

PUTTING AN END TO STRESS

Stop The Robberies and Enjoy Safe Streets - STRESS is the misnomer for the Detroit Police Department's Terror Squad, whose purpose, stated by Police Commissioner John Nichols, is to reduce street crime.

Ignoring the root causes of street crime, the owners and controllers of Detroit's economy and government machinery have decided that it is more expedient to instill the fear of death into hearts of the city's economically disenfranchised citizens than it would be to rightfully distribute the wealth and political power that is currently being held by that tiny minority.

Two months after the formation of the STRESS squads, in January of 1971, the Fifth Estate reported on terror operations with the purpose of demonstrating the real reasons for their existence.

Since that time, eighteen people have died at the hands of STRESS, resulting in the creation of the Coalition to Abolish STRESS, made up entirely of blacks with varying class allegiances: Republican, Democrat, independent and party socialists - raising some serious questions about the effectiveness and legitimacy of that organization's ability to defend the interests of Detroit's black working people. Are the Republicans and Democrats who are a part of that coalition truly interested in abolishing STRESS or in merely changing its name and mode of operation?

On April 28, the Coalition to Abolish STRESS has called for a demonstration by the citizens of Detroit to voice their opposition to this repressive police terror - an action we support, despite our reservations about some of the coalition's members.

The Fifth Estate interviewed Ron Lockett, a Coalition organizer, with the intent of exploring STRESS operations and the role the Coalition to Abolish

FIFTH ESTATE: STRESS has temporarily discontinued their decoy operations because of all the heat that's coming down on them. What's the nature of STRESS operations now? What's the story behind the notorious STRESS Patrolman Raymond Peterson, who was involved in the deaths of 10 people?

RON LOCKETT: What the people in the Coalition feel is that Peterson blew his whistle too quick. Blatant terror was discontinued in the black community. That doesn't mean that they still don't patrol the black community, pick up brothers, (and sisters - Staff), but now they'll let them go on a bunch of garbage-type charges. Peterson appears to us to be used as a scapegoat, but I wouldn't go as far as saying that he will do some time, that he will be convicted. Never in the history of Detroit has a police officer been convicted of murder. A police officer has been sentenced to jail for 90 days for killing a dog.

FE: What do you see as the reason for STRESS existing?

RL: Theoretically it is to stop street crime, but we feel that it is a terror squad whose sole purpose is to demoralize and demobilize the black community. With STRESS, as far as blacks being able to organize against bad housing, being unemployed, drugs, they become scared, you can just see it out on the streets. A blood, unless he is a junkie and has to get a fix, won't go out on the streets at certain times at night. They're scared of seeing four whites with long hair and blue jeans step out of a late model Chrysler and shake them down.

FE: What about John Nichols' statement that STRESS has effectively reduced street crime?

RL: Police statistics are so nebulous. We can go down to the dockets and see that it's the same amount of people being tried, the same amount of trumped up charges. Of the 2,200 or more arrests that STRESS has made, less than 100 have ended up in convictions. The Detroit papers have said that drugs have to do with 50-65% of the people out here on the streets. The police duty, theoretically, is to deal with that problem. But all black people know about police complicity on drugs, about STRESS officers going in dope houses and getting payoffs. They bring dope to dope houses - I myself have seen this.

FE: What kind of forms do you see as concrete ways of dealing with crime? Right now, the tactic is that the best way is to instill terror into anyone who looks like they might be a "criminal."

RL: We propagandize around the demand of citizens review boards, precinct by precinct, with the power to hire and fire all racist policemen. This would be community control of the police. The sentiment is moving that way--we just have to elevate the level of (political) consciousness. People say "just get a black mayor and he will put in a black police commissioner. We don't agree with that.

FE: Isn't STRESS merely symptomatic of a larger problem - who controls the wealth in this city? If they got rid of STRESS, if they changed the name, but if the power is in the same hands, wouldn't there be some other form of repression?

RL: We don't doubt that, but if we got rid of STRESS, it would be a significant victory for the black community. Also, the rulers of this city have to look at the morale of the police department. Police departments across the nation are autonomous. They run rampant