

point of view

ROLDO BARTIMOLE

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Will it be Smith?



Photo by Amy Boyer.

The disputed meeting of members of city council to deal with racial divisions within the city reveals the first attempt to develop a new leadership in the post-Forbes era.

And the first strike - though there are denials that the meeting has anything to do with politics - was made by those vying against Forbes' choice for council head - Helen Smith. More later.

The concept of shared leadership appears to be the symbolic message in the meeting of a racially and politically mixed majority of council at the meeting called by Earle Turner, seen as Smith's competitor for the job.

Coming out of an era of dictatorial and abusive leadership under Forbes, there are some members who believe

that they can entice enough members who are tired of such one-person rule, to form a new majority and elect a president who will share power.

That, of course, remains to be seen, both as to electing and sharing.

But the call of the meeting by Turner opened the maneuvering to a first public look at potential line-ups of future leadership.

That's not to say that those who attended back Turner. Some came simply because they personally need support under the pressure of racial problems in their wards.

The meeting, which Forbes tried to head off privately, and then publicly, drew 11 members and two more phoned in that they couldn't make it but wanted to come.

WILL IT BE SMITH ? (FROM PAGE 1)

Jeff Johnson was ill and Jay Westbrook was on vacation but with them Turner drew a majority of members.

And the fact that the members decided to meet again suggests that Forbes' desires were not being followed even by those who are generally supportive.

Some - Preston Terry and Roosevelt Coats among them, are exhibiting a rare independence.

Forbes had tried to get the meeting canceled.

"I really wish you would not have the meeting," he told Turner from the podium at council, having failed to change him privately. "The racial issue is a volatile issue and we have in place mechanisms to deal with the problems."

And he went on to suggest that he understands the move by Turner represented a challenge to his leadership and a reflection of his lame duck position.

"The letter (sent by Turner to all members) was not addressed to members of the community development committee (which Turner heads) but addressed to all members of council," he said.

"Now you must have order here in the body. You absolutely must have order in the body. The president of council calls meetings to order. Nobody else can... If you don't follow that rule, you can have chaos. And I will insist that the rule stay in effect... That is my objection. I don't think it is wise... I wish you would call the meeting off," Forbes concluded.

Turner had been conciliatory in his remarks just before those of Forbes.

"You know what, Mr. chairman, you can chair that meeting tomorrow since it's supposed to be a whole body. You can have it. All I want (are) the problems of this town solved racially," said Turner.

Forbes has depended upon keeping council divided black and white and this too was a threat.

As of this writing Forbes has made no other move but if the council is going to continue to meet without his involvement, he has a problem.

Turner came out of the dispute better than expected. Had the meeting become in any way divisive, he could have been badly hurt.

It almost seemed as though he were determined to out-manuever himself.

At the start of the meeting, which went amicably and constructively, Turner relinquished control to Fannie Lewis, tossing her control of the meeting without any prior indication he was going to do that.

The meeting went well but some winced because Lewis isn't always known for calm and logical reflection.

Possibly Turner took some initiative away from Smith and Forbes, her mentor in this race. But luck more than anything seemed to keep him from stumbling.

The existence of a shared-power council, replacing the tight-control of the present leadership, offers room for participation to those who have been denied the ability to help in decision-making.

But little is being said about to what purpose that sharing will serve.

A crucial test of that will be coming up soon with the tax abatement request from our old greedy bunch, the Jacobses.

Richard Jacobs and Forbes have become very close buddies with Forbes delivering city properties, tax abatements (in the area of \$250-million with the latest request) and other goodies.

To continue their good fortune, the Jacobses and Forbes will want a friendly and competent (for their chores) figure at the helm of council.

Smith has already done favors for Richard's son, Jeff Jacobs, the developer-politician. And Jeff Jacobs has been returning the favors with fund-raising.

Although most of the anti-abatement people are pro-Turner, none seem to be calling for an anti-abatement pledge as part of the price for support.

Indeed, with Turner or Smith there's likely to be little change in how business is done, other than cosmetic changes.

If there is to be any real change, now would be the time to insure such a possibility because after the election, which may come sooner than anyone thinks, it will be too late.

There may be one thankful development, however, and that is that both sides are integrated and the election of a new council president, it appears, will avoid a racial split.

We have to be thankful for even small favors.

DID 'SNAKE' STRIKE?

The Pee Dee in the past several weeks has been involved in two major news stories, neither of which had much - in one case none - coverage in the Pee Dee.

One case, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) against the Newhouse family for tax evasion, was completed and now stands before the judge. The IRS charged that the Newhouses, after the death of founder, S. I. Newhouse in 1979, owed about \$1-billion including penalties. But the Newhouses paid on only \$181.9-million.

In testimony by expert witnesses, according to a report in the Nation magazine, the value should have been even higher than the original IRS charge, at least \$2.2-billion. The family holdings, including the Pee Dee, now are valued at \$5-billion. A decision should be coming soon.



In the other story, nary a scarp of it in the Pee Dee, Ken Myers in the Arkon Beacon Journal quotes from FBI documents released from its files of Jackie Presser's informant material.

The information has Presser alledging that Alex "The Snake" Machaskee, then an assistant to Pee Dee publisher Tom Vail and since promoted to general manager by Vail, tried to work a deal to have the Teamsters give the already troubled Cleveland Press more labor problems.

While the charges lack credibility and have been called a "total fabrication" by Machaskee, the accusations hardly do Machaskee much good at the Pee Dee or in the community.

He's already earned the nickname "the Snake" among reporters and that reputation doesn't need further enhancement. But the charges likely will add to that perception. It can't help Machaskee as he deals with people in the community, or as he attempts to replace Vail who will be retiring soon if the 65 and out policy at the Pee Dee remains.

There's likely to be skepticism in dealings with him in the community at large and the charges can't help.

The Teamsters back in early 1982, just before the Press went under, were considered to be in a pivotal position in the fight to breath new life into the dying Cleveland Press.

There was hope expressed at that time that the Teamsters would strike the Pee Dee, thus giving the Press an opportunity to continue publishing, gain advertising, revenue and readership. That never happened.

The new charges in Presser's FBI files simply raise more questions about the involvement of the Pee Dee in the death of the newspaper, beyond the payment of the \$22-million by the Pee Dee to Joe Cole, the Press owner.

Meanwhile, another Cole office building rises adjacent to the Press' former home, proving once again that the purchase of the afternoon newspaper proves to be one of the best real estate deals in town.

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In this corner...

Finance director Charles Brown's official city hall duties don't include refereeing.

But it's lucky for city hall tranquility that he took on a volunteer job.

Brown came between councilwoman Fannie Lewis and Laborer's union boss Paul Wells in the halls of city hall in a tiff that almost degenerated into physical battle.

Lewis is known to be protective to the nth degree of her ward and anyone interfering. One is qualified for that distinction merely by being in her ward without her permission. That's like being without a passport in a foreign nation.

And Wells wasn't just cavorting in Lewis' territory - he was "interfering" into the affairs of Lexington Village, the relatively new housing project, a pet of Lewis'.

Wells, believing his union workers should be serving to collect garbage from Lexington Village, doesn't like the idea of private haulers doing the job.

A city official says that private housing complexes such as Lexington are handled by private collectors, not the city. About five years ago, because of personnel cutbacks resulting from financial difficulties of the city, city waste collectors now don't even bid, as they once did, against private haulers.

Fannie says that Wells used language that riled her.

Brown and an aide to Lewis had all they could do to keep the two separated after a recent council meeting. The yelling could be heard throughout the second floor of city hall.

Wells says he's written to council president George Forbes about the collection at Lexington.

Messing in Lewis' ward is like trying to put your hand in a buzz saw to stop it.

Good luck, Paul.

point of view

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so long as those who are
now possible remain possible.*

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