

# City Unit Blasts Police

Chris Singer

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The Establishment press and the Detroit Police Department have been blasted in a report on the New Bethel Incident done by the Detroit Commission on Community Relations (CCR).

The eight-page staff report is sharply critical of the manner in which the news media reported on the actions of Recorder's Court Judge George W. Crockett Jr. The CCR also blasted the response of police both during and after the March 29 shootings of two policemen outside the New Bethel Baptist Church.

Richard Marks, CCR secretary, said: "The news media do not understand the nature of their own racism." The commission asked the community relations service of the U.S. Justice Department to step in and meet with representatives of Detroit's Establishment press, to discuss "the handling of emotional issues that might lead to confrontations."

The *Detroit News* was singled out for special criticism as the commission decided to "politely ask" the News if its crime coverage is "racially biased." The Rev. James L. Sheehan was more forthright. He suggested the CCR "act on the situation of community response to the editorial position of the Detroit News."

The report was prepared April 30 by the CCR field investigation division and was adopted on May 2. It was designed to present the facts in the incident in which one policeman was killed and another wounded, allegedly by members of the Black Legion. The Black Legion is the "army" of the Republic of New Africa (RNA), a black group that was holding its first anniversary meeting at New Bethel Church that night.

Police stormed the church after laying it under siege and arrested 142 persons, many of them women and small children. Police have claimed that they were "met with a hail of gunfire" from inside the church when they came to the aid of the stricken officers who had allegedly stopped their patrol car to investigate "10 or 12 Negro males with guns" on the street outside the church.

The CCR concluded that there was little, if any, evidence to indicate that police were met with gunfire from inside the church. "A painstaking examination of the church interior, exterior and the immediate surroundings," the commission said, "however, does not reveal any physical evidence to support this claim. Command officials admit that few shell casings were found inside the church.

The commission said that while some of those inside the church may have been involved in the shootings, all others were detained and arrested illegally. The CCR said the Constitutional rights of the prisoners had been flouted and that "the evidence is reasonably clear" that the police failed to advise the prisoners of their rights.

Police have steadfastly maintained they had "probable cause" to arrest all 142 persons, and that the administration of nitrate tests to some of the prisoners without the permission or presence of counsel was "procedure."

The commission also concluded that the persons inside the church were both physically and verbally abused by police. Staff members were provided with "detailed accounts of expressions of verbal epithets that were predominantly racial."

The physical brutality referred to "included two unprovoked shootings of unarmed persons and menacing of individuals with ends of rifles and pistol barrels against their heads."

The CCR called attention to: "Open and unrestrained searching of females by male officers in the church."

The commission also said it was “compelled to believe that police intelligence information on all phases of the RNA convention meeting did exist.” It was reported elsewhere that police had the church completely surrounded within 90 seconds after the alleged initial confrontation outside the church.

While the CCR was preparing their report blasting police conduct, the police themselves were busy on another front. Petitions bearing the signatures of 200,000 Michigan residents, some of them living in the Upper Peninsula, were presented to Governor Milliken by the Police Officers Association of Michigan (POAM).

The petitions demanded the removal of Judge Crockett from the bench, charging him with “gross misconduct” in freeing some of the 142 arrested at the church. The petition campaign was run by the Detroit Police Officers Association (DPOA), headed by Carl Parsell, who is also president of the POAM.

In another development, Recorder’s Court Judge Robert J. Colombo ruled that none of the Recorder’s Court judges could hear the contempt case- brought against attorney Kenneth Cockrel.

At a hearing, Colombo first said he would hear the case, but after listening to a tape recording of Cockrel’s comments on the handling of a pre-trial examination by Judge Joseph Maher, Colombo said Cockrel had intended his remarks to mean the entire Recorder’s Court.

Cockrel’s comments came in an interview to reporters following the examination. He accused Maher of not knowing anything about the law, and quoted a law book to make his point. He also accused Maher of racism and of setting a confiscatory bail on his client, Alfred Hibbit Jr.

Hibbit has been accused of assault with intent to murder in the wounding of Patrolman Richard E. Worobec outside the New Bethel Church. A second man, Clarence J. Fuller, accused of assault with intent to murder in the shooting of Worobec is due to stand trial October 26.

Colombo also ruled out a jury trial for Cockrel, and said he would ask the State Supreme Court to appoint a judge to preside at a full hearing of the case.

# fifth Estate

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