

# Puerto Ricans Air Grievances

By HENRY B. McNULTY  
Hartford City Manager Freedman, Police Chief Thomas J. Vaughan and several other city leaders were told by Puerto Ricans Thursday night that Hartford's Puerto Ricans want an end to discrimination, especially by police.

Nearly 200 Puerto Ricans jammed the third floor of the South Green Multi-Service Center, 99 Main St., to tell city officials what has prompted four days of tension and violence in the city's South Green area. Other city officials present included Councilmen Nicholas Carbone and George Athanson, Parks and Recreation Director Victor J. Jarm, Asst. Police Chief James W. Heslin and the Rev. Charles Pickett of the Spanish Action Coalition.

The meeting was run by Mrs. Maria Sanchez, Democratic committeewoman. She introduced each speaker and often translated remarks made in Spanish for the benefit of the city officials.

## Student Tells of Arrests

Many Puerto Ricans said they had been treated unfairly by members of the police department. Louis Rivera, a 19-year-old student at Eastern Connecticut State College, said he had been arrested numerous times in the past on completely false charges. Rivera said policemen had often used unnecessarily rough language toward him and other Puerto Ricans.

"But these were in the past—they are part of my growing up," Rivera said. "What I want to know now is what are you, City Manager Freedman, doing for the Puerto Ricans now?"

Freedman said he and his department were constantly trying to make life better for all Hartford residents. He said it was unfair of Rivera to "put me on the spot here."

Rivera said Freedman had asked for his job, and therefore had a responsibility to do his job as well as he could. Rivera's remarks were met with loud applause from the entire group.

Of particular concern to several Puerto Ricans was an inci-

dent in which a Puerto Rican man was allegedly beat up Saturday night by a member of a local motorcycle gang. Chief Vaughan said the police have one man in custody in connection with the beating and are currently searching for another man.

"We have gone all out on this (case)," Vaughan said. "I feel for you all. I feel for every member of this community and I am here to plead for your cooperation."

## Equal Treatment Asked

Several Puerto Rican speakers said Hartford's Puerto Ricans only want to be treated the way the rest of the city's citizens are treated.

"Puerto Ricans are citizens of the United States," one Hudson Street resident said. "We are not enemies of the American people. We want to be brothers to the rest of the people." His remarks were also followed by loud cheering and stamping.

The crowd, originally seated on about 100 chairs in the South Green Center, soon grew to nearly 200 as people filled every available space in the two adjoining rooms.

Outside, the streets were quiet near South Green as small groups of Puerto Ricans awaiting the meeting's conclusion sat and joked.

Inside, a small room air conditioner was inadequately

pumping air into the meeting rooms. Most men who had come to the meeting in jackets and ties were quickly in shirt-sleeves.

Pedro Castillo Jr. of 14 Pulasqui Dr. said the problem was compounded by the fact that many policemen do not speak Spanish. He said he had often seen policemen arrest a man simply because they could not understand him.

## Clerks Will Help

Chief Vaughan said it was difficult to hire qualified Spanish-speaking policemen although the department is continually searching for such men. He said there are currently four Puerto Ricans on the force.

Vaughan said he had just managed to get approval to hire two Spanish-speaking clerks to work at the police information desk, to assure that Puerto Ricans would always be able to receive assistance in emergencies.

As the meeting drew to a close, Councilman George Athanson stood on a chair and, addressing the restless crowd in a booming voice, outlined several proposals for better community relations.

First, he said, Puerto Ricans should have a representative in city government, preferably an elected city councilman. South Green residents also should make sure their interests are represented in other city departments.

He urged Puerto Ricans to keep their traditions, customs and language. But he said they would find life easier if they also tried to learn some basic English.

## Pleased by Meeting

After the meeting, most Puerto Ricans apparently felt the confrontation with city officials had been a success. "It was wonderful," one young man said. "But we must continue."

Councilman Carbone said the police force must make sure there is no discrimination. "Vaughan would be crazy not to take a good, long look inside his department to see if there is any discrimination," he said.

Chief Vaughan said he couldn't investigate vague claims but if anyone had specific names or details he would investigate any charges of discrimination.

Mrs. Sanchez also said she thought the meeting was a success but she added, "If something isn't done or no good statement is made quickly, it could be a hot weekend."

After the meeting broke up, knots of Puerto Ricans talked on the streets for about an hour in front of the South Green Center. The general feeling was that Thursday's meeting was good but only a beginning.

Mrs. Sanchez said another meeting, this time in a large enough room, would be held Tuesday for further airing of grievances. She said many city officials had promised to attend.



## Puerto Ricans Meet to Air Grievances

Puerto Ricans met with municipal officials Thursday evening at the South Green Neighborhood Center to air grievances they had with the city. The meeting came after

a series of disturbances earlier in the week in the south Main Street area. At right is City Manager Eli Freedman (Courant Photo by Jerry Williams).