Enemies, friends testify about Pomerleau's job

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For the most part, the crowd reacted favorably when anti-Pomerleau speakers blasted the Commissioner.

Opposing witnesses assailed Pomerleau's alleged illegal investigatory practices, reports of brutality in black neighborhoods and the small percentage of black officers on the force.

They cited a 1975 state Senate investigating committee heard testimony from witnesses who claimed Pomerleau had authorized illegal wiretaps on politicians, including Rep. Parren J. Mitchell, D-Md., and Judge Joseph Howard.

Witnesses favorable to the re-appointment praised the Commissioner's revitalization of the department and his willingness to cooperate with federal and state law enforcement agencies.

The committee also heard testimony relating to charges that police officers obtained credit information on private citizens.

George Beall, former U.S. Attorney for Maryland, was the first witness to praise Commissioner Pomerleau.

"The Commissioner was very cooperative with the federal prosecutors in Baltimore. When he came to this city in 1972 he asked the Justice Department to investigate his own department.

"He is a man of integrity, innovations and cooperative spirit. I endorse Commissioner Pomerleau with enthusiasm," Beale said.

Fourth District Councilman Michael Mitchell asked Beall, in light of the Senate committee report, whether the police department had violated the privacy of private citizens.

"There is invariably a delicate balance between investigating lawbreakers and encroachment of civil liberties. Invasions of privacy do happen but you have to sacrifice privacy to get information on law breakers," Beall said.

Deputy Police Commissioner Bishop Robinson, the highest ranking black law enforcement official in the state, testified in support of the re-appointment.

Recalling the discriminatory practices of the police department when he began as an officer 26 years ago, Robinson said "the doors began to open up (for blacks) when Pomerleau took over as commissioner."

Robinson also said the Commissioner has promoted policies to foster effective community relations in the city.

Mitchell, in asking Robinson about the percentage of black police force members, said "The total number of officers on the force exceeds 3,000. Yet there are only 460 blacks. That's roughly 14 percent. What is being done to make the numbers more equitable?"

Robinson replied: "I agree we need to increase our efforts in this area. But this is not a problem unique to Baltimore."

Attorney George Russell, who represented Pomerleau before the Senate investigation, blasted the Senate probe into questionable police tactics.

"It was an inquisition, not an investigation. I personally feel there is no credence at all to the findings of the investigation," he said.

Russell said he knows Pomerleau professionally and personally and is "proud to call him a friend.

"When the citizens of Baltimore pray at night they should thank God we have Commissioner Pomerleau!" These remarks from Russell brought applause from spectators.

Tom Bradley, president of the Baltimore Metropolitan Baltimore Council of AFL-CIO Unions, protested Pomerleau's re-appointment.

In a prepared statement, Bradley charged that detective with the Inspectional Service Division (ISD) was an undercoverman on the negotiating team during the July 1974 police strike.

Bradley maintained the detective was a chief agitator for strike action and, since all other police officers on the negotiating committee were disciplined by the department except this officer, the detective actions were approved by Pomerleau.

Bradley also said after the strike he met with Pomerleau who, according to the union president, threatened to send Bradley to federal prison.

Ernest Crofoot, president of AFSCME Local 67, blasted the commissioner, saying Pomerleau was "so arrogant he could violate the rights of union leaders.

"If Pomerleau remains I have great apprehension for the future of this city. His job is to fight crime, not fight citizens," Crofoot said.

Chester Wickwire, affiliated with the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance and Johns Hopkins University, stated Pomerleau protected inproper police surveillance of the NAACP and the Human Rights Commission.

"He (Pomerleau) investigated people who cared about making America strong. We don't want him to play judge, jury. God," Wickwire said.

The chairperson of Baltimore Welfare Rights, Ms. Annie Rogers, came to testify before the committee for "the people who can't be here."

"People in low income neighborhood have no police protection. We have been ignored. If something happen in a black neighborhood and we call the police, nothing happens," she said.

Ms. Rogers accused the police department of harassment, saying people "can't even sit on their front steps — they'll be locked up.

"People want to know why there aren't more black cops. Well, I'll tell you — most of our boys are in City Jail.

"You want to know how we feel about the good Commissioner, well we don't feel too good . . . and remember, we will vote this year," Ms. Rogers received applause for this statement.

Deputy State's Attorney Mary Ann Willin said Pomerleau is a man of intergrity who has been responsive to the needs of the state's attorney's office.

She urged the committee members to use logic when listening to the witnesses.

"If as much surveillance has gone on as has been reported, every member of his force would have had to been involved. You must also remember that many of these opponents have an ax to grind," she said.

Another resident favorable to Pomerleau's re-appointment was Allen Quille, owner of All-Right Parking Co., who said it was "too bad a man of his (Pomerleau's) character has to sit through this.

"If a black guy was commissioner you think it's bad now, you should see it then," he said.

That remark prompted an abrupt "shut up!" from a spectator in the gallery.

"A black commissioner would have to work twice as hard to prove himself," Quille said.

Rep. Parren Mitchell arrived to testify, apologizing for being detained on the floor of Congress.

Mitchell said he was not happy to testify. He said surveillance of his activities has had a "psychological impact."

"I've got to remember how I was harassed by the police force. I know of past instances and I don't know if they've stopped," he said.

Councilwoman Clarke asked him to clarify "psychological impact."

"If I were able to plot your day, wouldn't you feel something was wrong? This type of thing has happened to me," Mitchell said.

He related an incident in 1974 when two police cars followed him home from a meeting.

"I won't be able to convince you of these things and that is the tragedy. So many of you have never been in that surrealistic situation," he said.

Del. Kenneth Webster said he had no problem understanding Mitchell's meaning.

"Pomerleau has a basic disregard for citizens in general and black citizens in particular," he said. "He hasn't been held accountable to the whole city."

Several more witnesses, both pro and con, offered testimony before Councilwoman Clarke called a 10 minute recess before hearing Pomerleau.

After the break, it was Pomerleau's turn.

The Commissioner said he responded to the Senate committee report by consistently denying allegations of illegal activities.

The ISD never knowingly violated civil rights of any citizens, he said.

"It sounds like a great number of people are guilty of felonies. Any people with information on this are obligated under law to go through the grand jury system to bring it to a conclusion," he said.

Pomerleau responded to Bradley's statements.

"The union had betrayed the men and women of the police force. The strike had been declared illegal by the courts," the Commissioner said.

In response to Bradley's charge that he threatened to have the union president put in prison, Pomerleau said, "I don't put anybody in prison. I do investigate and go through the grand jury process.

"I told Bradley he would be investigated because he had crossed interstate lines. During that strike he had a catastrophe in this city," he said.

Pomerleau said after turmoil in 1968 "I vowed this city would never burn again."

He responded to Rep. Mitchell's statement by saying he and the congressman had always been on good terms.

"I recognize people have to do their thing. He was followed home because we received a threat against his life," Pomerleau said.

The commissioner had more information for Mitchell.

"I want him to know that (Judge Joseph) Howard and (George) Russell were never targets of ISD, never targets of the police department and never the focus of ISD surveillance," he said.

He admit that 120 people had been the target of surveillance activities. These people, he said, advocated violence, destruction of property and business.

Pomerleau said testimony indicated that all ISD activity had been directed at blacks.

He broke down the 120 people — 68 were white males, 16 were white females, 31 were non-white males and five were non-white females. Of those under observation, 52 were arrested on 288 criminal charges.

Pomerleau also admitted that dossiers on private citizens were drawn up but he ordered them destroyed in early 1974.

He said they were no longer needed.

"The street scene had de-escalated and the national issues had de-escalated. We simply had no need for the records and I ordered them destroyed," he said.

He pointed out that the destruction of the files occurred before the "litany" — the Senate investigation — in 1975.

Pomerleau also responded to statements of police brutality.

He said his department investigates cases against cops as they would for any citizen.

All brutality cases are heard by the Complaint Evaluation Board which includes representatives from the Human Relations Commission, the police department, the attorney general's office and the state's attorney's office.

Pomerleau said he has been actively recruiting blacks to the police force.

"I am doing everything I possibly can. I have been asked black officers at cadet graduation if they have a brother who would like to join the force."

Although he said he is trying to add more blacks to the police force, Pomerleau adamantly said he would not give a man a job based solely on his race.

"I will not put a black in a position because he is black. I will put the best man in the position, regardless of race," he said.

Finally, at 1:45 a.m., after eight long hours, there were no more questions and no more testimony.

Despite the expressed opposition from black leaders nad community people, Councilwoman Clarke said she expects Donald D. Pomerleau's re-appointment to Police Commissioner to pass the City Council.

Opposed

AFRO photos by Robin McGinty

Ms. Annie Rogers, chairperson, Baltimore Welfare Rights, "We have no police protection . . ."

Del. Kenneth Webster
". . . insult history to re-affirm . . ."

STANDING ROOM ONLY—Spectators and witnesses crowd the rear of the Council chamber for the hearing on the re-appointment of Police Commissioner Donald D. Pomerleau.

ERNEST CROFOOT—President, AFSCME Local 67". . . great apprehension for the city . . ."

COMMITTEE MEMBERS—Members of the Executive Nomination Committee of City Council listen to testimony at the Pomerleau hearing. Shown are Chairwoman Mary Pat Clarke, D-Second (L) and Fourth District Councilwoman Victorine Adams. First District Councilman Dominic "Mimi" DiPietro is shown at rear.

In favor

BISHOP ROBINSON—Deputy Police Commissioner ". . . unequivocal support . . ."

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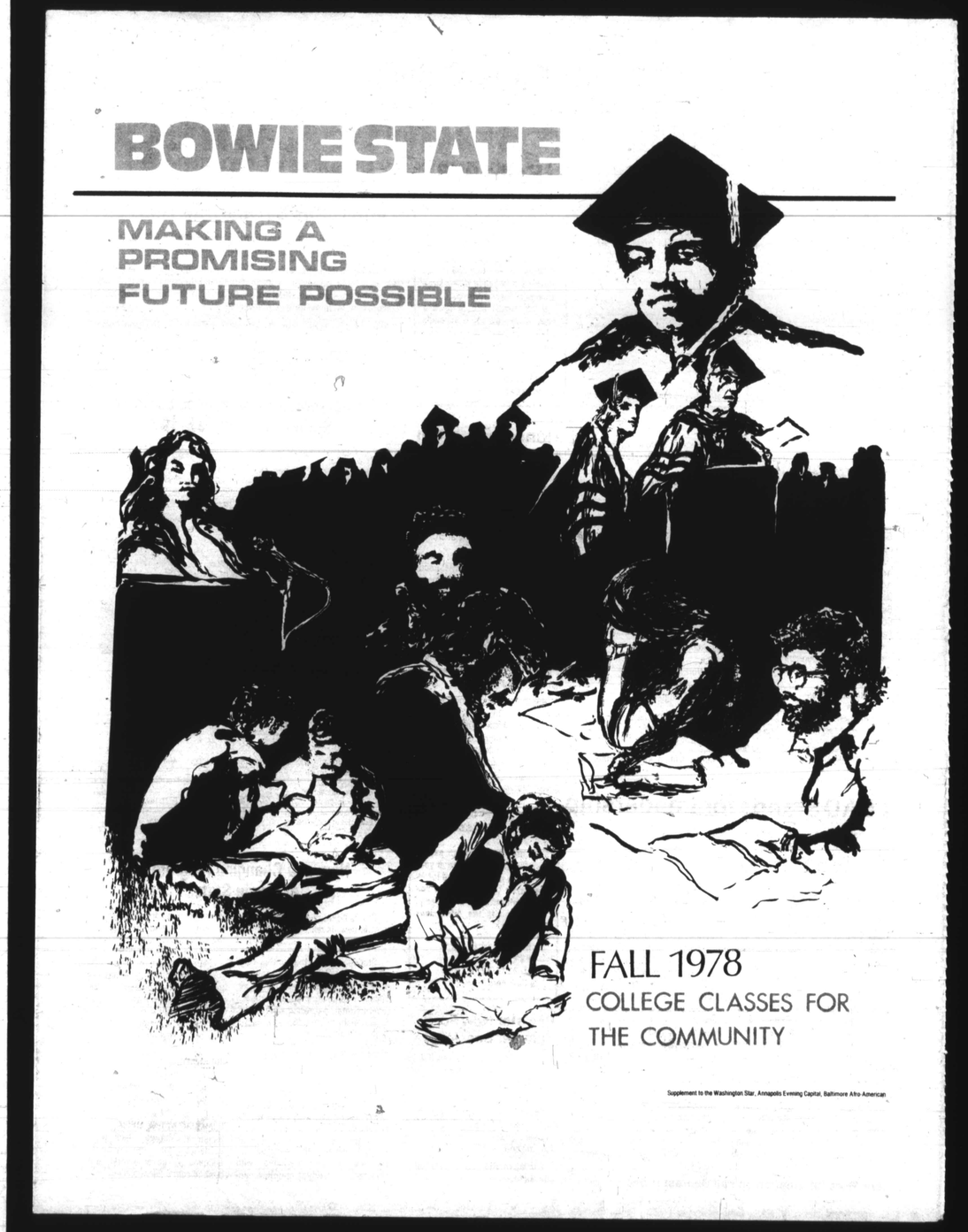
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