

Death penalty divides churches

by Meg Roland

On Friday afternoon the City Club of Portland took a stand which recommended a 'No' vote on the upcoming death penalty issue. Sunday afternoon a small rally gathered at the South Park Blocks to demonstrate against reinstating the death penalty here in Oregon. But polls indicate that these citizens may represent a minority opinion among Oregon voters.

Ballot measures 6 and 7 are companion measures which, if both are passed, will result in the reinstatement of the death penalty in Oregon. The death penalty, abolished in Oregon in 1964, has been claimed by many to be discriminatory against Blacks and low-income people.

"No murderer has been executed in Oregon who has had enough money to hire his own lawyer," says Paul Wichman, coordinator for Oregonians Against the Death Penalty. Citing a national statistic Wichman points out that "If you are convicted of murder and happen to be black, you are five times more likely to be sentenced to death."

The Oregon Bill of Rights currently prohibits the use of "cruel and unusual punishment" in sentencing criminals. Measure 6 would amend the state constitution so that the execution of convicted murderers would be exempted from this guarantee against excessive punish-

ment. Measure 7 would require by law execution by lethal injection for anyone unanimously convicted of aggravated murder.

"I am very much opposed to these measures," says Ron Herndon, co-chair of the Black United Front. "The death penalty is the kind of punishment relegated to the poor and typically to people of color."

A study done in Florida in 1977 indicated that race was a factor in delivering a sentence of death to convicted murderers. A Black person who murdered a white person was far more likely to receive the death penalty than in the reverse situation.

Concerned Oregonians for Justice, however, support the death penalty initiative and believe that the facts deserve a closer look.

"Fifty percent of all murder victims are minorities even though they only make up 10% of the population," says Dedi Streich, chairperson for Concerned Oregonians for Justice. "In 95% of these cases the offender is of the same race as the victim."

"I am not saying that minorities are dangerous people," says Streich, "but rather that if we are really concerned about justice for minorities we should be looking for ways to reduce the number of murders." According to Streich, the murder rate in Texas was decreased by 33 1/2% the year the Texas death penalty law was confirmed by the

Supreme Court.

But the Religious Community for Equal Justice, opponents of the death penalty measures and organizers of Sunday's rally, cite a study by the National Academy of Science which states that there is no useful evidence on the deterrent effect of capital punishment.

"People are scared," says Myron Hall, spokesperson for the Religious Community for Equal Justice. "I understand that, but the death penalty will not make people any safer."

"To stop murder you need to provide a just society that provides equitable rights for all," says Hall.

Herndon asks, "What if a mistake is made? There can be no appeal after a person has been executed."

Measure 6 and 7 have divided the religious community in their opinions on the morality of imposing a death penalty. Oregon's Roman Catholic bishops recently released a pastoral letter to all Catholic parishes in the state denouncing the death penalty.

"The death penalty does not deter; it is discriminatory; it is fallible; it is costly; it is real; it is final; its ultimate victims are all of us," the statement said. "Our faith in God calls us to 'choose life, not death.'"

Clergy Concerned for Biblical Justice, a coalition of conservative Christian pastors, endorses the measures and cites a number of biblical passages to support their view.

"God mandates that man, organized collectively in government, exact death upon the murderer," the committee recently stated.

The Religious Community for Equal Justice, representing Protestant pastors, Catholic bishops and Jewish Rabbis has opposed the measure because it is, in their view, both discriminatory and morally wrong. They too base their views on biblical passages.

Mike Katz, member and past president of the Portland City Club, served on the committee appointed to research Measures 6 and 7 for Friday's City Club debate. Katz was originally in favor of the death penalty but the research done by his committee strongly convinced him to change his mind. "According to the Economist (a London-based economic journal), there are three main white-ruled countries that still execute people as part of their legal justice system: the Soviet Union, the Union of South Africa and, to my bitter shame, the United States of America," said Katz at the Friday discussion. "In South Africa last year there were 100 executions, 99 of which were Blacks. This gives you an idea why I feel so strongly that this is company we ought not to be keeping," said Katz in a later interview.

The City Club voted on Friday, by a substantial margin, to adopt the majority report of the research committee which recommended a 'No' vote on both Measure 6 and 7.

Rally urges Reagan defeat November 6th

by Lanita Duke

GRASSROOT NEWS, N.W. — Pioneer Courthouse Square glowed October 20th with the new Political Pioneers — the Rainbow Coalition — at a Rainbow rally to end Reaganism.

Speakers covering the entire spectrum of concerns and issues warned the 300-person crowd with a common theme, "End Reaganism!"

Herb Cawthorne, a City Council candidate, said Reagan does not share his vision of America. "Reagan does not believe every child deserves a quality education. They have cut the program for gifted children, those one or two years behind in reading and math, the handicap, vocation and technical education."

Cawthorne also urged a sister-city relationship with the city of Corinto, Nicaragua: "People in Portland care about the struggle you are trying to make toward democracy."

On the nuclear question Cawthorne said Portlanders need to make a local statement to fulfill their obligation to make the world safe and advocated a "Nuclear Free Zone."

Nita Brueggeman, Northwest secretary-treasurer for Amalgamated Clothing and Textile workers, predicted, "If Reagan is reelected the U.S. will invade Nicaragua." She added her visit to Nicaragua dispelled Reagan's contention that only one political party was allowed to thrive in Nicaragua. "Seven parties are on the ballot and the people participate and support their government."

Ramon Ramirez, director of



Despite heavy rains, an estimated 300 people came to protest the Reagan Administration Saturday in Pioneer Square. (Photo by Richard J. Brown)

Willamette Valley Immigration Project, complemented Brueggeman's analysis. "Reagan has a solution to the high unemployment of Hispanic youth — the Army. . . . This way he will have an armu force with cultural and language similarities with the people they are fighting."

Ronnie Herndon, co-chair of the Black United Front, called Reagan's national and foreign policy "a shakedown racket." "He goes to those who are defenseless and says, if you don't give it up I'm going to hurt you."

He said during the Reagan Administration a major redistribution of income had occurred. "Households with incomes under \$20,000 lost \$20 billion in benefits from Reagan's tax cuts. But those households over \$80,000 per year have gained \$30 billion."

Herndon questioned the so-called reduction in the unemployment rate by pointing out that the slight decrease for white workers occurred because they were forced to take lower paying jobs.

Internationally, he said Grenada represented a threat to the current

power structure in that region. "Grenada was the only country in the West Indies where they reduced unemployment from 40 to 12 percent. All children received free education and everyone had access to free health care. That was the message they did not want spread to millions of poor people on the islands."

Herndon advised the crowd to give Reagan a long rest "in the bunkhouse, maybe in the outhouse, but definitely not in the White House."

Salvadoran rebel addresses local group

On the eve of scheduled peace talks in El Salvador, a representative of the Salvadoran opposition met in Portland with leaders of the Oregon Rainbow Organizing Committee. Jose Escobar of the FDR-FMLN reported on human and civil rights abuses which have been institutionalized by the US-backed Salvadoran government.

According to Escobar, El Salvador's national Constitution bars Blacks from entering the country if they do not perform certain functions (i.e. politicians, athletes, etc.). Thus, Jesse Jackson was allowed entry into El Salvador where he delivered the FDR-FMLN's latest peace proposal to President Jose Napoleon Duarte because as a politician, his entry did not violate the Salvadoran Constitution.

The country's legal code also permits torture for the purpose of obtaining information, and imprisonment without trial for suspected anti-government sympathizers, Escobar said. The New York Times



Jose Escobar, seated center on couch, meets with members of the Portland Rainbow organizing committee. (Photo by Richard J. Brown)

has also reported the use of napalm against the civilian population. Escobar reminded the Rainbow supporters that the day the Reagan

Administration commits U.S. ground troops to defend "friendly" dictatorships in Central America, it will be Rainbow people — Blacks,

Latinos and low-income whites—who will be sent in the greatest number to fight an unwinnable battle in the name of U.S. interests.

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