

Anarchy in Memphis

Fifth Estate Collective

1978

The standard rationalization for the existence of the State is that supposedly without an external restraining element, such as a heavily armed police force, the nature of humans is such that all of us would prey so wickedly upon one another that life would become intolerable. Forgetting that the State is a somewhat recent development in human affairs and permanent police forces an even newer innovation, many people believe that at least under capitalism the police are a necessary evil as long as this society creates such a potential for disorder.

However, the recent police labor dispute in Memphis, Tenn. gives lie even to this utilitarian view of the cops. When the police went out on strike, so, apparently did the crooks. *New Times* magazine, writing about the incident in its Oct. 2, 1978 issue, reports, "From the beginning of the strike, the reported crime rate was down 40%. From Friday night to Saturday morning, there were only two burglaries and one robbery reported."

Just a matter of reporting? Doubtful, for there is no reason not to think that once the several day strike was over that unreported crimes would not have been reported to the police or that the National Guard patrolling the streets wouldn't have received the reports.

The real danger in Memphis? Of course, the police. A coalition of Memphis civil rights groups have petitioned the United Nations for an official investigation into the city's police force for continuing violations of the black community's human rights. In a recent seven week period, Memphis cops shot to death seven unarmed black men.

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