

WP 3/2/70

The Maryland Explosions

There is a great public need to know as many details as possible about the explosion at Bel Air, Md., where the trial of H. Rap Brown was about to begin. That need can only be met by the most thorough investigation, including a detailed reconstruction of the automobile now in progress and laboratory and engineering tests to determine as nearly as possible how the explosion occurred. Meanwhile, the interests of calm and order are ill served by officials who persist in making speculative judgments based on incomplete information.

Already, the state police and the Baltimore medical examiner's office have stirred an angry reaction from black spokesmen because of their necessarily premature conclusion that the explosive charge was set off *accidentally* from inside the car after having been carried *voluntarily* by the occupants. By concurring with these police findings, the judge in the Brown case may have further muddied the waters swirling around the

trial since he did not have before him all possible evidence relating to the explosion.

The explosion 24 hours later in the Dorchester County Court House 70 miles away has added another dimension to the problem as well as greater urgency to the need to get to the bottom of the Bel Air blast. Here again, some officials did not wait to get all the information, but hurried to suggest that the two explosions were "directly related."

Governor Mandel should not hesitate to ask all available investigative and scientific resources of the federal government be focused on this investigation. Police officials have made a good start by calling for some help from the FBI and the experts on explosives at Edgewood Arsenal. The assistance of experts from the Federal Transportation Safety Board who are called in to reconstruct airplane accidents could also be asked for help. Meanwhile, the officials on the scene should confine their public commentary to demonstrable facts.