

# Attorney general supports Orange police chief

## Legal papers filed to combat mayor in job harassment suit

By KEVIN DILWORTH

Attorney General Cary Edwards has filed a court brief in support of a political interference and harassment lawsuit Orange Police Chief Robert Sorge has filed against the mayor and police director.

Under state law, Edwards maintains, "a chief of police must function as the executive of the police department" and municipalities cannot appoint subordinate police officers from the ranks and make them "superior to the chief."

Mayor Robert L. Brown appointed Lt. Charles Cobbert as police director on July 5, four days after assuming office, and the city council approved the action.

Edwards' brief says "it is incompatible with the office (of a police chief) for a police officer to assume the duties of an appropriate authority."

Sorge two months ago sued Brown and Cobbert, contending he has been made the object of their "political interference in the workplace and political harassment" ever since Cobbert became his boss.

Edwards, in the court brief prepared by Carl A. Wyhopen, a deputy attorney general, said his "interest in this litigation lies in the statewide significance of some issues which have been raised regarding the appropriate interpretation of the (state) statute which controls the organization of every municipal police department in the state."

The brief, submitted to Superior Court Judge Paul B. Thompson in Newark, notes the stage now is set to formally debate how municipalities derive

the authority to organize a police department.

Brown and Councilwoman Louise Corvino accused the attorney general of playing politics ever since he requested that the court allow him to mediate the dispute and get involved in an issue they said does not concern him.

Edwards' time would be better spent addressing how he can improve law enforcement in the state, the Orange officials maintained.

Brown and Corvino added, the attorney general should find the time to respond to a year-old Orange request to help curb drug trafficking and prostitution in the city and to investigate reports of criminal activities being committed by some members of the police department.

Under state law, Edwards reiterated, "a chief of police must function as the executive of the police department. Unlike under the (1981) predecessor to this statute, there can be no administrative officer, superior to the chief, who is responsible for the operation of the police department."

Under the Brown administration, Sorge's lawsuit says, Brown and Cobbert have sought to reduce Sorge's salary, assigned police officers to the detective bureau, appointed an acting chief when he was on vacation, forced him to wear a uniform while on duty,

moved his office, fired his secretary and screened his mail.

The issues raised by Sorge are fundamental to the 1981 law, Edwards' brief reasons, because that legislation "creates statutory offices with defined duties and responsibilities."

Prior to the amendment, the brief continues, state law left police functions to the control of municipal ordinances.

"The attorney general's comments are without any substance," maintained Brown. "Also, this (brief) is just a prime example of a political alignment between the attorney general and the chiefs of police" throughout the state.

Corvino said, "I'm very surprised that the attorney general would give any opinion in support of Chief Sorge when he has not even bothered to answer a Sept. 15, 1987, letter I sent him."

"That unanswered letter outlined how Chief Sorge allowed vindictiveness and cronyism to exist in a department plagued by poor manpower deployment, low morale and accusations of some officers involved in questionable activities," Corvino said, "and in a city where little was done to stem the rising tide of criminal activities."

Corvino said some of the concerns she asked Edwards to look into 14 months ago "have come to pass, includ-

ing the fact that some Orange police officers have been convicted of drug use, extortion and possessing stolen credit cards."

John R. Hagerty, a spokesman for the Attorney General's Office, said Corvino's 1987 letter does not have anything to do with Edwards filing a friend-of-the-court brief in support of Sorge.

Brown disagreed. He maintained that Edwards' stance, if upheld, would usurp his appointing authority rights and those of all mayors. This kind of action should be remembered and frowned upon by all the mayors."

Edwards' interpretation of the law, said one law enforcement official who asked not to be identified, could, if upheld in Superior Court, jeopardize the jobs of police directors in Orange and municipalities such as Camden, Elizabeth, Irvington, Newark, Jersey City and Paterson.

The attorney general's thoughts on the matter, the official added, also could "establish and perpetuate a monarchy and dynasty" among police chiefs and make them answerable to no one.

Said Mayor Brown, "I'm certain that the Office of the Attorney General has a great many responsibilities beyond supervising the Orange Police Department. That's my job, and I accept it willingly and gladly. I'm not the least bit interested in running his office. I wish he felt the same way."

On Sept. 20, Judge Thompson imposed restraints upon Orange, blocking Brown and Cobbert from interfering with Sorge's supervision of the 85-member police department's day-to-day operations while the litigation continues.



Msgr. John Byrne stands in front of St. Peter's Church

# Parish in Belleville celebrates 150 years

By JERRY THOMAS

Members of St. Peter's Parish in Belleville, the third oldest in the Archdiocese of Newark, began celebrating its 150th anniversary last night with song and dance.

Members gathered at the Atrium West in West Orange to begin the first phase of the celebration with a social event led by the Most Rev. John M. Smith, vicar general and auxiliary bishop of the Newark Archdiocese, said Msgr. John M. Byrne, pastor of St. Peter's.

The second phase of the celebration, a religious ceremony, will take place on Dec. 4 with an 11 a.m. Mass to be led by Archbishop Theodore McCarrick.

Byrne said members will celebrate founder's day Dec. 4, because it is the Sunday nearest the actual anniversary, Dec. 3, 1838.

On that date, Byrne said, members gathered in a frame house at Bridge and William streets for the first Mass. The house, he noted, is still standing.

"We didn't have a bishop," Byrne said. "Archbishop John Dubois, the third bishop of New York, came over to celebrate the Mass."

A new church was constructed in 1913, Byrne said. It stood until 1976 when it was gutted by fire. Two years later, he said, it was rebuilt and rededicated.

On Dec. 4, the congregation will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the church building.

"The church served originally the needs of the Irish residents," Byrne said. "But it has opened the doors to all multi-ethnic, second and fourth generation Americans and new Hispanic immigrants. We now have 2,500 families."

Byrne said the size of the parish has stayed pretty much the same over the past 20 years.

"It is basically what it was," he said. "Belleville has been pretty stable."

The stability has made this anniversary a special occasion for new and old members and the community.

"I sense a great feeling of pride in our traditions, especially in a world in which so much changes so rapidly," said Byrne, who became pastor in 1978. "St. Peter's has been a stronghold of faith and service, not only to our Catholic population."

# Newark exec attends education conference

By ANGELA STEWART

Newark Executive Superintendent of Schools Eugene Campbell had an opportunity to compare notes with colleagues from 27 states during a three-day convention that focused on strengthening educational ties between public schools and the community.

The convention in Leesburg, Va., titled "Strengthening the Collaboration for Educational Progress," was sponsored by the National Urban League's Educational Initiative Program and attracted superintendents and Urban League officials from more than 100 communities.

Stephanie Robinson of Montclair, who heads the Urban League's educational program, said the conference was a follow-up to a meeting held two years ago in Virginia. At that time, she said, the superintendents and Urban League affiliates "signed a memorandum of cooperation" to work together on implementing community-based programs designed to improve the achievement of black students.

"This meeting was held to look at what progress has been made and to expand and extend that collaboration," she said.

Among the topics discussed were parent education programs, guidance and mentoring programs and the composition of local school boards.

The convention opened with an address by David Kearns, president and chief executive officer of the Xerox Corp., and ended with closing remarks yesterday by Richard Green, chancellor of the New York City public school system.

Kearns is the immediate past president of the Urban League's board of trustees.

Campbell told his colleagues that the most significant partnership the Newark school district has embarked on in the last two years is the Newark Education Council.

Formed last year, the council is a broad-based group of parents, teachers, state education officials and members of Newark's education, business, religious and grassroots communities.

Its aim is to improve the Newark school system

through a collaborative effort which encompasses all who have a stake in the quality of Newark's educational system.

The council was the brainchild of the Newark Collaboration Group, the organization which is spearheading the city's revitalization efforts.

Campbell said he had an opportunity to share the inner workings of the council with his colleagues and hear about the partnerships they are forming in their communities.

"We don't get a chance to talk with other superintendents often," he said in a telephone interview from Virginia. "This is just excellent."

Lorna K. Johnson, executive director of the Urban League of Essex County, who also attended the convention, said the discussions spotlighted a number of school partnerships which could be used in Newark.

She commended Campbell for taking the time to attend.

"His interest and willingness to be here shows he is open to our suggestions," she said.

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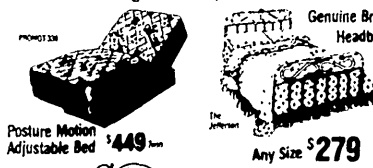


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