

Confronting a Police Crackdown

In 1901, Seattle Police Chief William Meredith was forced out of office after several contentious city council hearings in which People's Theater owner John Considine testified he had given one of Meredith's officers five hundred dollars for supposedly "protecting" the box theater. The council's investigating committee reported that the police chief had been paid by numerous operators for "the privilege of being permitted to conduct bunco and 'sure thing' games in the city undisturbed."¹

Similarly, once MacIver Wells had revealed the gay payoffs, Police Chief Frank Ramon's remaining time on the force would be limited. At first, Mayor Dorm Braman responded by appointing a citizen's investigating committee, which reported in April 1967 that it was unable to confirm the existence of any such payoff system. No one wanted to talk without some benefit of protection. The suspicions and accusations continued to grow, and department morale plunged even more when an outside organization of police chiefs recommended changes in the command structure that no one seemed to like. Although the accusations never touched Ramon himself, eventually it would be reported that Braman had wanted to fire the chief, but each time a crisis of bad publicity intervened, and the mayor did not want to seem to be responding to community criticism. In March 1969, though, Braman resigned as mayor to take a federal post at the Department of Transportation. By autumn, following reports of an attempt to bribe an assistant police chief, the new interim mayor, Floyd Miller, had no such reservations. Ramon was out.²

Choosing a replacement became something of a circus when, in early 1970, the U.S. Attorney's office began pursuing indictments, and seventeen witnesses testified that more than sixty-five officers had accepted bribes over the past three decades. No one was sure which officers were likely to be charged. Ramon's top assistant, M. E. "Buzz" Cook, served briefly as chief but was eventually accused of perjury for telling the federal grand jury he had no knowledge of the payoffs. Another officer, Frank Moore, became acting chief, only to step aside because of illness and then to be demoted when he refused to answer the grand jury's questions. Then came two loans from the Oakland police force, Charles Gain and Edward Toothman, the latter of whom set off a small controversy when he supposedly told

a *Seattle Times* reporter that the department was “rotten.” All four passed through the position during the course of one year.³

During that time, the city also acquired a new mayor, Wes Uhlman, a kind of Kennedy Democrat—articulate, attractive, and ambitious. Uhlman had been voted into the state house of representatives at the age of twenty-three as a law student from a district that included the expo grounds around the University of Washington. He had stayed there for a decade and now, in his mid-thirties, was promising to be an urban activist. To get elected, he had smoothly maneuvered among Seattle’s sometimes fractious neighborhoods, creating a coalition of Scandinavian fishermen, union workers, educators, and feminists.

For a while, he found himself virtually running the police department as de facto chief. Uhlman was relieved when in late 1970 he finally found the man he thought could replace Ramon—thirty-eight-year-old George Tielsch, who at that time was commanding the police force in Garden Grove, a mostly white middle-class Orange County suburb next to Disneyland. The day of his appointment, Tielsch said he believed in “strong discipline” in police departments, exactly what Uhlman thought he was looking for. A *Post-Intelligencer* reporter later noted that whenever Tielsch appeared on television, he looked “stern, cold and steely-eyed.”⁴

By the time Tielsch took over in Seattle, many cops had begun to resent the constant string of bad publicity about the department. They argued they were not to blame for the payoff scandal. Politicians, they said, had been wishy-washy and not forceful enough to clean up Seattle. The schizophrenic compromise that tolerated a red-light district while proclaiming Cotterill-style virtues had tempted them into collecting bribes, they said. Tielsch offered the city and Mayor Uhlman a simple no-nonsense promise: no tolerance for anything the law defined as vice.

At first it looked like a refreshing change. After Tielsch had been in office for only one month, the *Seattle Times* described him as having the “dapper image of a modern corporate executive” who was working hard to “bring together the pieces of a shattered department.” But a second story published the same day revealed what would ultimately become Tielsch’s destruction. Speaking about gambling, the police chief declared his strong opposition to a plan by then state attorney general Slade Gorton to legalize certain types of petty betting, such as ten-cent bingo for churches and charities. “You would set up the tolerance policy all over again,” Tielsch declared. “Who would run such games? You would have to rent the equipment and games. Most people at churches can’t act as pit bosses; they don’t know how to handle a crap table or deal blackjack. So organized criminal activity could reoccur. And if that comes in, anybody in the Police Department that might be susceptible to persuasion from the criminal element would have that opportunity present again.”⁵

It was a moral domino theory, in which ten-cent bingo at a neighborhood church led to organized crime penetration into the police force.

Tielsch quickly became popular with rank-and-file officers by defending the

Confronting a Police Crackdown / 195



Seattle Police Chief George Tielsch launched a vice crackdown in the early 1970s that included what lesbian and gay activists condemned as severe harassment. (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer* Collection, Museum of History and Industry, Seattle)

frayed department from its many critics. He denounced the county grand jury investigating the payoffs as a “Spanish inquisition” and pilloried the press for its continuing probes. Wrongdoers on the force, he argued, had been few and were long since fired. He instituted new rules. Cops were not to accept even a cup of coffee for free lest the gesture be misinterpreted. He promoted advanced training programs where he not only lay in the mud at the firing ranges with trainees, but also insisted that his assistants do the same.

A year after his appointment, the *Post-Intelligencer* headlined that Tielsch had become a “hero in the eyes of most policemen.” But, the same article noted, “other words which have been used to describe him during his first year on the job here have included ‘dictatorial,’ ‘short-tempered,’ ‘humorless,’ ‘peevish,’ ‘ill-advised,’ ‘ill-equipped for the job,’ ‘ready to quit,’ [and] ‘likely to be fired.’” A reporter jokingly asked the chief who his public relations man was and Tielsch supposedly quipped, “Hitler.”⁶

By April 1972, Tielsch began to publicly extend his moral domino theory to sex. When a King County Superior Court judge ruled that two city ordinances ban-

ning topless dancing were unconstitutional because dancing could be considered a form of free expression, Tielsch darkly warned that “there is a definite danger this will open the door” to bottomless sex-act performances.⁷

That summer, his vice squad turned its focus to combating sex, particularly along First Avenue, which had become a street filled with heterosexual bars and sexual arcades. It was the street where Wells had once owned the 614 and where the *Seattle Times* reporters had spotted the cops inside the Pacific Tavern. The sex arcades on First offered individual booths where customers could watch films portraying either heterosexual or homosexual acts.

In August 1972, police officers began to raid. According to the arcade owners, the officers would descend without notice, force booth doors open to surprise patrons who were perhaps enjoying themselves a little too much, accost others in the hallways, and sometimes beat them. As they had in the gay bars, police demanded identification from men who simply happened to be in the hallways, threatening to take them to jail for questioning if they refused. Within a few weeks, Tielsch’s vice squad had arrested more than 200 people; 157 were charged with lewd conduct and 36 with activities described as “homosexual.”

The city attorney would later concede that a few “young patrolmen” had “acted overzealously.” When the Western Amusement Company, which owned some of the arcades, sued in federal court in October 1972, U.S. District Judge Morell Sharp agreed. He found that the “over zealousness” had included “excessive numbers of police officers on the premises . . . repeated, unnecessary inspections within a short period of time, [and] requiring persons . . . to identify themselves without the officers having probable cause to arrest such persons.”⁸

Not content to fight vice only in downtown, Tielsch’s officers soon moved into the emerging gay and lesbian spaces on Renton Hill and in the University District. A complaint to Mayor Uhlman in September 1972 marked the first of what was to become a flood. Richard Andrus, a social worker who counseled gays, wrote that he was “profoundly disturbed as I have become increasingly aware of an (unofficial) change of policy of the police department towards . . . sexual minorities. Not only are the homosexual bars being checked for I.D. far more vigorously than are the heterosexual bars, but some members of the sexual minorities have been arrested in some of the parks without being informed of their rights and by un-uniformed policemen at that. In some instances, no laws were even being violated. Most deplorable of all, some of the language of some of the officers has been atrocious and wholly unexcusable [*sic*].”⁹

Soon came more complaints. Gay men in particular were being accosted by police more often for loitering, jaywalking, or any public displays of affection such as hugging or touching. Some were being arrested, held for a few hours, then released without being booked or charged. Tavern-goers were being checked for identification—up to ten times a night. Patrols were being stepped up in Volunteer Park on the crest of Capitol Hill and in Cowen Park near the University of Wash-

Confronting a Police Crackdown (197

ington, both known as areas where gay men went to meet one another. The police argued that the extra patrols were needed to stop sex acts from occurring in the bushes or the restrooms, but often the harassment extended to men simply walking or sitting in the park. Sometimes the harassment became extreme: at Broadway Playfield, a park below Renton Hill, police teargassed a men's room thought to be used for sexual encounters.

By October 1972, gay activists began to fight back. One complaint sent to Uhlman from the Gay Students Association at the university was signed by fourteen gay men: "The harassment and arrest of gay people in Broadway Park beginning 12 September 1972 and the subsequent arrest of members of the Seattle Counseling Service for Homosexuals and the harassment of the Service's offices are actions which indicate need for reform. We understand that the police failed to identify themselves, failed to charge the people they arrested, refused to clarify their rights, and treated them rudely."

Karen West, board chair at what was then still called the Gay Women's Resource Center, also protested the "outrageous" and often "physical assaults."

Heterosexuals joined too. Peter Raible, minister of the University Unitarian Church, sent his own complaint to Uhlman:

On the night of September 29, from about 10:15 to 11:45 P.M., I was on the sidewalk near [Cowen] park. Beyond whatever unmarked police cars or plainclothesmen which may have been in the area, several police cars were noted. One parked across from the park for over an hour from about 10:30 to 11:30 P.M. At about 11:30 P.M. the car came across the street and one of the police officers therein warned the three individuals of whom I was one in approximately these words:

"We are cracking down on this park. We'll be in here as thick as flies every night, so you'd better be careful. The lieutenant on the shift is really putting the heat on."

I asked the officer if this meant that persons should not be in the park prior to 11 P.M. He replied: "We will be here at all times at night, so you'd better watch out!"

As our mayor, I wonder if you believe that the best use of our police units is to be stationed near our parks for an hour or more when there is so much truly major crime.

Even Dr. Benjamin Spock, passing through town that fall as a presidential candidate for the People's Party, complained to Uhlman that a planned meeting with a dozen gays had fallen through because of fears created by Tielsch's crusade. Spock called the crackdown "illegal and barbaric persecution, quite indefensible from any point of view."

The Feminist Coordinating Council, which represented the multiple women's groups in the University District, condemned Tielsch. One member of the group called him a modern-day Elmer Gantry, "fighting sin . . . and leaving a wake of bloody bodies behind him."

In December 1972, two activists, Chuck Harbaugh at the Seattle Counseling Service and Dan White, co-chair of the university Gay Student Association, called a press conference where they condemned the “harassment, intimidation, and abuse” from the police department and charged Tielsch with having a “personal vendetta” against homosexuals. At the same meeting, an American Civil Liberties Union representative promised help.

To all the complaints, Uhlman responded with a form letter: “An investigation by my office has been completed. . . . There is no crackdown on sexual minorities by the police department. Chief Tielsch agrees with me that police behavior must be highly professional and respectful at all times toward all citizens.”¹⁰

Disappointingly for gay activists, the mayor seemed to have fully cast his lot with the police chief.

In the spring of 1973—the same spring that was so turbulent internally for the city’s homosexuals, when lesbians were spray painting Freeway Hall and arguing among themselves—a group of men and women moved onto Denny’s knoll in a public political protest for the first time. The picket line in front of police headquarters that Monday, April 23, was not big or long—only twenty to forty men and women—but it appears to have been the first such organized protest against government by Seattle’s gays and lesbians. (The city’s first gay pride march would not occur for several more months.) Among those walking the picket line were Bob Sirico from the gay Metropolitan Community Church, Ann Montague from the Feminist Council, and Tim Mayhew of the Seattle Gay Alliance. They demanded a meeting with Tielsch, but were turned away by a lieutenant who said the chief was too busy. Politely, they requested a future appointment and then left.

Sirico reported that the lieutenant phoned the next day to tell him that “Chief Tielsch feels that homosexuals are not a socially recognized minority [so] he feels no need to grant an interview.”¹¹

The pressure had to be increased.

In a coincidence of timing, the following week a county superior court opened the trial of ten payoff defendants, including Buzz Cook and a ladder of former police captains, inspectors, and officers. That Thursday and Friday, May 3 and 4, pre-Stonewall bar owners from the mudflat gathered in a courtroom to testify about the previous harassment, while on Saturday, post-Stonewall activists from the hill-sides took the new struggle against harassment to George Tielsch’s own home. There, for four hours, about sixty protestors walked in a residential neighborhood near the University District chanting, singing, and carrying signs that said “I’m a Lesbian and I am beautiful,” “It’s okay with God,” and “Woman Married to Woman and Loving It.” Sirico told the press that taking the demonstration to Tielsch’s home was intended as both a personal and public rebuke. Reporters who tried to talk to the police chief trapped inside his house got only a stern “no comment” from the intercom system. The demonstration drew even more public notice than the one

Confronting a Police Crackdown / 199

downtown had. One television station closed its report by commenting, "Some people say that homosexuals are revolting, and, as we have seen today, they are revolting—for their rights."¹²

On Monday, Sirico went to police headquarters for a scheduled talk with one of Tielsch's assistants. The officer refused to meet with him.

Tension continued to build. On May 21 in a letter to Uhlman, ex-priest William DuBay of the Stonewall treatment center added his voice:

For a couple of weeks now, Reverend Robert Sirico and I, both representing a coalition of gay social services, have been trying to reach you to obtain an appointment without success. The subject at hand, of course, is the continuing harassment of homosexuals, lesbians, and members of other sexual minorities by the Seattle police. . . . We have been working through the proper channels in attempting to get these wrongs corrected. We would hope that the police matters can be taken care of administratively. But if you choose to make a political issue out of this matter, we will be glad to take you on. Seattle boasts not only of a very large and active gay population, but also the mostly highly active one in the country with more than 16 gay organizations and social services as well as several of the more effective organizers and activists of the Gay Liberation Movement.¹³

That summer, Tim Mayhew of the Seattle Gay Alliance reported that vice officers were coaxing gay men into sex and then arresting them, although neither he nor anyone else seems to have compiled reliable numbers. In his notes, preserved at the University of Washington, Mayhew recounted several complaints:

"When about a dozen officers were arresting a number of men in a park for being near a public latrine, the officers taunted the arrested with epithets and remarks such as: 'Faggots! Cocksuckers! With all the pussy running around, this sure is a waste of cock—these guys playing with each other's. Stop that one from smiling at this one—they must be in love!'"

Mayhew continued: "Pantomimes of supposedly homosexual stereotypes were enacted by policemen as they waited to take the prisoners away. When these same prisoners arrived at the police station, the other policemen already there, including clerical personnel, carried on similarly. While the prisoners were waiting in interrogation rooms policemen kept coming to the doors and leering at them. . . . No charges were made."

In another note he said that "A beautiful and quite feminine young woman was stopped on Capitol Hill by two officers. As they frisked her for no stated reason, they said, 'Are you a man or a woman? What you need is a good fuck.' They apparently believed she was a lesbian."

Another incident: An officer stopped a van painted with several slogans, including Gay Power. "As he stood by the window he expressed curiosity about the lifestyle of the three occupants, particularly of the young man in woman's clothing. He

then delivered himself of a number of unsolicited opinions and a recommendation: 'What you need is to fuck a good pussy.'"

Still another, according to Mayhew: "A man arrested on suspicion of lewd (homosexual) conduct was handcuffed and put in the back seat of the police car. When one of the officers got into the back seat with him, the officer kned the prisoner in the belly and crotch."

"Police caught a young man masturbating in the darkness of a pornography theater. As they arrested him and took him out to the car on the street, they would not let him rearrange his clothing to cover his penis. This was on First Avenue, where there were many people to see."

"A woman was arrested on the sidewalk in front of a gay bar. . . . The police later called her employer and told him that she was a lesbian. The woman was fired from her job on the basis of the police report."¹⁴

In July 1973, the police stubbornly began another vice sweep on First Avenue, this one aimed at the young male prostitutes who had been a special concern of Bob Deisher and of the Seattle Counseling Service. They arrested more than forty—an unprecedented number—with one officer alone apparently making twenty-two of the arrests. Swamped by the number of people turning to it for help, the public defender's office launched its own investigation of the police action and discovered what one of its attorneys, Paul Rogers, called "suspicious incidents which seem to fit into a definite pattern." Rogers told the gay newspaper *The Fountain* that typically in a prostitution arrest additional cops arrived to help the arresting officer in about ten or fifteen minutes, but in the arrests of the young men, assisting officers arrived so quickly "it appears that they are parked around the corner just waiting." Officers, Rogers said, seemed to be inviting gay men into their cars, offering to pay for oral sex, and then, if refused, intensifying their persuasion until the pickups relented. In one case, the attorney said, a youth who had asked to get out of the car was held until he agreed to sex. Then he was arrested. At the time, laws prohibiting police entrapment were not nearly as strong as they would later become.¹⁵

Police also arrested members of a youth group at Sirico's MCC, and then in October arrested Sirico himself after he left a bar in Pioneer Square. It was about 2 A.M. when the minister saw two vice squad officers arresting two gay youths. Approaching, he shouted he was from MCC. The teens should call him for help, he yelled. Then he crossed the street and stood on the curb with one foot in the road, so that he could copy the license of the police car. Immediately, the cops seized him, handcuffed him, took him to the police holding tank, and booked him into jail. The charge: walking in the road. It was similar to jaywalking, a police spokesman would later explain, although he would concede that normally a person would simply receive a written citation for a ten-dollar fine, not be booked into the jail.

For the next three hours, Sirico sat in the holding tank, repeatedly singing "We

Confronting a Police Crackdown (201

Shall Overcome” until a parishioner bailed him out. When the trial came, the verdict was quick. The judge struck the citation and simply warned Sirico to avoid jaywalking in the future whenever he decided to minister. When Sirico complained that his arrest was yet another example of police vengeance against gays, a Tielsch spokesman answered that the department did not condone any such harassment.¹⁶

It was just overzealousness.

A few months later, a gay journalism student at the University of Washington, Sam Elwonger, wrote of his own encounter with the police. “I was just walking up First Avenue . . . when I got the signal (a stare, a wave, and a nod) from an orange VW Bug. I got into the car and immediately suspected the man of being a police [officer]. . . . I refused to take the initiative in the conversation, so he started the subtle leading questions—Whatcha doing downtown? Where are you from? Do you have sex with men?” The driver eventually mentioned he had a hotel room and asked Elwonger what he wanted to do. “I played dumb,” Elwonger wrote, “and let him make the offer. ‘You call the shots, you picked me up.’”

“How about a blow job?” Elwonger said the driver asked as he stopped at the Roosevelt Hotel, adding, “Do you want some money? How do I know you won’t run off when we get up to the room? Don’t you want ten or fifteen dollars?”

Now, Elwonger knew it was definitely a setup. The law punished those who either offered money or agreed to accept it. He answered instead, “I’m not worried about money, why are you?” When they arrived at the hotel, the floor had been reserved for a jury. A sheriff’s guard at first blocked the two, until the man who had picked Elwonger up quickly consulted with the guard and then was admitted. Elwonger wrote, “His cover was so far gone that I had to suppress laughter.” Inside the room, the U.W. student decided to stop the game and demanded to see the man’s identification. At that point, the officer said he wanted to see Elwonger’s because “I’m a Seattle police officer.”

“I know,” Elwonger said he responded. “I haven’t done anything illegal.” The officer kicked him out. “I should have made a citizen’s arrest,” Elwonger wrote, “for he did make me an illegal offer.”¹⁷

Gay men in Seattle were suddenly fighting back.

Within city hall itself, the increased police harassment began to stir concerns over the more fundamental issue of discrimination against homosexuals, particularly with one city council member named Jeanette Williams, who had been elected to begin serving the same year Uhlman had become mayor. She had often been called conservative. Coming from a well-educated family that had settled in Seattle in the early 1900s, Williams could easily appear patrician. Her father had been a doctor and her mother an engineer, and Williams was a musician by training, a prodigy who had entered the University of Washington at age fifteen. That was in the 1930s, and like another powerful woman attending the university, Frances Farmer, Williams was part of the class of pre–World War II women who were challenging

stereotypes about their appropriate roles. For a while she pursued a musical career in Los Angeles; by the 1960s, she joined precinct politics trying to help elect John Kennedy president. She eventually became vice chair of the Democratic Central Committee in King County, then surprised everyone by becoming chair—despite stereotypes that a woman could not run the local party. When she decided to run for Seattle City Council, she drew support from the city's labor unions, for whom job relations and job discrimination were always a concern, and in her campaign she urged a social accounting from the city—an annual report on how well its social goals were being met. She was fiscally conservative, but her social goals were those of a reformer.

As a newcomer, Williams had been assigned to chair the council's judiciary and personnel committee, traditionally "a rather dry committee" she would remember later, but she was determined to make it more creative and to use it to address issues about human resources and, inevitably, human rights. At Williams's insistence, the council created a Seattle Women's Commission in 1971, partly because there were few women in anything other than clerical jobs in city government, but also because it was a way to address the overall status of women and discrimination in Seattle. Some of the male council members considered the Women's Commission too feminist; some feminists considered it too milquetoast, but it did provide an avenue into city government for people long stereotyped because of sex or gender—and that would include the city's homosexuals.¹⁸

An item Williams soon took under review was a city ordinance prohibiting job discrimination. It was another dry task, but with women often passed over in hiring or else paid unequal wages for their work, creating legal wording was a pragmatic change needed in a new era of sexual politics. In May 1973 (the same month protesters picketed Tielsch's home), at an otherwise unremarkable hearing, Williams's committee heard from one of the women at the University YWCA—Karen West, then chairing the Lesbian Resource Center's board. The ordinance, West told the council members, also needed to protect men and women from being fired or discriminated against just because they were gay or lesbian. West then sent Williams a letter reiterating the suggestion.

What is most remarkable in retrospect is how publicly uncontroversial the idea seems to have been within the city council itself. The state sodomy law was still in effect, making a criminal out of anyone who confessed to being actively sexual in any manner other than married intercourse. Tielsch's vice cops were actively harassing gay men and women. Yet the public hearings in Seattle turned up very little heat over the proposal.

Williams liked the notion of granting gays and lesbians some civil rights protection. At least she liked it enough to mention the proposal among amendments to be considered in another hearing a few months later. The Seattle Women's Commission she had created studied the idea, then also voted its support. Other women suggested the ordinance also offer protection against employers who were

discriminating against feminists by questioning them about their beliefs or by hiring only married women. In effect, they were asking the city to extend protections against interference in free speech and thought to business hiring and firing. Williams and her committee addressed that by adding a clause banning discrimination by employers on the basis of political beliefs and marital status.

While the amendments were proceeding, Sirico and Ann Montague lobbied Uhlman. Again they got little in the way of public support from the executive. They reported that the mayor actually wanted to maintain job discrimination against homosexuals, at least in the city fire and police departments. Montague claimed Uhlman had told them, "We can't have police hiring homosexuals because they would be subject to blackmail," and they couldn't be in the fire department "because [the men] sleep in the same dormitories together."¹⁹

Uhlman knew he would be facing a tough re-election that fall. Part of his campaign strategy depended upon drawing credit from the newly reformed image of the police department that George Tielsch had built, and so at that point, Uhlman couldn't afford to offend Tielsch publicly. Uhlman's chief opponent in the 1973 election was to be Liem Tuai, the popular president of the city council who had handily won his most recent election. While Tuai had sometimes sided with liberals on council legislation, he was a conservative Republican who was not going to support job protection for homosexuals.

Clearly, Williams's civil rights amendments were headed into a political imbroglio. If Uhlman weighed the considerations on a ledger sheet—and what politician wouldn't—he would have listed on one side the police and Tuai as strong reasons not to back any law protecting homosexuals. But on the other side, he would have had to note the equally politically powerful Williams and her Seattle Women's Commission. For all the infighting going on among feminist activists, this would be the first year in Seattle when the women's movement was organized enough to impact the mayor's race. Uhlman had to be particularly sensitive to that. After all, his old legislative district encompassed the University District. The newly energetic feminist groups could turn what was beginning to look like a close race.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1973, as the Seattle police continued to harass and arrest gay men, Williams's proposed amendments silently moved through the labyrinth of legal drafting and then into analysis in the city attorney's office. To some observers, they seemed to have vanished from sight, perhaps to be held hostage until after the November election.

Waiting wasn't Williams's style, though. Pragmatic enough to count heads, she knew she had the votes in the council to pass the amendments. The question was what could be negotiated with the mayor to get his signature. June passed, then July, then August. Not until late September did the amendments finally emerge from the city attorney's office as a proposal to the council. Curiously, they had been transformed. They were no longer individual amendments to the old law but a completely rewritten Fair Employment Practices Ordinance. It specified eleven

categories prohibiting discrimination. Sexual orientation was one, as were race, religion, political beliefs, age, and sex. Suddenly, the question was no longer one of voting on amendments, but of voting on an entire omnibus law. To vote against gays and lesbians was also to vote against African Americans, women, the elderly, the disabled, and the unmarried.

Eight council members lined up behind Williams. Only council president Tuai cast a vote against the proposed ordinance. Cleverly, he had been isolated. Now it was up to Uhlman.

If signed, the new law would put in place one of the strongest job protection acts for gays and lesbians in the nation. It applied to city government and to all private companies with four or more workers. It covered hiring, promotion, working hours, pay, and firing. Employers could be fined five hundred dollars and taken to court to ensure they changed their practices. And although the city already had a Human Rights Department that investigated instances of racial discrimination, complaints about prejudice against gays and lesbians would instead pass through an Office of Women's Rights where they could be scrutinized more intensely. Not only had Williams designed the law, her interest in more women's representation in city government had created the branch that would enforce it.

But there was one "sleeper"—a bit of wording that looked routine and really quite bland. Nothing in the new law, the clause said, could conflict with the authority of city departments or with civil service requirements. That meant city departments still retained the right to define legitimate job qualifications. Since Washington had not yet repealed its sodomy law, any openly gay man or lesbian could be considered suspect of criminal activity. That might give the police an out. There was another catch. The city police and fire departments participated in the state's Law Enforcement Officer's and Fire Fighter's Retirement System. The regulations governing those pensions said that anyone considered psychologically maladjusted could not join—and in fall 1973, the American Psychiatric Association still listed homosexuality as a mental disorder. Those known to be homosexuals could not join the pension plan, and so they also could not join the city police or fire forces.

Uhlman's concerns had been met. On September 18, 1973, he signed the new ordinance.

During the election, Tielsch and the police stayed quiet about the new law—remarkably quiet considering the chief's moral domino theory. Even Tuai aimed only minor criticisms at it. He had, after all, been outflanked eight to one. Uhlman won his re-election, although by a much narrower margin of about six thousand votes compared with the comfortable margin of forty-three thousand votes he had enjoyed four years earlier.

For the first time, homosexuals were part of the political process at city hall. They had gained mention in a law.

Promptly, a gay activist who would soon join the Freedom Socialist Party became

the first to test the law, in a way probably not foreseen by those who had passed it. Sam Deaderick, who had joined the Portland Gay Liberation Front in 1970 and then had moved to Seattle and volunteered for the gay counseling service, took a job as a bell-ringer raising money for the Salvation Army that Christmas season. According to a later news report, he made it clear to some passersby that he was gay, socialist, and an atheist. Someone called the Salvation Army to complain, and Deaderick was quickly told to turn in his bell. Initially, the Office of Women's Rights, which had been assigned to oversee the law, awarded Deaderick back pay and damages on the theory that he had been fired because he was gay. A municipal court judge instead agreed with the Salvation Army that Deaderick had failed to effectively represent the Christian organization. Importantly, the judge dismissed the Salvation Army's argument that the new protection was unconstitutional.

The law, he said, was valid.²⁰

Throughout the mayoral campaign, Uhlman steadfastly refused to publicly criticize George Tielsch, but behind the scenes the tension had been tightening. Tielsch had especially offended Uhlman by publicly urging the city council to oppose low-stakes bingo games even in churches—something the mayor had favored. It was an egregious faux pas by a subordinate. Compounding the strain, Tielsch then demoted a very popular assistant chief who had been aiding the grand jury investigation of the police. Some of the city's most prominent citizens organized a special dinner in the officer's honor, to Uhlman's severe embarrassment. Then, Tielsch's vice squad decided to raid weekend social gatherings in Chinatown, looking for gambling but instead capturing innocent families. The city's Chinese leaders were outraged. Complaints about police brutality against minorities increased, especially within the African American neighborhoods, and demands began to be made for civilian review boards.

The crime rate was dropping, the payoffs had ended, the police force had a high morale, but Tielsch was a wild card of independent ideology in a city still trained on tolerance.

Uhlman, for one, was not as convinced as the chief that victimless vice crimes needed as much costly attention as the city's cops had assigned them. Tielsch also had his critics within the force, among them a captain named Robert Hanson who had once headed the unit that included the vice squad. Hanson would later say that he disagreed with the chief's "blue nose" approach and that he tired of "seeing our officers running across the stage of the New Paris Theater"—a burlesque house—because "we became part of the act."²¹

Shortly after 1974 began, Uhlman and Tielsch angled toward a confrontation. Uhlman received a confidential letter, later published in the *Post-Intelligencer*, from a well-respected superior court judge named T. Patrick Corbett, advising him that while most of the young, new police officers Tielsch had been hiring were "intelligent, well-balanced and capable," the attitudes and actions of others seemed ques-

tionable. "From time to time," the judge wrote, "there seems to be a sudden rise in the number of complaints" about police brutality. "Now," Corbett continued, "is one of those times. I would sincerely appreciate whatever subtle direction you may be able to give to the police that would discourage the unnecessary use of force."²²

One of the cases that had caused Corbett's concern was that of a young man named Jon Bisha, who had seen two men in street clothes attack a hitchhiker near the University of Washington. Bisha tried to stop the fight, first by calling a 911 police emergency number and then by yelling at the men fighting, but the two assailants were actually plainclothes police officers. They arrested him for interfering and sent him back to police headquarters, where, Bisha claimed, a patrol officer yanked him from the police car and struck his mouth, knocking out two teeth. Presented with the evidence, Corbett ruled Bisha not guilty of the interference charge. The judge was disturbed by the force the police had used against an innocent bystander who thought he was stopping a mugging. An internal police investigation eventually cleared the patrol officer, ruling that Bisha was not credible as a witness, so Tielsch kept the officer on the force. Then the *Seattle Times* learned that the police review board had refused to let Bisha call any witnesses to testify about his credibility and had kept Bisha and his lawyer barred from the hearing room.

Livid, Uhlman demanded that Tielsch fire the officer. The police chief refused, but he also announced on February 26, 1974, that he would resign effective March 31 to become police chief in Santa Monica, California. Publicly, he said he wanted to get away from Seattle's rain and back to where it was sunny. He never made it to March 31. Uhlman issued an ultimatum that he fire the officer, and on a Friday afternoon, March 15, as the mayor prepared to attend the inaugural ball for his second term, Tielsch walked off the job. Moving with lightning speed, within a half-hour Uhlman reached into the ranks to appoint an acting chief—Robert Hanson. The mayor then told reporters that he wanted the police to reduce the emphasis on victimless crimes. A news story in the *Advocate* quoted him as saying "I'm going to be a lot more interested in seeing police officers out on the streets enforcing felony crimes that do have victims rather than wandering around Volunteer Park looking for gays looking for friends."

The head of the vice squad immediately requested reassignment.

The Tielsch crusade was over.

On Renton Hill, Robert Sirico proclaimed, "Who says God doesn't answer the prayers of gay people!"²³