

MAYOR JEROME P. CAVANAGH REPORTS TO THE PEOPLE

Text of Television Address Delivered

Thursday, March <sup>7</sup>6, 1968

Seven months ago this city experienced a destructive riot. The damage to our community was great. The number of lives lost, the people arrested, the physical destruction of property, the families left homeless -- all were part of a catastrophe none of us wish to see repeated.

Following the riot, we directed most of our efforts to clearing the rubble -- the visual scars -- from our streets and to alleviating the immediate suffering of those who were the victims of this violence.

Some members of this community went further. They recognized the riot as a manifestation of the frustration and despair of those who by race and education are excluded from our complex, largely impersonal economic system. This awakening of awareness by a segment of our community has had its finest embodiment in the New Detroit Committee, established immediately following the riot.

But there were other voices that gained strength from the tragedy of last summer. These were the voices of the right and the left which are even now trying to further divide our community. Fortunately, these men have not been successful in attracting major followings in this city, no matter how confident they may seem.

However, it is not to these two groups -- those trying to eradicate the conditions which breed riots or those unreasoning, hate-filled men of the right and left who, like maggots, are trying to feed on human misery and fears -- that I am speaking tonight. Both these groups have already made their commitment.

Rather, I want to address myself to the majority of the three million people who live in the Detroit-Metropolitan Area.



I am speaking to the man who stood last July on his lawn in Dearborn, in Northwest or Northeast Detroit, in Warren, in Southfield, in all of the communities around this city and saw smoke clouds hanging low in the sky over Detroit.

I am speaking to the man who hears the voices of violence but who may not understand how unrepresentative they are.

I am speaking to the man who, confused and fearful for the safety of his family, believes rumors and stories that his normal good judgment would reject out of hand.

For this man, and his family, are victims of the riot and its aftermath. This is part of the damage of last July that we failed to foresee. And it is the psychological damage done to these citizens which holds the greatest threat, and constitutes the most clear and present danger, to our common future.

My purpose tonight is to reassure all citizens of the Detroit-Metropolitan Area that the Detroit Police Department is well equipped, effectively staffed and organized to prevent trouble whether it originates with the extremists of the Left, or of the Right. Whether they are Black, or whether they are White. Extremism which takes the form of acts of violence or of provocation will not be tolerated. But freedom of expression will be permitted and encouraged, and those who are opposed to our precious freedom of expression will not be allowed to interfere with the rights of others.

Those who would threaten others will be stopped. Those who would bomb, or burn, or shoot, or loot will feel the full effect of the forces of law and order which we can command.

Fear is fueled by rumors and rumors have been rampant from Grand Boulevard to the Grosse Pointes. Newspapers and the rest of the communication media play an essential role in dispelling rumors and dispensing



facts. There are certain facts you should know, and that is one reason I am speaking to you tonight.

Riots are not inevitable. I cannot emphasize that too strongly. No one can predict when, or if, a riot will occur. No one can start a riot. No one can predict its course once it starts.

But when I say that riots in this city or in any other other city are not inevitable, I must emphasize that every citizen has it within his power to affect the conditions that give rise to violence. If he accepts uncritically every rumor, if he buys a gun neither understanding how it works nor the legal implications of using a weapon, if he endorses vigilante groups, he has contributed to an atmosphere that may well bring about the very violence he has been seeking to avoid.

All of these things have been happening in the Detroit area. We seem to have lost our judgment and our perspective. Wildly irresponsible rumors, concerning what "might happen next summer," have been spread throughout the Detroit area by commentators whose credibility in normal circumstances would be immediately discounted.

Without newspapers in this city, these rumors have been spread further by word of mouth until they have taken on the aspect of truth and a basis for action. For this reason, it is most urgent for the welfare of our city and of this entire area that the newspapers publish soon. I have put the resources of the city at the disposal of the publishers and union representatives to achieve the earliest possible settlement.

Victimized by rumors, the citizens of Detroit -- both Negro and White -- are arming themselves in unprecedented numbers. And, in the suburbs surrounding Detroit, gun sales have also soared.

This arms race must be stopped.

We must return to sanity.

The continuing spiral of gun purchases to people in this area is a



most serious threat to the public safety and to the maintenance of peace in our community. I have tried to revive a sense of balance within the City itself through the introduction of a gun registration ordinance in the City Council.

Since the riot of last July, we have been working to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of our Police Department. We have studied the areas in which the department was weak last summer and we have acted to plug these gaps.

As a result of our emergency bond issue late last year, we are buying new communications equipment that will greatly increase our ability to bring to bear effective police power in any foreseeable situation. We have purchased the weapons which we found that we needed and that were most suitable based on our experience of last summer. We have conducted, and are still conducting, special classes in riot control techniques for the Police Department.

We have organized a Police Reserve of civilian volunteers, both Negro and White, who are being trained to guard vital installations and to supplement police protection of fire units in a riot area. Many of these men have completed training and are available for duty now. Many more are in training.

Tomorrow I will submit to the Common Council a re-organization plan for the Detroit Police Department -- the first such reorganization of the Department in 31 years. This plan, along with the improvements in salaries which have been recommended and which I support, will give us a modern, effective Department and should enable us to attract the number and quality of police officers this city needs and deserves. I have also been diligently searching for a new Police Commissioner, and I expect to be able to make an announcement of my selection very soon. We have worked with the State Police, the National Guard, and the Governor's



office to shorten the response time should it be necessary to call on these forces. We have developed plans that will allow us to cope effectively, quickly and selectively with any type of civil disorder.

In other words, and I want to emphasize this, the public safety agencies charged with protecting lives and property in this city are prepared -- and are capable -- of maintaining order.

I must point out, however, that the control of a riot is not our only aim. We must do more than just prevent a disorder. We must remove the causes which give rise to those expressions of violent discontent. We do not seek in any way to repress the legitimate grievances of any of our citizens.

But we will not -- we cannot, if we are to make any progress -- tolerate lawlessness.

We will apply the law fairly and equally. We expect all of our citizens to live by the law.

At the same time, we are trying to move this city in an affirmative way toward a solution to its problems through the institution of new programs in jobs, recreation, housing, and social welfare. Detroit has always had the ability to pick itself up off the floor and to make a strong comeback to achieve a better life for its citizens. We believe in the right of every citizen to individual dignity and self-determination. We are dedicated to achieving those goals. And we are coming back. We have a new sense of purpose, a new sense of mission, not only in city government but throughout the community. We have an opportunity to build a better city -- and we are taking advantage of that opportunity.

What I am describing is not an indication of a city on its back -- but a dynamic, vibrant community embarked on a new adventure.

We are not paralyzed except as we permit fear to paralyze us.

And this is why, tonight, I ask every citizen to examine his actions



over the past seven months, honestly and objectively, to determine whether or not he has contributed to the tensions within this community.

For to achieve our dream of a city re-born, we must have a return to sanity in this city and its surrounding communities.

I will do my part. In fact, today, I have sent a letter to the Mayors of all communities within the Detroit-Metropolitan area to meet with me Thursday, March 14, to discuss with them the plans Detroit has made to prevent any recurrence of last July. I hope that this will also help quiet the fears and anxieties within these communities.

Finally, if we are to succeed, we must guard against a blunder based on a fallacy. There could be no more tragic occurrence than, if this city were plunged into a conflict based on a wholly untrue, irresponsible rumor or story.

For this reason, I have today directed that the City's Commission on Community Relations establish and maintain a Rumor Control Center. I urge every citizen who has a rumor with which he is concerned to contact the Community Relations Commission. It's telephone number is 963-9550.

Each rumor will be checked out, the true facts established and an effort made to dispel the rumor before it can do any more damage. In the absence of newspapers and in light of the present situation, I urge every citizen of the Detroit-Metropolitan area to make use of the Rumor Control Center.

Beyond this, however, we need the understanding, the support, and the involvement of every citizen in this area. I ask you tonight to give us that support. I ask you to look at the City which supports you and to help build it anew.

For as one man stated many years ago:

"We are all in the same boat in a stormy sea, and we owe each other a terrible loyalty."