

Black Psychologists' Association Makes Proposals to APA

Black members of professional organizations increasingly demand a piece of the power in their associations. If the reception accorded the proposals of the Association of Black Psychologists at last weekend's meeting of the governing Council of the American Psychological Association (APA) is an accurate indication of mood, there may be a good deal of willingness to look favorably at the demands of newly created "Black caucuses" in professional organizations.

In presenting the "petition of concerns" from the Association of Black Psychologists, Charles W. Thomas was able to give visual evidence of what his Association thinks to be one of the main problems of the APA—"the fact that the general organizational structure of the American Psychological Association reflects a serious lack of adequate representation of Black psychologists." Thomas, who is director of education and training at the University of Southern California's health center in Watts, noted the total lack of Black representation on the APA's Board of Directors and among the approximately 100 council members who heard him speak on 5 October.

Thomas and Robert L. Green of Michigan State University are cochairmen of the Association of Black Psychologists, which was formed at the APA's annual meeting in San Francisco in early September. In its petition of concerns, the Association of Black Psychologists pointed out the following problem areas: "the failure of the American Psychological Association to direct its scientific and professional energies toward the solution of prominent social concerns, particularly the issues of poverty and racism," and the extremely limited number of Black psychologists and psychology students.

In his presentation to the APA council, Thomas said that his Association commended the APA for the efforts it had made, but added that much more must be done, and done with a sense of greater urgency. The soft-spoken Thomas then presented the seven proposals of his Association, which are summarized below.

1) That the APA officially endorse the Kerner Commission's Report on Civil Disorders, citing white racism as the factor chiefly responsible for injustice, inequality, and social unrest in America today.

2) That all APA groups which develop policies related to the Black community include Black psychologists recommended by the Association of Black Psychologists.

3) That the APA bring to bear its full resources on finding solutions to the problems of racism and poverty and recognize that a significant part of research emphasis must be shifted from total preoccupation with the ghetto as a source of problems to consideration of the "forces within the larger [white] community that contribute so heavily to the maintenance of the status quo."

4) That the APA establish a committee to study "the misuse of standardized psychological instruments to maintain and justify the practice of systematically denying educational and economic opportunities to Black youth." Furthermore, that pending a thorough reassessment of the issue, a moratorium on comparative testing and evaluation projects be declared.

5) That the APA reevaluate its training programs in clinical and counseling psychology in terms of their relevance to social problems, especially those of the ghetto.

6) That the APA "recommend to each psychology department under its jurisdiction that immediate steps be taken to get, by whatever means necessary, significant numbers of Black students into their graduate and undergraduate programs," and that the implementation of this recommendation become a prerequisite for APA accreditation.

7) That the APA, in consultation with the Association of Black Psychologists, establish a funded committee to implement the above recommendations.

Responding to questions of the APA Council, Thomas said that his association had assembled the names of more than 500 Black Ph.D.-level psychologists and estimated that, in this country, there are about a thousand Black psychologists holding the Ph.D. degree. About half of these, Thomas said, are APA members. Many of the rest, he said, do not belong to the APA either because they regard it as irrelevant to their concerns or because they think of APA as "just another white organization."

In the question period that followed Thomas' presentation, the only reservation expressed by a Council member was one on linking accreditation to an increase in the number of Black students in psychology programs. No hostile or highly critical statements were made by Council members during the question period. The Council then passed, without dissent, a resolution expressing warm appreciation and desire for speedy consideration for the proposals which Thomas had presented.

In an interview with *Science*, Thomas explained that his Association was formed at the APA meeting last month when more than 200 Black psychologists assembled in an unusual meeting together. Thomas described this meeting as "exciting," and explained that, in the past, Black psychologists had tended to avoid each other in public at APA gatherings and had associated with white psychologists on the basis of professional interest. Now, Thomas said, he has no hesitation about standing up among white psychologists and proclaiming "I am a Black man"; he now feels free to write about the problems which are of interest and relevance to him as a Black psychologist.

"We are absolutely convinced that the survival of American society will depend on Black men," Thomas maintained. Thomas and his associates are also convinced that the implementation of their recommendations is required if APA and psychology are to be socially relevant. Thomas argued that, although one of the purposes for the founding of the APA was to be a "means of promoting human welfare," the organization had been "in the shadows of shame" in this regard.

It remains to be seen, of course, how far the APA's leadership will go in meeting the proposals of the Association of Black Psychologists. But, on the basis of the cordial response of the council, Thomas went back to Watts hopeful about the prospect of change within the American Psychological Association.—BRYCE NELSON