

THE NATION

Detroit Mayor Knew Riot Was Coming

Jeffries Says He Wasn't Surprised; Worked 'Secretly' to Avert Trouble

By WILLARD WIENER



Mayor Edward J. Jeffries, Jr., of Detroit, told me by telephone that the bloody racial outbreaks in his city last week were anticipated.

Here's the way he put it:

I was taken by surprise only by the day it happened."

He hadn't taken any "special" measures, he said, to prevent such a conflict, explaining that he relied on various city departments to do whatever they could to ease the tension between the immigrant whites of Detroit and the Negro population.

His method, he said, was to say nothing and not let the people know he was quietly working.

"I think it's best to work in a sort of subterranean way," he said. "Publicity would only aggravate the situation and defeat the very thing we sought to accomplish."

More than 15 months ago an official of the now defunct Office of Facts and Figures (OFF)—since merged with the Office of War Information (OWI)—commenting on the Detroit race situation, noted in an inter-office memorandum:

"Unless some socially constructive steps are taken shortly, the tension that is developing (in 1942) is very likely to burst forth into active conflict."

"It is fairly obvious that Mayor Jeffries is not able to handle this matter constructively."

It Happened

Jeffries' "hush-hush" program exploded last week, leaving death and destruction in the wake of one of America's worst race riots, in which 31 persons lost their lives.

As early as March, 1942, the U. S. Government was officially put on warning in detailed reports by U. S. investigators that a violent race riot would break out in Detroit unless immediate preventive action was taken.

The warnings were issued by the OFF in confidential reports "for administrative use only," and sent to various Federal agencies, including the Dept. of Justice and the Federal Housing Administration, "for action."

PM yesterday revealed these reports and memoranda.

Jeffries said he had never seen the reports, or even heard of them.

"But I think I can tell you," he said, "that they were actuated by a kind of vendetta between Detroit and Washington."

That "vendetta," he said, dates from the inception (about a year and a half ago)

of the Sojourner Truth Housing Project, a low-cost housing project in Detroit for Negroes.

Jeffries suggested the project be constructed in the Negro district. The Federal Government, he said, rejected that suggestion, and built it in a white section.

A controversy ensued. For a long time nobody knew whether the project was to be for whites or for Negroes, or for both.

The housing project became the focal point for rising racial hatreds.

"The thing was kicked around for months," Jeffries said.

The project was opened for Negroes, for whom it was originally intended, late in February, 1942.

Warned of Others

That was the signal for open racial warfare.

The secret Government reports, disclosed in PM yesterday, referred to that disturbance.

One report warned that the issue would not be confined to Detroit but, unless measures were taken to check it, would spread to every industrial city in the North.

Jeffries blamed the Government's Fair Employment Practice policy (designed to end discrimination in employment) as "aggravating the situation."

"That policy," he said, "has forced many manufacturers to hire as high as 10 per cent colored help where, in many instances, no colored help had ever been hired before."

I asked Jeffries what his personal feeling was toward the FEP policy.

He said: "It's a practical factor. I've heard people protest it, and I've heard people advocate it. I guess it depends on how you look at it."

"We've had all sorts of trouble in our factories over racial questions. I won't say we've had riots there, or even brawls. But there have been fights."

"Do you think the situation might be relieved if the FEPC policy was done away with?" the Mayor was asked.

"Well," he said, "I think it's gone too far for that."

I asked him what he, as Mayor, had done toward easing the tension.

He said: "I like to work in a quiet, unobtrusive

Officials Fear Dies' Probe Will Incite Race Clashes

Denounces 'Coddling' of Races; New Deal Smear Seen as Aim

By JAMES A. WECHSLER
PM's Bureau

WASHINGTON, June 28.—Martin Dies' projected investigation of "racial antagonisms" in the U. S. A. was viewed by responsible Government officials today as a new incitement to racial conflict.

Although declining to be drawn into a public row with the Texas congressman, key figures in agencies responsible for averting further outbreaks were unanimously aroused and alarmed by Dies' announcement.

In a week-end statement Dies had disclosed that he is planning to conduct a nationwide probe of recent race clashes. His declaration indicated the inquiry would be aimed chiefly at groups and individuals which have sought to win better working and living conditions for Negroes.

'Not Wholly Un-American'

Asserting that "responsibility" for "misunderstandings between the various races" could not be "ascribed entirely to un-American groups," Dies said:

"They have been aided and abetted in this program of spreading racial hatred by certain people in America who have kept alive and stimulated race consciousness and race hatred for political purposes or because of misguided social ideas."

He attacked "the coddling of races by politically-minded people in this country who ignore the vast differences between the protection and the coddling of a race."

Declaring he intended to summon government officials and representatives of "various race groups," Dies said he would also subpoena "persons responsible for spreading race trouble." He did not name any names.

More Friction Seen

In government circles there was general agreement, based on past experience, that an inquiry conducted by the Dies Committee would intensify the frictions visible in recent weeks and become a sounding-board for the "white supremacy" bloc in Congress.

Dies' references to the "coddling of races" and "misguided social ideas" were interpreted as a thinly-veiled attack on Administration agencies that have endeavored to curb discrimination against Negroes. Little likelihood is seen that such an investigation would throw any real light on the cause and cure of the recent riots.

The proposed Dies investigation of race battles is apparently planned as a sequel to committee hearings scheduled to open here Wednesday dealing with the status of Americans of Japanese descent.

At these hearings Dies is expected to stage a major drive against the War Relocation Authority, set up by executive order to direct the handling of Japanese-Americans.



Mayor Edward Jeffries, Jr.

way, on the theory that that's the best way."

"What manifestations did you see that spelled trouble?"

"I can't say exactly," the Mayor answered. "But I saw signs—I read the papers—I knew what was going on in other parts of the country."

"Did you do anything to prevent an outbreak?"

"What do you mean?" he countered.

"Well," he was asked, "what steps did you take to prevent it?"

He said:

"I can't put my finger on any particular thing. But every city department does what it can—"

Held Conferences.

"Well," he was asked, "did you have, for example, any municipally sponsored forums where unity might be the theme and democracy discussed?"

"No," he said. "We had no forums."

But the Mayor said he had had several conferences with various civic groups where the problem was discussed.

"In fact," he said, "within the past six months I've had two luncheon conferences with the editors of Detroit papers, and we discussed the problem, and—"

The interview stopped abruptly on that note. The long distance telephone operator had inadvertently cut us off.

I was unable to get the Mayor on the telephone again.

AN EDITORIAL

The Worst Possible Choice

We can think of no agency less competent to deal with the explosive issue of race relations than the irresponsible, headline-hunting Dies Committee.

No man is less fitted to head such an inquiry than Martin Dies—the poll-tax Congressman has spent six years serving as a transmission-belt for the native fascist front.

The picture of Martin Dies as promoter of tolerance is as grotesque as a "better race relations" campaign sponsored by the Ku Klux Klan or the Silver Shirts. Or a civil law-and-order program drafted by a lynch mob.—J. A. W.

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