Chicago

"The pigs are retreating...Keep attacking!"

Liberation News Service

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CHICAGO, Ill. (LNS) — Thousands of black and white young people in Chicago stoned police, trashed cop cars and broke windows of luxury stores in the downtown Loop area for more than five hours on July 27, after impatiently waiting for a city-sponsored rock concert to get underway. Police at one point fired more than a hundred rounds over and into the crowd, seriously wounding six teenagers.

All during the hot, sticky day, people gathered at the Grant Park bandshell, scene of the biggest police attacks on demonstrators at the 1968 Democratic Convention. Under an upside-down American flag, boldly covered with a marijuana design, around 75,000 freaks, blacks, greasers, and other assorted rock fans waited for the scheduled free performance by Sly and the Family Stone.

The concert was part of the city's Reach Out program, a set of entertainments during the summer to try to take kids' minds off the lack of jobs and their bitterness towards police and city officials. The kids had sat through an earlier concert content with wine, dope, and music, and the city thought it had a sure-fire solution for keeping kids quiet.

When the late afternoon concert time rolled around, announcers in the true rock concert style kept promising that Sly was on his way, but since the group failed to show at two previous Chicago dates during the last year, people were skeptical. Then Fat Water, one of the warm-up groups took the stage and a couple of dozen people broke through barricades and joined them. Scuffles with the ushers broke out and some amplifying equipment was broken.

Then the police moved in, and the name of the game was war. They took a shower of bottles, called up reinforcements and shot tear gas at the retreating crowd. Three to four thousand people were active in the conflict, injuring over 80 police, some seriously. After an hour, half the original crowd was still around to watch and root. Gang Intelligence Unit plainclothesmen, Task Force Squad, and Canine Patrol forces (pigs with dogs) supplemented regular cops. At least 165 arrests were made, and more than 40 young people were treated in Chicago hospitals.

Although as in any integrated scene in racist America, there were some minor tensions between blacks and whites, the crowd was dramatically transformed when the police arrived. Blacks and whites—street freaks, greasers, short-haired guys recently out of the army—fought side by side. Black kids showed the way, the whites joined in, overturning and burning police cars and driving back waves of pigs with bottles and rocks. To judge from the slogans shouted, the battle took an increasingly political tone, with the familiar chants of "Power to the People" and "Off the Pig" being punctuated by sounds of crashing glass.

There was a stirring show of "mass bravery" according to one woman from Rising Up Angry, a group organizing for revolutionary Grease Power among working class white kids in Chicago. "Blacks were clearly leadership all the way," she said, "but it wasn't like it was bands of blacks and bands of whites. It was mixed."

A few V-flashing peaceniks tried to stop the fighting, but they were largely ignored.

Pushed back from the band shell, the rock fans returned street fighters, faced off with the police across Balbo Avenue—next to the Conrad Hilton Hotel, another Convention landmark. Police defied orders and threw back rocks and bottles, breaking rank at times to charge with clubs swinging into groups of young people.

Around 7:50 P.M., as police had been pushed back, their front ranks suddenly turned and opened fire. Some officers shot up in the air but others held their pistols firmly with both hands and fired directly into the crowd. "If you see any of them breaking windows, they're breaking the law... so shoot!" a high-ranking police officer ordered his men.

John Kifner from the New York Times, who was at the scene, reported:

"When the police fired, the youths dived to the ground or crouched next to trees and bushes. But seconds later someone shouted, 'The pigs are retreating! Keep attacking!' And the crowd continued to move toward the police."

Over a hundred shots were fired and when the smoke cleared, six kids—most of them black—were seriously wounded.

But the crowd came back. Several bands of hundreds of blacks and whites swept into the Loop, running down State Street, "that great street," in a window smashing joyful rage that far outstormed the Weathermen's actions last October.

Park District President Daniel Shannon claimed the fight was planned by groups who wanted to break down what he called a new "camaraderie" between the Daley administration and young people. The next day, Shannon cancelled all future city-sponsored free rock shows in the park for the ungrateful kids who wouldn't be pacified by that novelty in the capitalist entertainment world, free music.



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