

Riot Born In Rhetoric, Reared By Sheriff

by HOWARD KOHN



By MARVIN KEMP

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ANN ARBOR
Despite the explosion of riots, many observers remain mystified why such a minority of "revolutionaries" can cause so much trouble.

Nobody has one good answer, simply because there are as many answers as there are riots.

No single riot can be fairly judged a microcosm of all riots. Yet each riot has lessons which can be learned to prevent the next one.

THE WORK WEEK of June 16-20 was one of the most violent in Ann Arbor's history. More than 150 persons were injured, 20 of them policemen. More than 80 were arrested. More than 2,000 people and 400 policemen were involved in two nights of street fighting and two more nights of looting.

A strange combination of personalities and politics accounted for the Ann Arbor riot.

FIGHTING BEGAN ostensibly because of a street party held on South University Street, near the University of Michigan campus.

But the riot was actually born in the rhetoric of a communal radical group and was reared on police overreaction.

White Panthers, who several months ago launched a radical party here appealing to teenagers with a platform of free thinking, free drugs, and free sex, this spring seized upon the "people's park" issue of Berkeley for a test here.

They jeered the South U area urging their followers to "liberate" the street.

Actually, the issue of converting part of South U into a pedestrian mall is an old one which has been argued before the City Planning Commission several times.

Businessmen from the area favor the idea, on the stipulation the city provide substitute parking for their customers. Since parking is a major headache in Ann Arbor, the Planning Commission has just tabled the mall proposal.

UNTIL JUNE 16, White Panther ideology on the street mall had been just ideology. But on Monday night, 200 "street people" barricaded three blocks of South U for a street party.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is a more analytical view of Ann Arbor's recent street riot, based on a more intimate knowledge of the campus than any Detroit paper has provided. Howard Kohn is a U-M senior who already has an outstanding record in practical journalism, and this summer is a reporter for the Farmington Enterprise & Observer.

On Tuesday night, when 500 people (teenagers, older motorists, high school dropouts and "freaks") tried it again, police moved in and moved them out.

Conspicuously absent on both nights were White Panther leaders, who are usually busy around South U. When police scattered the young mob on Tuesday, the street people did fight back.

Police cordoned off South U as street people gathered in small crowds on the side streets. But by 10 p.m., as a drizzle started, the area was relatively quiet.

At 10 p.m. 150 police were on the street. By 11 p.m., 400 were there.

Since many U-M students and faculty live within sight of South U, the side streets became crowded with students spectators demanding to know why police were arriving.

DOUGLAS HARVEY, Washenaw County Sheriff, ordered the police to clear the street, Harris blasted Harvey's tactics.

At this insistence, Harvey agreed to stay away from South U on Thursday and Friday nights. No major incidents occurred.

After Harris told reporters "We're trying to keep Harvey out of operation," Harvey stormed into a closed meeting at city hall to allege: "You know nothing at all about keeping the law."

Harris and Fleming walked the streets Thursday night talking to street people. More significantly, though, White Panther leaders used megaphones to tell their followers to "stay off the streets."

Unmoved somewhat by the violence their rhetoric had spawned, the White Panthers had decided against playing "politics of confrontation."

"I THINK we've raised some issues," explained Skip Taube, Panther spokesman. "There's no point in getting killed over this."

U-M students, however, were not impressed with the issue of "streets belong to the people," voting down the motion at a Wednesday noon rally.

Still the university community has been receptive to complaints of police brutality. Student leaders and several faculty members are now actively supporting the "Recall Harvey" movement.

Briefly, this is what happened to people who played key roles in the fighting:

● WHITE PANTHERS—Despite the free publicity, they lost credibility with the radical movement by denouncing "confrontation politics." Predicated on many old hippie motifs and consequently more social than political order, the Panthers are a competitor with SDS in the junior highs and high schools rather than a coalition force.

● FLEMING—On the streets for the first time in his two-year administration, Fleming won support from students for standing up to Harvey. But he's now more vulnerable to radical demands, i.e., he can be pressured more now before he'll be willing to call in police because he has criticized them. This may mean a change for a campus that was once in the radical mainstream but has been quiet for three years.

● HARVEY—After campaigning against police brutality in the mayoral election, Mayor Harris managed to appease both sides by lauding one police unit and knocking the other. He has also appointed a committee to review community-police complaints and a committee to weigh the possibility of a South U mall.

Both Harris and Fleming were caught not anticipating street fighting and didn't confer with city and police officials until afterwards.

● HARVEY—Still immensely popular in spite of harsh attacks by the Detroit News, Detroit Free Press, Ann Arbor News and Michigan Daily, Sheriff Harvey seems primed to challenge Harris' leadership in the county Democratic party.

● STREET PEOPLE—Undaunted by everything, they're now flippantly saying the street party was just a passing fancy. Most street people arrested were charged with misdemeanors, and a majority tried so far have been acquitted.

● UNIVERSITY STUDENTS—Finding very little to identify with in White Panther rhetoric, students nonetheless are angry over police tactics. Some say they were mistakenly arrested in the police sweeps. This may be the most "radicalizing" event here since the Vietnam teach-ins of 1964.

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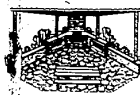
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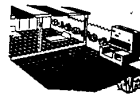
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