

WHO STARTED THE KERCHEVAL STREET "RIOT"?

8-17-64
Newspaper

In the belief that the people of Detroit deserve the truth about the events of the past week on the East Side we present the following:

THE INITIAL INCIDENT

On Tuesday, August 9, between 8 and 9:30 p.m., Wilbert McClendon, Clarence Reed, and James Roberts were standing at the curb leaning against a car parked on Kercheval near Pennsylvania. A passing police cruiser stopped and one of the four officers said to the three men, "Move on Buddy, or you're going to get a ticket." McClendon said, "For what." The police jumped out of their car and one said, "O.K., let's see your identification." Roberts said, "I don't have any identification." (He had just come from home and did not have his wallet) One officer then said to another, "O.K., call some help."

Within three minutes, 15-25 police cars converged on the area. Clarence Reed, who protested the manhandling of Roberts, was severely beaten by more than six police officers in full view of a gathering crowd. He was unable to move and was taken directly to Receiving Hospital where he was not allowed to make a telephone call to his family. The other two men were taken to the Fifth Precinct station. When they entered the precinct parking lot they noticed an unusual number of police cars and officers, many armed with "riot equipment."

In the neighborhood itself, people naturally entered the streets to see why there were so many police in the area. Some young people threw rocks and yelled insults at the police.

BACKGROUND

The Adult Community Movement for Equality (ACME) of which Wilbert McClendon is a past chairman and the Afro-American Youth Movement (AAYM) of which Alvin Harrison Jr. is director, have been active in the Kercheval area for more than two years. They have taught Negroes their history as a people and their legal rights as citizens; they have struggled for neighborhood improvement. They have tried to help Negroes re-discover the dignity and manhood which has been taken from

them by a society largely organized against them.

In addition to a program of self-education and neighborhood improvement, both groups have in the past, through a variety of measures including demonstrations, challenged the authority of the police department to harass, intimidate, and insult Negroes. With legal counsel, they are presently challenging the constitutionality of the loitering ordinance which is selectively enforced against Negroes in general and members of ACME and AAYM in particular.

The police department, quite understandably, has felt threatened by this challenge to the traditional way of doing things in Negro neighborhoods; threatened not physically but psychologically. The police response to this threat has been antagonism by members of the Fifth Precinct toward the leadership and membership of both organizations.

Councilman Nicholas Hood has stated that there is undue police harassment on Kercheval; that people do not feel they can stand on their own sidewalks. Scores of incidents of harassment have occurred in the past two years. Many of these incidents have been documented and brought to the attention of the Citizens Complaint Bureau, Fifth Precinct officials, the Civil Rights Commission and the police commissioner. Nothing has been done except that the police have increased their harassment and provocation.

FACTS

1. Every leader and many members of ACME and AAYM were arrested last week. Some were held for 24-40 hours without charges and released. Others were charged and are facing penalties ranging from 5 to 20 years in prison. And yet it is known that many members of both organizations spent time patrolling the area asking people to stay off the streets.
2. Police have released allegations to the press which will make it impossible for many of those charged to receive a fair trial.

3. The press has presented a biased police department account of the events. One newspaper story in reporting on a press conference held by Mr. Harrison stated only that he held it and nothing of what he said.

4. Eyewitnesses have given a sharply different account of the events than that of the police.

5. Much of the information reportedly relied on by police in making arrests has been obtained from two juveniles who were themselves under arrest for their part in the disturbance. Their self-serving statements are subject to unreliability of the compulsion they might have felt to agree with the police version of events.

CONCLUSIONS

We are forced to conclude that the police acted in such a way as to provoke a situation which they could call a riot, which would allow them to arrest members of ACME and AAYM. It is more than coincidental that this attempt to destroy two militant civil rights organizations comes at a time when the police department is desperately seeking means to restore its prestige, which has suffered so greatly from the recent findings of the grand jury.

Moreover, the motives of candidates for judicial office, presently employed by the prosecutor's office, whose names have figured prominently in the charges must also be questioned.

Indeed we believe that the public has the obligation to ask many questions about the events of the past week. Because Detroit can make racial progress only through fairness, because communication from those who are aggrieved is essential to fairness, because of the simplified one-sided version that has been widely presented, and because of the difficulty of accurately and objectively understanding the disturbance, we urge Detroit's leaders and its citizens not to prejudice this incident, to carefully seek the truth and to avoid any miscarriage of justice.

PUBLIC MEETING

"Anatomy of the Kercheval Incident"

7:30 P.M. FRIDAY

CENTRAL METHODIST CHURCH

Contributions to Citizens for Fair Law Enforcement may be sent to 1101 W Warren, Detroit, Mich. For further information call 832-1890.