

Call for economic boycott continues

Civilian oversight review of police is sought

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DOWNTOWN — As January approaches so does D-Day for a possible economic boycott of St. Louis by conventioners and tourists.

However, on Tuesday, about 100 protesters took their call for justice to police, city hall and the downtown convention center as they appealed for passage of a civilian oversight review board to help monitor rogue police officers.

The call for a boycott was made by members of The Coalition Against Police Crimes and Repression, which is asking conventioners and tourists to St. Louis to avoid the city until the city passes the police monitoring measure.

Their angst against city call, the police and local economic powers



Sandy Bradley-Easter marches outside police headquarters.

Photo by Wiley Price

is partially precipitated by a black-

white split in the Board of Aldermen over creation of a civilian police oversight board, the call for a boycott spotlights an unofficial 13-15 vote chasm that threatens to kill a long-sought police oversight bill sponsored by Alderman Terry Kennedy, D-18th Ward.

"The Coalition has been working for more than (two) years to pass the Kennedy Bill (Board Bill 16) establishing (an) independent (civilian oversight) for St. Louis City police with subpoena power and representatives elected directly by the community," a Coalition statement reads. "The group has been canvassing door-to-door in key wards, sent hundreds of postcards to aldermen, met with neighborhood groups, and organized a well-attended lobby day at the

See **BOYCOTT, A6**

BOYCOTT

Continued from A1

Board of Aldermen on April 26. Yet, the Board of Aldermen is still ... 13-15 over the Kennedy Bill. All the (black) aldermen have endorsed the bill. None of the (white) aldermen have yet expressed support."

In their call for a boycott, the Coalition does not plan to interfere with conventions before May 2002, which would give groups time to relocated their meetings, the statement added.

In August the group issued a call for the boycott, unless the Board of Aldermen decides to support the oversight measure and the mayor, Board of Aldermen and the police make a "good faith effort to establish an effective independent police oversight board," said Zaki Baruti, a leader of the Coalition, last August. That not having taken place, the call for a boycott continues. Initially, October was the date set for the boycott to begin.

St. Louis Police Chief Joseph Mokwa has repeatedly said he is for civilian review.

"I am for civilian review," he said in August, however, "some facets of the bill are in conflict with state statute and the bill would run into litigation. I think that inevitably ... all these things can be worked through ... We want this department to be transparent to the community and we're trying to be cooperative."

Since 1983 at least 35 people have died at the hands of police and "under suspicious circumstances," Coalition officials said.

The Coalition Against Police Crimes and Repression is comprised of 16 organizations which are dedicated to stopping police abuse, exposing the prison industrial complex and ending the criminalization of a generation of Americans.

Tuesday's local protest was part of activists' fifth year as participants in the National Day of Protest Against Police Brutality, held each Oct. 22. Some protesters went as far as taking a metal casket inside City Hall to protest alleged insensitivity by Mayor Francis Slay involving police shootings.

Anthony Shahid, a member of the Tauheed Youth Group and SUFYR (Stand Up For Your Rights), led the coffin-carrying protesters.

"It represents all the dead people



Vincent Terrell marches outside St. Louis police headquarters with a scarf covering his face, Tuesday. The Coalition Against Police Crimes and Repression marched to three different locations in recognition of a National Day of Protest Against Police Brutality. Photo by Wiley Price

on his hands," Shahid said of the mayor. "He didn't come to none of the funerals. We felt he had to (symbolically) view the bodies himself. Plus, he is a commissioner on the Board of Police Commissioners. The coward he is, he was a no show; because life means nothing to

our racist mayor."

Both the mayor's office and the St. Louis Convention and Visitors Commission were contacted for comment, however, no response was received by deadline Wednesday.

2002