

Detroit Nearing Breaking Point

By BILL BLACK

Common Council held a public hearing in the City-County building auditorium last Thursday morning. The intent of the hearing to air both sides of the police manhunt controversy and hopefully defuse the present nearly-explosive tensions that permeate the Black community.

While some public officials and agencies have downgraded this situation, many councilmen whose phones have been ringing off the hook with calls from irate citizens know that this city is near the breaking point.

Some claim that the actual number of "official" complaints are few in number. They may be right. However, the paucity of complaints actually emphasizes the intimidation and genuine fears of much of the Black community.

Since the Dec. 4 shootings of four STRESS officers, the manhunt for the men allegedly responsible for those shootings and the Dec. 27 murder of Patrolman Robert Bradford has been unsuccessful, despite the fact that police have received innumerable "tips," and have "raided" many homes, stopped and searched many citizens.

Shortly after 4 a.m. the morning of Dec. 5, a large contingent of policemen kicked in the doors of the W. Outer Dr. residence of Rev. Leroy Cannon. Awakened by the noise, Rev. Cannon went downstairs to investigate. Fortunately, he did not think to bring his pistol. (Rev. Cannon owns a men's clothing store in Inkster and has a concealed weapon permit.)

As he descended the stairs, Rev. Cannon was met by a plain-clothed police officer who allegedly put his gun to Rev. Cannon's nose and said: "Nigger, if you breathe loud, I'll blow your brains out." Cannon's family was roused from their beds and a young man, an employee who was spending the night in the Cannon home, was arrested and taken to police headquarters.

It took Rev. Cannon and his attorney, Wilfred Rice, several hours to find out where the young man was being held so Rice could serve the writ of habeas corpus he had obtained. The "prisoner" was then released without having been charged with any crime.

A half hour after the Cannon family's experience, Mrs. Caroline Tyler, a Veterans' hospital social worker, answered a knock on her door and was confronted by a squad of policemen who entered her home with guns drawn, searched the house, made the frightened woman produce identification, and then explained that they had a tip that one or more of the wanted men was at a house whose number was "close" to Mrs. Tyler's home.

A 13-year-old boy on his way home from school in the afternoon was chased to his front door by a policeman with his gun drawn. "Little nigger," the police officer allegedly said, "we're tired of you people shooting us." The kid had broken no law, and certainly hadn't shot anyone, policeman or civilian.

Nine young people were lounging around an apartment on Ohio after an all-night party. Suddenly the door panel "was kicked clean across the room and this big gorilla-looking cop jumped through the door with a gun in each hand," one of that apartment's occupants told *The Chronicle*.

The five men were ordered into the kitchen, spread-eagled on the wall, searched, asked where "they" are, and beaten when they denied knowing who "they" were. The four young women, one of them only 17, were forced to go into the bathroom, and disrobe to prove they did not have "a gun concealed in your bra."

All these young people were angered and embittered. None made a formal complaint or protest. One of the young women, a college student, explained why: "I'm humiliated. How can I go to someone in some office and tell them that a whole bunch of men made me take my clothes off, and that one of them ran his hands over my body?"

The men involved, who were taken to a precinct station and detained more than eight hours before being released without charges, were also intimidated. "Sure I'm madder than hell," one of them told *The Chronicle*, "but I gotta live here, and I don't know when I'm gonna meet one of those cops on the street. I ain't about to make no complaint."

Real estate broker Theodore R. Barnes had no qualms about making a complaint. Barnes was approached by a uniformed police officer while he was showing a client a home. He protested being ordered out of his car and searched, then cursed by the policeman. Barnes wrote a strong letter of protest to the police commissioner.

Durwood Foshee, 59, will not make any complaint, formal or otherwise. Two days after the Dec. 4 shootings, Foshee responded to a 2 a.m. knock on his door. According to the police report, Foshee fired a shotgun through his door at the plain-clothed policemen and they returned fire, fatally wounding Foshee.

The police went to Foshee's Wabash St. residence because they had "information" that the house was a dope pad and might be a hiding place for the wanted men. Foshee had moved into the home just a week previously. His relatives claim that, contrary to the police report, Foshee was slain as he lay in bed.

A 27-year-old Vietnam veteran college student was found shot dead on the street. His car was gone, coat missing. Just a few days before his mysterious death he told his parents and a faculty member that he knew he had to be careful because he resembled one of the wanted men.

A Ford employee who also faintly resembles one of the suspects was driving down an eastside street with his daughter. He was stopped, searched and interrogated by policemen, one of whom slapped him because "you don't ask me no goddam questions — you must be one of them smart ones."

A 15-year-old with a large Afro is stopped by a group of men wearing casual clothes and driving an unmarked car. One of the men put a gun to the youngster's head and ordered, "Tell me where Boyd and Brown are."

The kid was almost too frightened to answer that he didn't know Boyd and Brown. The man replied that, "We're gonna start treating you people the way you treat us — we're just gonna blow your brains out and then ask the questions."

"Official" complaints may be few in number but many Detroiters are uptight, afraid particularly to let their young sons go out, even in the daytime. One example of this situation is perhaps the most graphic illustration.

At a protest-news conference the morning of Jan. 4, Guardians of Michigan President Tom Moss described witnessing several policemen stop a DSR bus at Woodward and Garfield and "snatch a Black youngster off the bus."

One of the radio stations had Moss' account on the noon newscast. The *Chronicle's* switchboard was immediately besieged by concerned parents who wanted to know if the youngster Moss talked about was their son.

Whether complaints are few or many, official or unofficial, really is not the issue this city must face. The problem now is that the tension is great — and something must be done quickly to alleviate that tension.

That was the announced purpose of Thursday's public hearing: Hopefully, by providing citizens an opportunity to air their complaints to the city fathers, something will be done — quickly — to cool the deep-seated anger that exists and poses a serious threat to the peace and tranquility of all Detroiters.