

monks who joined the walk in Kansas. Their shaven heads wrapped in soaked towels and their saffron robes bright as spring pollen, they ready their small hand drums for the day. From the time the group moves out until it stops, six or seven hours later, the monks will chant and beat their drums.

Non-Indians, walking to show their support for the Indians' cause, bring up the rear. While the walk is foremost an Indians' effort, these people have been welcomed into the group. Spiritual leaders on the walk always point out how people from all four sacred colors are on the walk. Those non-Indians who have been on the walk the longest help orientate newcomers so that they do not offend the Indians in their ignorance of Indian customs.

Ragamuffin caravan.

Sagging buses follow behind the walkers, carrying water for the hot afternoon hours and providing a rest for the tired and footsore. A caravan of cars and pickups also shakes down the shoulder. Their bumper stickers are in step with the day: "Support the Indian Athlete," "Free Skyhorse and Mohawk," "It's hard to be humble when you're Indian," "Marry an Indian—We need more of them," "AIM doesn't start problems—it exposes them."

The drums begin and the walk descends down the ramp onto the interstate. Moving through Indianapolis' asphalt knot of by-passes, the sound of the drums echoes off apartment complexes nearby. People line up along the right-of-way fence to watch. Some school children whoop like television Indians: the only ones they've likely seen until now. For a while an older black man walks along in silent support, no doubt remembering the marches of another battle. Even though the temperature is in the upper 80s, he wears a grey winter suit and keeps his hat on.

Cars slow down to rubberneck and more than once semi-trucks slam on their brakes to avoid overrunning them. Many drivers offer fists in support and honk their horns. Occasionally someone, almost always a white male, drives by waving his middle finger at the walkers and shouting curses. But such frenzied anger is the exception.

Except for Republican Gov. James Thompson of Illinois who first balked at granting the walk interstate passage, all states have cooperated by providing police escorts to direct traffic. Many of the mayors of towns on the route have given the walk keys to their cities and several states have issued proclamations recognizing the purpose of the walk.

But so far the walk's message has been confined to direct contact with local people and word of mouth. Walk spokesman Bill Thomas maintains that there is a press blackout on the walk.

There is evidence to support his claim. Though walkers camped in downtown St. Louis under the Gateway Arch for three days, the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, a large and respected daily, ran only one photo with a three-line caption on the day the walk left town. The *Indianapolis Star* had only a brief note on the walk and nothing on its purpose—the group was also there for three days. One report described the two ceremonial tepees brought on the walk as restrooms. Another called the walk's sacred pipe a war pipe.

The beat goes on.

Thoughts wandering across the landscape eventually return to the chant's cadence. Without their rhythm the miles would surely be longer. But this is not a march. Like the Walk itself, the beat is more complex than that, but also really quite simple. The more one tries to fall into pace, the more out of step one becomes. Stop trying and one achieves the unity of the

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THE ATTACK ON NATIVE RIGHTS HAS BEGUN

In high school history classes, usually after unfolding the saga of "How the West Was Won," the teacher may make a short addendum. It is explained that even though our ancestors may have given the Indians a raw deal there's not much we can do about it now. But "the Indian question" is not something confined to the past. Presently, there are four major and several lesser bills before the Congress that directly affect the future of all Indians left in this country.

The most far-reaching of these is House Resolution 9054, introduced by Rep. Cunningham (R-WA). Cloaked in language of "providing full citizenship and equality under the law to Native Americans," the bill would annul all remaining treaties between the U.S. and the Indian nations and eliminate all reservations. Land would be allotted to individual tribe members by the percentage of Indian blood.

Similar plans tried in the 1930s severely eroded Indian land holdings. Indians argue that it is precisely this collectively held land base that has enabled them to survive as a distinct culture.

While the Cunningham bill is not expected to pass, it serves to make other bills with many of the same effects seem like reasonable compromises. Each of these would also represent a significant redefinition of Indian rights and sovereignty.

In response to the developing battle over water rights, intensified by the western drought of the last few years, Rep. Lloyd Meeds (D-WA) is sponsoring a bill that would erase all former Indian water rights. Instead, water claims would have to be filed under an intricate set of "permissible uses."

One section would prohibit commer-

cial fishing by Indians, in response to recent court rulings entitling Indians in Washington state to half of that state's annual salmon catch. Commercial fishing is one of the few sources of outside income for Pacific Northwest tribes since their land holdings cannot provide total self-sufficiency. For the same reason, tribes relegated to lands away from major rivers have held onto treaty rights to rivers off reservation land. The Meeds bill would eliminate such off-reservation fishing.

Meeds has also introduced the "Omnibus Indian Jurisdiction Act" (H.R. 9950). Its most criticized section would limit tribal government authority to only its members and only while they are on reservation land. Highway right-of-ways running through reservations would not be considered part of that land. Any case involving a non-Indian, either as victim or aggressor, would be automatically out of tribal jurisdiction.

Indians say that non-Indians involved in crimes on reservations are seldom arrested or quickly freed when tried by non-Indians in towns off the reservation.

The bills have gathered support from some odd bedfellows. Some environmental groups, most notably the National Wildlife Federation, back the bills, reasoning that since non-Indians have been unable to preserve wild areas neither can Indians, and want the lands placed under federal protection. Corporate energy interests are also lined up behind the bill.

According to the Native American Solidarity Committee, it is these interests that are pushing the flurry of anti-Indian legislation. It is not surprising—an astounding 80% of American uranium is on reservations, along with immense coal deposits—a total of 30 percent of all the nation's known energy reserves.

But by far the most controversial bill the walkers hope to focus attention upon is H.R. 6869, the "Criminal Code Reform Act," an attempt to fully codify

all the nation's criminal laws, passed piecemeal over the last 200 years. The specific passages of concern to the Indians address the right to assemble. Mass demonstrations could be effectively halted by provisions against obstructing a government function by physical interference, and "failing to obey a public safety order" if a federal official perceives a gathering as a danger to persons or property.

Obviously the bill's effect would not be limited to only Indians. As one walker put it: "The only power people have is to be able to get together, to assemble. If they take that away and say, 'I'll tell you when you can assemble,' then we've lost our only power."

Indians also object to the inclusion of the Logan Act, an old but seldom used law, that makes it a crime for a U.S. citizen to communicate directly with a foreign government. Last fall Native representatives from this county and the rest of the Western Hemisphere spoke in Geneva, Switzerland, before the Non-governmental Organizations (NGO's) of the United Nations on government oppression against them. Indians fear that if left in the bill this act would be used to keep them from taking their case before the UN.

Put through the Senate in just five days, its sponsors had hoped that the bill would be passed by the House in toto. However, representatives are looking it over line by line.

The House Judiciary Subcommittee has already blown the whistle on the Logan Act and it will most likely be scratched in the final version.

The sifting will keep the bill from reaching the floor this session and that, of course, gives the Longest Walk and its supporters valuable time to get across their message. "The walk is not just for Indians, we're walking for all people," walk spokesman Bill Thomas said. "We're walking for our unborn children so they won't ever have to do this again."

—Nolan Hester

CITIES

Mayor's disinterest spells trouble for Rights Commission

In recent weeks, New York City's mayor, Ed Koch, has come under increasing criticism for failing to carry through his campaign promises "to appoint more blacks in my administration than the combined administrations of Wagner, Lindsay and Beame." As VILLAGE VOICE reporters Wayne Barrett and Andrew W. Cooper wrote on May 29, half of New York's population would feel like tourists at City Hall because of what black and Latin leaders call the betrayal of the essence of Koch's commitments.

Barret and Cooper found that none of Koch's personal staff or the chairmen or heads of commissions was black or Latin and that fewer than 15 percent of other high level appointees were. They concluded that Koch's appointments "form a white line, drawn tightly around a defensive mayor."

Rep. Shirley Chisholm (D-NY), an embarrased Koch supporter in last year's runoff election, admitted: "I get the feeling Ed has written off blacks and that he's saying 'I don't need you. There are just enough blacks in the administration to offset a charge of discrimination and I don't need any more.'"

Harlem Rep. Charles Rangel is quoted by Barrett and Cooper as saying that in the past there was always someone in the system to talk to, but no more. "The blacks Koch has," Rangel says, "can't find their way to Bedford-Stuyvesant. He prefers blacks from the State Department, Cleveland, or the Ford Foundation."

One part of this growing pattern of indifference or hostility to the needs of the majority of New York's working poor has been Koch's treatment of the Human Rights Commission, and of Patria Nieto Ortiz, whom he appointed without consultation with the concerned parties and then quickly fired after she threatened to embarrass his administration.

By Nora Lapin

NEW YORK

IN A CITY NOT KNOWN FOR EITHER the efficiency or social effectiveness of its municipal government, the New York City Human Rights Commission has long been an admirable exception. Under the leadership of the crusading Eleanor Holmes Norton, now head of the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the agency had garnered both an unusually committed staff and a deserved reputation as the country's model anti-discrimination unit.

But the local press has generally paid little attention to the Commission's determined efforts to redress employment and housing discrimination in New York City. And it wasn't until this past April when a brief furor erupted over Nieto's firing that the agency finally rated a few headlines and editorials. The turmoil has now died down and the newspapers have again lost interest. But the full story of Koch's attitude towards the mandated role of the Human Rights Commission as the city's primary enforcer of anti-discrimination law has never been reported.

In fact, Nieto's careless appointment and rapid dismissal as commissioner was only one of the many ways in which City Hall has recently undermined the agency's effectiveness.

Other destructive moves have included refusal to allow the agency to fill federally-funded professional job slots while making inappropriate but political executive appointments, plans to transfer a vital agency program to a less progressive city department and serious consideration

Considering Mayor Koch's disregard for minority rights, it is hardly surprising that his appointment of Patria Nieto Ortiz turned out to be disastrous.

of the merger of the commission with the relatively weak State Division of Human Rights.

Questioned Commission's existence.

During the 1977 mayoral campaign, both Koch and Mario Cuomo questioned whether the Commission should continue to exist or be merged into the State Division of Human Rights, an act tantamount to abolition.

An effective anti-discrimination agency is considered incompatible with the new administration's approach towards big business. Koch's assertive defense of the rights of homosexuals has endowed him with credibility among many civil libertarians, but gay rights in New York are basically a white, middle-class and relatively kosher issue. In fact, Koch remains entrenched in his longtime opposition to affirmative action for minorities and women, a position reflected in his congressional record, continual quarrels with Harlem Rep. Rangel and a heated debate with Norton on the subject at a Human Rights Commission hearing in 1974.

Prominent minority leaders say that when Koch took office, it was painfully apparent that he intended to relegate the Commission to as non-threatening and diffuse a role as possible, ignoring its real enforcement responsibility.

Hilton Clark, an equal opportunity consultant and one of the handful of minority participants in the Commission chair selection process, says that qualified candidates were discouraged from wanting the job by both the still real possibility that the agency would be phased out and the limitations implicit in heading it—if it did continue to exist—in an administration so obviously unsupportive of its primary mandate.

Disastrous appointment.

Considering Koch's disregard for minority rights, it is hardly surprising that City Hall's appointment of Nieto Ortiz as Commissioner turned out to be a disastrous. Although some liberal New York columnists have argued that she was fired for militancy rather than incompetency, it was the circumstances surrounding her selection—in which minority opinion was ignored every step of the way—that spelled her doom.

In fact, Nieto Ortiz was not very militant. While she did sometimes speak strongly about enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, she also took an openly conciliatory approach to business, announcing her intentions to seek financial support from the private sector and resurrecting the old and long discredited concept of "technical assistance" to educate corporations to their equal employment responsibilities—on the assumption that ignorance rather than recalcitrance is at the root of discrimination.

This tendency to be soft on business, along with her lack of civil rights experience—her previous job at the Equitable Life Insurance Company had been in the



New York's mayor, Edward Koch.

Ken Firestone

corporate responsibility and law departments—and the fact that she was not known in the Puerto Rican community led the two minority members present at the selection committee meeting to cast the only votes against her. "Her name came to us from City Hall after we had already recommended a number of better candidates to them," said Clark. "I wonder what happened to those people?"

According to a Puerto Rican community leader, Nieto Ortiz was submitted for approval to the 24 Hispanic members of the administration's search teams only after the Mayor had offered her the job. This procedure violated the understood relationship between City Hall and that group, which expected to pass on Hispanic candidates for high level appointments. Obviously, Koch thought that he had found a winning combination in a female Hispanic lawyer with strong ties to the corporate sector and he was determined to appoint her.

Did not grow into job.

Nieto Ortiz can hardly be faulted for accepting the job, an unprecedented opportunity for a 30-year-old woman with only four years of legal experience. But, unfortunately, she did not grow into it. Instead, during her short six-week tenure, she alienated not only the predictably wary administration, but sympathetic white and minority community leaders, longtime agency commissioners and virtually the entire staff.

In a letter to Koch urging her ouster, the staff explained: "The Commission has spent many years building up a credible record as a professional, competent and sensitive enforcement agency in the field of civil rights, and developing respected and open channels of communication with all the diverse groups that comprise this city. This position is further eroded with each new action taken by Commissioner Nieto Ortiz."

Significantly, although minority leaders have vigorously protested their minimal representation in the administration,

they did not come to Nieto Ortiz's defense when she was ultimately dismissed because of her letters threatening to subpoena city commissioners as well as the Mayor himself to obtain equal employment data.

Since Nieto Ortiz's departure in mid-April City Hall has continued to run the Commission into the ground. Acting chairman Frank Mangino is an Italian-American from Queens, whom an elected official with close ties to the Commission described as a "two-bit politician who can't speak a simple sentence, let alone enforce anti-discrimination law."

Other people with good connections to City Hall but no civil rights experience have been installed in various front-office positions. One, the public information director, was quickly let go when he publicly admitted that campaign work had gotten him his new job.

Meanwhile, the Commission is seriously understaffed because City Hall has not given its approval to the filling of a number of professional positions, even though the salaries would come from federal funds and qualified candidates have already been found for the jobs.

In addition, the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, which has managed to foster a delicate racial balance in crucial communities throughout the city, seems about to be headed out of the Commission to the more conservative Housing Preservation and Development Administration, which is likely to turn it into a "Beautify your neighborhood" operation.

The handwriting seems to be on the wall for the agency and demoralized staff members are polishing up their resumes. "Now that Norton has gone to Washington and Koch has come back to New York," said a knowledgeable official, "no one with any clout at City Hall cares about the existence of the Human Rights Commission."

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