

NSM Information Release--

Citizens rally to defense of NSM

Detroit:

In response to increasingly clear evidence of police collusion in provoking and publicizing the so called "riot" on Detroit's East side, nineteen of Detroit's top lawyers have constituted themselves into an East side Defense committee to provide free legal counsel for the arrested persons. Led by one of Detroit's best criminal lawyers, Milton R. Henry, the group includes staff people from the University of Detroit Law School, corporation lawyers and Nathan Conyers, brother of Congressman John Conyers.

To date, the lawyer's committee has held three meetings, has assigned counsel to all defendants, and is gathering evidence on the many inconsistencies of police charges and behavior. For example, the police department, in clear violation of the recent Supreme Court ruling on the case of Dr. Samuel Shephard, has, for all practical purposes, already tried the defendants in the press.

In another development PAR(People Against Racism), NSM's group of white supporters in Detroit, held a mass meeting on August 19, where the people of Detroit were told the true facts of the case by NSM staff members Wilbert McClendon and Al Harrison. NSM executive director, Bill Strickland, bussing to Detroit because of the airplane strike, told the audience, "I do not see how this city, or this country can justify the arrest of black people in Detroit for "loitering" in a public street. I do not see how they can then redefine this act as "rioting" while they reluctantly arrest white rioters in Chicago for "disturbing the peace" and never arrest the members of the Nazi party. The riot act was read in Chicago, and defied. It was not read in Detroit, but people are charged with rioting. In Chicago the whites march with signs saying "Kill the Niggers"---and nothing happens. What would happen to black people if they took to the streets with signs saying "Kill whites?"

We are reprinting PAR's ad, as it appeared in the Detroit Free Press August 17 and 18.

Detroit Free Press, August 17th & 18th

WHO STARTED THE KERCHEVAL STREET "RIOT" ?

In the belief that the people of Detroit deserve the truth about the events of the past week on the East Side we present the following:

THE INITIAL INCIDENT

On Tuesday, August 9, between 8 and 9:30 p.m., Wilbert McClendon, NSM staff member, Clarence Reed, and James Roberts were standing at the curb leaning against a car parked on Kercheval near Pennsylvania. A passing police cruiser stopped and one of the four officers said to the three men, "Move on buddy, or you're going to get a ticket." McClendon said, "For what," The police jumped out of their car and one said, "O.K. let's see your identification." Roberts said, "I don't have any identification." (He had just come from home and did not have his wallet). One officer then said to another, "O.K., call some help."

Within three minutes, 15-25 police cars converged on the area. Clarence Reed, who protested the mishandling of Roberts, was severely beaten by more than six police officers in full view of a gathering crowd. He was unable to move and was taken directly to Receiving Hospital where he was not allowed to make a telephone call to his family. The other two men were taken to the Fifth Precinct station. When they entered the precinct parking lot they noticed an unusual number of police cars and officers, many armed with "riot equipment."

BACKGROUND

The Adult Community Movement for Equality (ACME) of which Wilbert McClendon is a past chairman and the Afro-American Youth Movement (AAYM) of which Alvin Harrison Jr. of NSM, is director, have been active in the Kercheval area for more than two years. They have taught Negroes their history as a people and their legal rights as citizens; they have struggled for neighborhood improvement. They have tried to help Negroes re-discover the dignity and manhood which has been taken from them by a society largely organized against them.

In addition to a program of self-education and neighborhood improvement, both groups have in the past, through a variety of measures including demonstrations, challenged the authority of the police department to harass, intimidate, and insult Negroes. With legal counsel, they are presently challenging the constitutionality of the loitering ordinance which is selectively enforced against Negroes in general and members of ACME and AAYM in particular.

The police department, quite understandably, has felt threatened by this challenge to the traditional way of doing things in Negro neighborhoods: threatened not physically, but psychologically. The police response to this threat has been antagonism by members of the Fifth Precinct toward the leadership and membership of both organizations.

Councilman Nicholas Hood has stated that there is undue police harassment on Kercheval, in the past two years. Many of these incidents have been documented and brought to the attention of the Citizens Complaint Bureau. Fifth Precinct officials, the Civil Rights Commission and the police commissioner. Nothing has been done except that the police have increased their harassment and provocation.

FACTS

1. Every leader and many members of ACME and AAYM were arrested last week. Some were held for 24-40 hours without charges and released. Others were charged and are facing penalties ranging from 5 to 20 years in prison. And yet it is known that many members of both organizations spent time patrolling the area asking people to stay off the streets.
2. Police have released allegations to the press which will make it impossible for many of those charged to receive a fair trial.
3. The press has presented a biased police department account of the events. One newspaper story in reporting on a press conference held by Mr. Harrison stated only that he held it and nothing of what he said.
4. Eyewitnesses have given a sharply different account of the events than that of the police.
5. Much of the information reportedly relied on by police in making arrests has been obtained from two juveniles who were themselves under arrest for their part in the disturbance. Their self-serving statements are subject to unreliability of compulsion they might have felt to agree with the police version of events.

CONCLUSIONS

We are forced to conclude that the police acted in such a way as to provide a situation which they could call a riot; which would allow them to arrest members of ACME and AAYM. It is more than coincidental that this attempt to destroy two militant civil rights organizations comes at a time when the police department is desperately seeking means to restore its prestige, which has suffered so greatly from the recent findings of the grand jury.

Moreover, the motives of candidates for judicial office, presently employed by the prosecutor's office, whose names have figured prominently in the charges must also be questioned.

Indeed we believe that the public has the obligation to ask many questions about the events of the past week. Because Detroit can make racial progress only through fairness, because communication from those who are aggrieved is essential to fairness, because of the simplified one-sided version that has been widely presented, and because of the difficulty of accurately and objectively understanding the disturbance, we urge Detroit's leaders and its citizens not to prejudge this incident, to carefully seek the truth and to avoid any miscarriage of justice.