

Minutes

1-21-57

DIVISION REPORTS

Community Services Division

1. Police Department Incident

Mrs. Whitby stated that before Mr. Gracie made his report, she would like to report an incident just today referred to the Commission for investigation. It concerns Mr. Robert F. Mitchell of 2801 Virginia Park who alleges that without provocation he was stopped last Friday night by the police and searched in the middle of the street. He asked if he could drive to the curb for safety and also so that the searching operation would not be so obvious. When this was allowed the police continued to search him, which seemed to him quite unnecessary and exceedingly embarrassing. They found some rolls of silver money which he had gotten at the bank to use in making change in his business. They accused him of not being in business but in the numbers. Mr. Mitchell stated he was kicked by the police, beaten severely with the butts of guns so that several stitches had to be taken in his head. He was arrested, first charged with felonious assault with an automobile, which was later changed to resisting arrest. He is at present out on personal bond and will be arraigned tomorrow on warrant.

Mrs. Whitby said this incident has stirred up considerable community reaction. At least six persons have called during the day expressing concern about it. Invitations have also been extended to Mrs. Whitby and other staff members to attend a community meeting scheduled for tonight at 8:30 at the Omega House on Ferry for the purpose of discussing the whole situation and what can be done about it. Mr. Mitchell is a graduate of Ohio State University, and from Wayne State School of Law. He is a member of the Cotillion Club which worked with Mr. Coles and the police in trying to establish better police-community relations and seems to be highly regarded in the community.

Mr. Chittick of the Police Department stated Inspector O'Brien is making an investigation of the incident and a meeting has been called this afternoon. He said he knows Mr. Mitchell personally, that he owns a bar on Tireman and was connected with the Pfeiffer Brewing Company for about eight years as a salesman. He does not have a police record.

Mr. Davis asked Mr. Chittick to check with his office to learn the outcome of the meeting. Mr. Chittick talked to Inspector O'Brien who advised they had received 25 telegrams today about the incident, the majority from Mr. Mitchell's fraternity brothers. They are checking for witnesses. A warrant was issued for interfering with and obstructing an officer in making an arrest. Mr. Mitchell was evidently struck with a night stick. One policeman was struck in the body, another had his badge torn off. They will contact the people who sent the tele-

grams to determine if they saw the incident. No conclusions have been reached as yet by the Police Department.

2. Public Accommodations Project

At the last meeting question was raised about public accommodations, particularly in the downtown area, especially with reference to the fact that several conventions have been scheduled in Detroit with an intergroup type of membership. Mr. Coles and Mr. Gracie have been working on a program for the elimination of discrimination in Detroit restaurants and bars and Mr. Gracie was asked to make a report.

He stated staff has developed a three-point argument with respect to the public accommodations situation in Detroit. It is an economic argument since it was intended that meetings would be held with people who are economically concerned, such as the Convention Bureau, the Restaurant Association and the Hotel Association. The argument for their action included the following three points:

1. Detroit has been and is now recognized as the industrial capital of the world and with the opening of the St. Lawrence Waterway this reputation will be greatly enhanced. People from Asia and Africa and South America will be coming here in ever increasing numbers. Furtherance of our trade with the new governments of the darker peoples is a desirable and practical objective. The business community of Detroit must prepare for this eventuality. People of darker hue must not be humiliated and insulted in public places and leave Detroit with bitter experiences to carry to their native lands.
2. With the wave of integration that is sweeping our country more Negroes in America are participating in organizations that were hitherto exclusively white. These organizations are becoming concerned about the treatment that will be afforded their minority group members in convention cities. Although accepted in the hotels of Detroit, they seek guarantees that all will be treated alike in the places of public accommodation outside the convention hotels. (Examples include: Delta Sorority, American Physical Therapists Association, Tourist Motor Club.) While it may be argued that Detroit's record is by and large good, the existence of a few exceptions could be enough to deprive us of convention trade.
3. The reputation of the city suffers when service is refused to a Negro, be he from Detroit, Birmingham, or British Columbia. We must first perfect our practices and then let it be known that we have done so in order to counteract the bad publicity the city has received from time to time in the national press.