at best partially effective as a means to guarantee equal opportunity for blacks and Latinos in the labor force.

Under President Carter, the EEOC became more effective in promoting civil rights, to an extent. In 1978 Carter signed Executive Order 12067 which transferred all authority to coordinate equal employment opportunity laws, regulations and policies in Federal departments and agencies to the EEOC, thereby strengthening its mandate. But the Supreme Court escalated the conservative reaction during the mid- and late-1970s. In the 1976 *Washington v. Davis* decision, the high court declared that "discriminatory purpose" had to be established by litigants in

order to prove racial discrimination under the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment.

The Burger court found that showing a disproportionate impact is not sufficient to establish systemic racism. The next year, the *International Brotherhood of Teamsters v. U.S.* ruled lawful a seniority system that was negotiated which actually perpetuates pre-Title VII discriminatory hiring and promotion practices. These decisions, which predated the notorious *Bakke v. Regents of University of California*, set the legal stage for Reaganism after 1980.

Since Reagan's first weeks in office, the EEOC has been virtually hamstrung. Budget Director David Stockman quickly ordered staff reductions in 1981, and fiscal cuts have diminished the EEOC's real budget 8 percent below 1980 levels. Last year, Reaganites in both parties actually slashed the EEOC's budget by two million dollars more than what the president had originally requested. Edward Watkins, president of the National Council of EEOC Locals #216, AFL-CIO, and staff member Mark Solof have written recently that "through a combination of budget cuts, staff reductions, procedural changes and employee downgradings, the Administration has created a situation at the agency in which many employees have been unable to adequately take action on individual charges and larger patterns of discrimination in the workplace." The number of cases filed by EEOC declined 70 percent between fiscal 1981 and 1982. The length of time for EEOC to process a charge has almost doubled since 1980, from 5.5 months to 9 months. "In many instances," Watkins and Solof add, "charges have been dismissed or 'no caused' because they would prove too difficult or time-consuming to process. Overall, there has been a 6 percent rise in the number of charges dismissed since 1980, to 35 percent."

Salem Scene

by State Senator Ruth McFarland

One hundred thousand working men and women die every year from work-related illnesses. Almost 400,000 more men and women contract new job-related diseases every year. One half a million workers get ill or die each year because of their jobs.

The National Institute of Safety and Health (NIOSH) says we have 16,540 toxic substances in commercial use today. Between 1,500 and 2,000 of those substances are known carcinogens, cancer causing agents. An AFL-CIO report says over 34,000 substances currently in use in the workplace are toxic, 2,300 cancer causing. The EPA reports even higher numbers of chemical substances in the workplace—44,000—and no one has an accurate accounting of how many of those substances affect human beings.

There's a confusing and frightening uncertainty about toxic substances in the workplace. The situation is, in fact, extraordinarily dangerous for American workers.

That's why we acted in the Oregon State Senate on April 11 to pass Senate Bill 294, the "Right to Know" bill which compels labelling of toxic substances in the workplace.

Following are some excerpts from testimony we heard which led us to pass the toxic substances disclosure act:

"Some ten months ago a number of our members were faced with the results of an exposure to a toxic chemical. This incident occurred when the workers were instructed to use a 'carburetor cleaner' as a degreaser. They were not informed of any possible hazard, nor were they instructed to use any protective equipment. The results: six workers passed out and one went to the hospital. Those were the immediate results. The long term results we still do not know."

(Dick Edgington, Safety and Health Director, International Chemical Workers, Local 109, Portland.)

"We have cared for nine industrial painters who have evidenced 'toxic encephalopathy,' a form of brain damage, from exposure to sol-

vents. In many instances these workers had been provided with faulty or inadequate protective equipment or no protection at all. The painters were generally uninformed about what they were being exposed to, and therefore could not properly protect themselves.

Many times this type of brain injury is permanent. Fifty percent of the workers we have seen are currently unemployed and not retrainable at this point. All of the workers have been physically, socially and financially damaged by the experience. More than likely all of these problems could have been avoided had the workers known what they were being exposed to, and been able to demand appropriate protective equipment."

(Patricia de Garmo, ANP; William Mortor, MD; Douglas Linz, MD, Occupational Health Clinic, U. of O. Health Sciences University, Portland.)

"We are currently seeing a 39-year-old woman with three children, who was exposed to a variety of toxic substances without protection during her one-and-a-half years employment three years ago. This woman will die some time within the next two weeks to two months from occupational lung disease.

Initially this woman thought she had a cold and her doctor concurred, unaware of her occupational exposures. She continued to work

and her cold turned into what was thought to be bronchitis. Finally, when her breathing became quite difficult, an x-ray was obtained and the diagnosis of occupational lung disease made. It was still some time before the woman was able to identify the specific substances to which she had been exposed, and in part because of that delay she was denied workers' compensation."

(The source is the same as above.)

I have included only a few of the tragic stories we heard during testimony on this bill. To allow such human tragedy to continue when we have the means to stop it would be unconscionable.

Put simply, the bill provides for an educational program for employees handling toxic substances, makes information available to employees who request it and provides a personnel record form for employees on termination so they have a permanent record of their exposure.

There has been strong employer opposition to this bill in my district, especially by farmers. I believe the amended form of the bill takes care of many of the objections farmers had. But for those who still oppose the bill and disapprove of my vote for it, I have to say that I could simply vote no other way.

This bill is vital to the health and security of our workers. It needed to be passed.

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