

There's More to Gangs than Just Gangs

anon.

1976

Gang fever, like the Bird's pitching, seems to have been just a-passing summer phenomenon. Both served their purpose for the Motor City and then disappeared. Of course, youth crime has not disappeared—just its exploitation by the media and city hall politicians has waned.

Hizoner Coleman Young is now preoccupied with concern about how far up in his administration the Federal drug probe will go (it's already touched his political associates and relatives), and with the exception of a few feeble attempts like Channel 7's "Summer of Terror" series, the media has gone back to its usual drab fare.

Well, one might say that it was all fun while it lasted—the teens liked seeing their gang names in print, the cops got all of their men back on the street, the media had a field day (after all, we devoted four pages to it last issue) and the citizens got a good scare just like going to see "Jaws" or "The Exorcist."

Of course, to the victims of the rapes and assaults the situation was a deal more serious and, in fact, for all of us, the implications of this summer's events are a lot more ominous than the straight media's flirtation with them would have us believe.

Beyond all of the surface spectacle aspects of the situation, several serious considerations begin to emerge. Perhaps most important is the increasing decomposition of city life and the ever increasing dependence of politicians upon police rule. In fact, the political activity of the police has begun to fill the news more than that of their civilian counterparts.

Just think over the last few months whose names have been in the headlines more—Police Chief Tannian Inspector Blount, Mayor Young (in connection with police disputes), the Detroit Police Officers Association or those of the members of the City Council (remember that redundant body?). Cop news and hassles have even taken precedence over that great non-story of the year—the national presidential race.

The police are becoming ever more prominent as the conditions of life erode for an increasing number of people; and that number is increasing dramatically.

According to a Bureau of Census report released September 26, 1976, 2.5 million persons slipped below the poverty line between 1974 and 1975. According to government figures, the total number of persons living below the poverty level is 25.9 million and rising—that's a lot of folks.

The well-plied American myth that "this is the richest nation in the world," is becoming less true than it ever was. While the seemingly affluent, commodity-rich middle class enjoys a high standard of living, there is no guarantee that this will be a permanent situation.

The movement of capital has historically blessed certain regions at the expense of others. No one thinks it odd to view the South as a less wealthy area than the Northeast, nor the whole of North America as richer than the continent to the South. But what is usually not considered is that, just as the wealth and power centers within the U.S. are now shifting from the aging northeast to the "sunbelt" of the south and southwest, the United States itself could become an increasingly poor region in the movement of capital world-wide as areas of the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and the Far East begin to develop rapidly and profitably.

American corporations in their global manifestations will continue to reap profits, but the mass consumer markets, as well as jobs, could rapidly re-locate out of this country, leaving the U.S. with a stagnant domestic economy, high rates of unemployment and a general deterioration of the standard of living Americans have come to expect.

All of these factors could very well increase not only the level of crime and violence, but also the willingness of workers to confront the exploitation of corporations and government. When wage levels (the value of real income has been declining since 1965) fall even farther behind prices, and greater levels of exploitation, speed-ups, etc., are instituted to maintain the capitalist rate of profit, large-scale layoffs, etc., a heightened combativity by workers, demanding what capital will be incapable of providing, will call the police that much more to the forefront.

What is perhaps only a pathetic footnote to the Detroit situation is the tendency of some to view the solution in terms of an “up state of mind” about the city and support for reform-minded politicians. This is perhaps best illustrated by a recent Detroit Sun article in which the entire gang problem is chalked up to a conspiracy by elements within the police department.

In a piece of unsubstantiated fiction, *The Sun*'s September 17 issue claimed to have actual knowledge of cops giving the gangs guns and money in order to embarrass the mayor. If the copy splashed across page one had as its only purpose the whitewashing of Mayor Young's return to “blackjack rule,” blaming the whole mess on the cops, it could be written off as just so much political eyewash by journalistic hacks trying to curry favor with the reigning politicians. While the police in several instances ignored crimes being committed, to blame the entire gang phenomenon on a police plot is to ignore the social roots of urban decay.

Young was sponsored for the mayor's post by mostly white, ruling-class Republicans who knew that the city could not be managed by the white racist wing of the local Democratic party with Detroit Police Chief John Nichols as mayor. They knew Detroit needed a black mayor who could function just like he did in helping to quell the Livernois mini-riot last Summer (the “Cool it, baby” crap).

However, even an astute politician like Young, popular in the black community as he is, is incapable of dealing with the problems created in the economy (50% unemployment in some sections of the black community), neighborhoods with their social structures ripped out by expressways used to take whites in and out of the city, or the flight of the business tax-base to the suburbs.

A defense of Young is impossible—he's only a pawn in the game. If Young can't bring “peace” to Detroit, the job will be turned over to the cops such as was the case this summer. And no one expects a turn for the better.



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Fifth Estate #277, October 1976

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