

EXPLOSIVE DETROIT IS ATTEMPTING A SOLUTION

By Gloster B. Current

Detroit, the dynamic capital of America's war production, continues to be the center of upheaval, tension and social maladjustment. Not only is it bursting with a war-swollen population of 1,875,000 people, but the city faces a magnitude of postwar problems which serve to keep everyone on edge. Throw into this boiling caldron the problems of 200,000 Negroes and you get a volcano ready to erupt.

Plans and solution offered after the riot have mostly followed the pattern of R. J. Thomas' eight point program. Thomas, president of the world's largest union, the United Automobile Workers of America, a CIO affiliate, suggested ameliorative measures calling for a grand jury investigation of the causes of the riot to return "justifiable indictments, with a competent Negro attorney as an assistant prosecutor to work with the grand jury."

Other points in his program were adequate park and recreational facilities, adequate housing through government-financed developments, fair employment practices, a special grand jury investigation of the police department, justice for white and Negro rioters in the courts, reparations for losses incurred by businesses and individuals; and finally, creation of a ~~ten~~ man bi-racial committee appointed by the Mayor.

Although Negroes complained of police brutality, "white papers" issued by police commissioner John H. Witherspoon and Mayor Edward J. Jeffries, Jr., were silent on this point. These reports were accepted by the majority populace as sufficiently explanative of what happened on June 20-21. The authorities rationalized on the slow arrival of the troops, difficulties faced by the authorities and their lack of knowledge of administrative procedure to place Negro people on the defensive by attributing responsibility for the conflagration to militant Negro leaders.

Tell anyone your're from Detroit and the question follows: "What's happened since the riot?"

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Soon after the riot it was apparent that Detroit's anti-Negro, anti-semiticprosecutor, William E. Dowling, did not intend to urge a grand jury investigation of either the cause of the riot, or the police department. Although many negro citizens complained of malfeasance, misfeasance and nonfeasance, on the part of the police department, "white papers" issued by police commissioner John Witherspoon, ~~inspt~~ and Mayor Edward J. Jeffries, Jr., were accepted by the majority white population as sufficiently explanative of what happend on June 20-21. These masterpieces of explanation explained why the troops were slow arriving, difficulties faced by the authorities and their lack of knowledge of certain administrative proceedure to secure

martial law, chronology of the riot and statements purported to place the Negro people on the defensive attributing responsibility for the conflagration to Negro leaders.

As a member of Governor Harry F. Kelly's fact-finding committee, prosecutor Dowling, followed the line of reasoning set by Jeffries and Witherspoon and in loud-mouthed statements to the press which were later found in the report of the Governor's Committee, he blamed the NAACP, and the Negro press of Detroit for a major part of the riot.

Charges and counter-charges of authorities and Negro organizations and unions and liberal groups, climaxed in the hectic primaries of September when ~~a/political/~~ Negroes and the unions joined hands in an attempt to rid the city of Jeffries's administration. Dodging, ineffective Mayor Jeffries was severely trounded in the primaries by CIO supported Frank Fitzgerald, Circuit Court Commissioner. Fitzgerald was'nt a happy or wise choice, ~~yet~~ he ran far ahead of the field.

For a while it looked as if the liberal forces would win, but Jeffries and downtown politicians, led by the Detroit News, Detroit's largest circulated newspaper, launched a race-baiting, union-baiting campaign, which brought into play every known dirty political trick. In desperation, Jeffries sought to drive a wedge between Negroes and labor by calling them "gangster minorities" which to anti-labor management groups was enough to secure their votes, and on the other hand took the tack that Negroes were asking for bi-racial housing which meant a Negro in every block! Vicous literature was distributed throughout middleclass neighborhoods such as "_____."

~~This won the day~~ Jeffries won the election in November by a narrow margin and Detroit's race relations were set back even farther than they were after the riot.

The first major riot trial was held during the hysteria of the election. Although the newspapers, radio and other media were filled with election ^{allwhite} propoganda, the/jury which tried Leo Tipton on the charge of inciting to riot by making an announcement over the public address system of the Forest Club,

was not locked up during the trial. Tipton, an employee of the Negro dance hall, steadfastly maintained his innocence, but was convicted on the testimony of young Negro hoodlums, who were ~~provided by police authorities~~ kept under custody by police authorities until after the trial. One of the prosecution witnesses against Tipton was an imbecile whose mother has asked that he be remanded to an asylum.

Lawyers for Tipton threw up their hands in the presence of such
The second major riot trial involved four white youths who shot _____ while riding around in an automobile of June 21. It seemed as if the juries were keeping score on convictions, and these youth were convicted of manslaughter. The third trial was probably the most controversial of all. Aaron Fox, an 18 year old Negro youth, was accused by three hoodlums, one who testified against Tipton, of ~~shooting~~ throwing a piece of concrete in the window of Dr. Demoratus Car as it passed the corner of Hendrie and Seaubien. The Doctor crashed into a post and was killed. Again, an all-white jury found the Negro guilty, although witnesses claimed that Fox was home looking out the window, and that a man who did not answer the description of Fox threw the concrete.

To all intents and purposes the prosecution feels that he has proven that Negroes caused the riot. Thousands of minor riot trials involved Negroes who were immediately convicted by all white juries! In Michigan Negroes serve on the jury panel, but there is no law which can force the prosecutor to allow them to serve on trials involving Negroes. Although there were at least ten thousand white rioters on Woodward Avenue during the day of June 21, seemingly the Detroit police department spent most of its time arresting Negroes in the heart of the Negro district.

What about the causes of the riot? Housing was recognized as a major factor in the tension which created the events of last June. In 1940, there were 149,119 Negroes in the city of Detroit. Today, estimates indicated there 50,000 have come to man the war machines which keep Detroit's production producing materiel for the armed forces. These newcomers have been crowded

into homes that were 50% substandard in 1940. Today, according to admission of the Detroit Housing Commission, there are 11,000 Negro families who have made applications for housing, whoses applications have not been processed! With such conditions, the manager attempts of the Housing Commission to provide pre-fabricated homes in neighborhood which will not change the existing pattern, are ~~vitality~~ woefully inadequate to meet the pressing need of thousands of war workers who are vitally needed in an area where shortage of labor is critical.

Not only in Detroit does discrimination operate to keep Negroes out of housing, but in the metropolitan area itself at the Willow Run Bomber Plant, located two miles from Ypsilanti, Michigan, there stand idle 3,5000 units of housing built by the Federal Public Housing Authority. Yet, Negroes are barred from this project, although many Negro war workers are employed there. Suit has been filed ^{recently} in Federal Court by Howard Flowers, a Negro workers employed at the Bomber Plant, against this policy of discrimination. Because of the segregation policies of FPHA, Flowers has to drive ^{a total} 88 miles to work each ~~morning and return the~~ day.

For a while after the riot the police tread lightly in their contact with Negroes. Of a police force of _____ there are only 40 Negro officers. Promotions have not been granted within the ranks and Negro officers have not been able to be promoted to inspectors and ranks of other responsibility. In an effort to ~~appeas~~ mitigate some of the conflict and antipaty against the department, Mayor Jeffries appointed John Ballenger to succeed Witherspoon as police commissioner in January. Ballenger, a former Welfare Administrator and friendly to Negroes, promised to make changes in departmental policy. He appointed a committee composed of Ray Hatcher, Urban League, Beulah Whitby, and the executive secretary NAACP, to work with him on revising the training program of the police department and surveying conditions relative to Negroes in the Department.