

4-6-68

SATURDAY

Strike Set Stage for King's End

By THOMAS PAPPAS

MEMPHIS (NANA)—The ultimate cause of Dr. Martin Luther King's death will be debated by the political philosophers and sociologists.

But the immediate setting for it was provided by a garbage strike.

IT ALL BEGAN ABOUT TWO months ago, on Feb. 12, when Memphis garbagemen demanded higher pay and a settlement of grievances.

Most of the city's 1,300 sanitation workers are Negroes, but there was no hint that race was a factor.

About 200 of the workers remained on the job when the strike began. The strikers wanted city recognition of their union—the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO.

Mayor Henry Loeb refused. He contended the strike was illegal.

Loeb came into office Jan. 1. There are three Negro members of the new council. Loeb had served previously as mayor and at one time was commissioner of public service, under which the sanitation department falls.

NATIONAL UNION LEADERS came to Memphis and public resistance to the strike was hardened when P. J. Ciampa, a union leader, publicly told Loeb: "You're a liar, shut your big fat mouth."

The garbage began to pile up, tons of it, and the city began hiring replacements for the strikers.

Loeb demanded the strikers return to work by Feb. 15 and negotiations broke off.

With the hiring of replacements a period of unrest began. Garbage trucks with police escorts made pickups on a once-a-week basis amidst threats and picketing, but

there was no major violence.

THE MINISTERS OF THE CITY became concerned about the welfare of the strikers' families. Loeb made available food stamps and ordered the light, gas and water division not to cut off utilities.

They marched on city hall—strikers, sympathizers, union leaders and ministers. Union demands now began to center around the issue of a union dues checkoff. Loeb refused.

During a march on Feb. 23 police and marchers clashed downtown. Police used spray gas to regain order. Several strike leaders were charged with contempt and sentenced to 10 days. This was appealed.

At a city council sit-in March 5, 116 sympathizers were arrested. There were other arrests and grand jury indictments for eight in connection with the Feb. 23 demonstration.

The marchers continued with police protection. Strikers and sympathizers marched almost daily from Clayborn Temple up famed Beale Street, along Main Street to city hall and back.

Roy Wilkins, NAACP executive director, came to Memphis March 14 and told 10,000 at a mass rally that the way to success for the strike was a firm but peaceful protest.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING came to Memphis March 18 and called for Negro workers and students to take a holiday March 22 and march downtown with him.

Snowfall canceled the march. It was held March 28. A group of young high school students broke from the march, smashing windows and looting. Part of the downtown area was a shambles. One Negro youth was shot to death by a policeman in a looting incident.

A curfew was put into effect and the National Guard called in.

Mediation efforts were begun and there was some hope union and city officials would get together.

DR KING SAID HE WOULD hold another march in the city and it was planned for this Monday.

City officials went into federal court and asked for an injunction, which was granted.

King asked that the injunction be lifted. He said he believed the march could be held without violence. This was Thursday.

That night King was shot and killed by a sniper as he stood on a balcony outside his room at the Lorraine Hotel. The rest is the anguish the nation is now experiencing.