

# K'zoo Conspiracy

Fifth Estate Collective

1971

The demonstration in Kalamazoo that resulted in a police riot on Feb. 17 has given rise to a full-scale witch hunt in the city. The local citizens grand jury has turned in indictments against members of the United Front, a local community organization, which is a coalition of black, brown and student groups.

The demonstration was called in response to the U.S. invasion of Laos, and as a continuing attack on the racist and inhuman conditions of the local jails. After the crowd dwindled from its original 500, some trashing started and the cops attacked the crowd. Six people were busted and many were beaten up by the cops. Of the four demonstrators treated for injuries, three were Brown Berets, even though they were a minority of the crowd.

The citizens grand jury was already in action, investigating the local drug scene. Circuit Court Judge Raymond Fox redirected the grand jury to investigate the demonstration. In reality, city fathers saw the opportunity to repress the growing Kalamazoo movement, using the riot as an excuse.

Many people were called before the jury, and in the first week of March, indictments came down against three people: Roger Messer, for conspiracy to incite riot and desecration of the flag—bond is \$50,000; Pat Fordham for conspiracy to incite riot—bond is \$5,000; Kiki Sanchez for felonious assault of a police officer—bond is \$2,250.

In addition, the six people busted at the demonstration itself were charged with loitering, carrying a concealed weapon, violation of probation and other minor charges.

The people of the community expected the indictments and were not sitting still while the jury was putting them together. A Legal Defense Committee was formed that has taken on the task of coordinating a whole legal defense for the people charged. Four lawyers, led by Mike Baron, are working with the Legal Defense Committee. Fund-raising activities are being planned to support the defense and the entire community, black, brown, and student, have come together in support of the people on whom the repression is coming.

Contributions can be sent to the Legal Defense Fund, c/o The Patriot, Box 687, Kalamazoo 49005.

## The Grand Jury

The citizens grand jury is a new tactic of repression coming to Michigan. People in Jackson are not strangers to the phenomenon. The White Panther Party chapter there was thoroughly investigated, and some of its members imprisoned.

The police and prosecutors of a county can convene a citizens grand jury that can easily skirt a person's right not to incriminate herself/himself. If a person invokes the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and refuses to talk, the prosecutor will make a motion that the person be given immunity, so that anything he/she says will not be used against them. In this way they can force the person to talk and reveal information about brothers and sisters who the police are interested in. If the person doesn't talk, they can be sentenced for contempt of court. Cindy Thorton of the Jackson White Panthers was given 6 months in jail for this.

The grand juries are usually made up of citizens chosen by the prosecutor. The one in Jackson was set up to investigate all the dope at the Goose Lake Rock Festival and then turned itself on the political movement in the city. The same thing happened in the Kalamazoo case.

Now in Macomb County there may soon be formed another citizens grand jury to investigate the dope use there. After the lessons learned so far, one can expect another political witch hunt, this time closer to home.

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