

CHICAGO: Some Thoughts and Comments

by George Wolkind

The brutality of the Chicago police was fairly well documented by the major TV networks and the establishment press. Approximately 1,200 folks who were injured seriously enough to require medical attention can attest to the "over reaction" of the police. Two of our own people who made the 850 mile trip brought back vivid impressions of Chicago. Art Magness, University of Delaware student, needed ten stitches to close a wound across the eye and Larry Mason, extension student and "Voice" staff member, required three stitches for the back of his head.



CONCORD BRIDGE, 1968
Photo by Leo Tammi/THV

However, brutality by itself is not the central issue. What is clear to radicals and less clear to liberals is that police brutality, like the policeman himself, represents an extension of the policies of any given governmental institution. The brutality of the Chicago police must be seen in context with the political decisions of Mayor Daley. One such decision, which came after months of petitioning and careful following of "proper channels" on the part of YIP organizers, was Mayor Daley's denying the YIPpies a permit to sleep in Lincoln Park. This decision meant that people could be "legally" removed from the park. This was very easily done; the cops simply used tear-gas and billy-clubs. Then, when folks were in the streets, away from TV cameras, the police had a field day. Some streets were covered with blood. What most people saw on TV was the tip of the ice-berg. Few people saw or were even aware of the terror below the water line, a terror that was consequent to a political decision.

Police repression in Chicago like our government's repression in Vietnam is not accidental. One can not look at Vietnam without seeing it as part of a long line of countries where the U.S. has tried to establish hegemony. The point is, repression, whether it is foreign or domestic, has a history.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union's monthly publication (#257, Sept. 1968) the "Illinois Civil Liberties Union's Roger Baldwin Foundation has asked a federal court to enjoin prosecution of 60 persons arrested at a Chicago peace march, charging the mayor (Daley), police superintendent (James Conlisk Jr.) and other high city officials with having encouraged the indiscriminate arrests and police brutality." The RBF stated that 67 men, women and teenagers were beaten at the demonstration, Maced while in police custody, held without booking and denied permission to make telephone calls. Film was confiscated. One woman said she was struck by police, dragged to the ground by her hair, thrown into a police van and Maced when she tried to take pictures of police beating a boy on the ground.

The incident just described took place in Chicago, April 27, 1968, during a peace march to the Chicago Civic Center, where for some unknown reason the police attacked the demonstrators (See story in Issue #4).

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A blue ribbon commission headed by the president emeritus of Roosevelt University also investigated the April 27 peace march. The commission reported that the police were doing what the mayor and superintendent had clearly indicated was expected of them... Many acts of brutal police treatment on April 27 were directly observed (if not commanded) by the superintendent of police... "Police who committed acts of violence can not be considered exceptions in this situation, the commission said, the political system of Chicago, not merely individual officers, was at work that Saturday."

The April 27 police riot was designed to deter people from coming to Chicago. It did. However, the determination of the 3 to 4 thousand who made it to Daley's city made up

about ourselves and about our leadership. We have been provided with the most modern equipment. We have had the finest training. And we operate with a select membership.

Day by day, year by year, this Department has moved forward. All of us have shared in this progress. Now we face a test which will show the world our quality.

We must continue to be constantly mindful of the welfare of others, never act officiously, and never permit personal feelings, prejudices, or animosities to influence our decisions or actions.

for the lack of sizable numbers.

For the sake of irony, I believe the words of James B. Conlisk Jr., which appeared in a press release, best illustrate the absurdity of our times.