

Troops Invade Venice

JOAN HOFFMAN

In a major effort to crush the Black Panthers and any other groups that may associate with them, the LAPD is now sending expeditionary forces into the Black communities around Los Angeles.

Shirley Rose of the ACLU Police Malpractice Center in Venice told the Free Press that in the last few weeks there has been a regional pattern to the complaints received in the office. A few weeks ago Sunland residents were bringing in police malpractice complaints. Then the numbers increased coming from Watts. Most recently, 20 specific complaints were filed by Venice residents.

An old Jewish lady who lives in Venice said of last week's police terrorism, "I haven't seen anything like this since I was back in Germany."

Before Reddin recalled his 30-man Metro Squad from Venice last Friday evening, the police claimed 28 arrests, 16 of them for narcotics possession. Other estimates indicate as many as 50 were arrested.



Local citizen's complaints about the massive roust began to pour into the offices of Chief Reddin, Mayor Yorty, and the ACLU Center last Wednesday. On the following day, the ACLU sent Chief Reddin a telegram asking him to withdraw his troops from Venice.

In the telegram the ACLU pointed out that "Metro Squad officers, armed with shotguns, asking the whereabouts of Black Panthers and promising to 'get

them' are hardly calculated to bring peace to Los Angeles." The telegram continued, "We urge that you withdraw the Metro Squad immediately in the interest of preventing a threatening confrontation between the police and minority group members."

Mrs. Ethel Bryant was sent from the Mayor's office to check out some of the complaints. She watched Metro officers arrest a girl sitting in a car outside the Oakwood Wesley House. The officers pulled up in an unmarked car and shined a spotlight on the girl and a man getting into the vehicle with her. When the girl screamed, the officers forcefully subdued her, hit her companion in the abdomen during the struggle, and then arrested the girl. When Mrs. Bryant's driver got

out of his car, the officer told him to leave or he would be arrested. He replied, "I have a right to stand 60 feet away to observe whether you are using undue force or not." Had not Mrs. Bryant stepped out of the car and identified herself, there would have been more arrests in that one incident.

To the hippie community of Venice, it was the second big bust in 1968. For the Black community, the razzia seemed more like a deliberate attempt to provoke an incident. Mrs. Winifred Pierson, director of the Neighborhood Adult Participation Project, charged that the police were "acting like they were trying to incite a riot."

When it was over, Capt. Sillings, commander of the Venice police, claimed the Metro Squad was called into Venice to combat an "alarming increase in the crime rate."

Residents could recall no particular situation of tension or unrest before the Metro Squad was sent in. There had been a small demonstration at the Venice Service Center the Monday before the invasion, but it was only a peaceful protest over the phasing out of 14 staff members.

Shirley Rose told the Free Press the Metro Squad's rude behavior could not have done more to stop all communication between

the police and the community. She explained how the Venice police had been working with Black leaders since Martin Luther King's death to keep the community cool.

The Metro Squad seemed particularly to harass these same community leaders. Without reason or probable cause people in the Black community were pulled over and suddenly surrounded by unmarked cars (without licenses) and hatless officers with shotguns. The Blacks were addressed in derogatory terms, questioned about the Black Panthers, and subjected to elaborate weapons searches.

One complainant charged that two undercover agents with two shotguns and a revolver forced him and two companions to get out of their car and get down on their knees in the street for a 15-25 minute search for weapons. One officer, seeing a hat in the car, put his shotgun up to the head of the driver and demanded to know if he was a Black Panther. The two other riders, Venice community organizers, tried to see the officers' badge numbers. The officers refused to give any identification.

When Bob Castille and John Fleming, Venice Service Center workers, drove by, the cops threatened to arrest them if they didn't leave. Castille reported the incident to the Venice police and the Watch Commander sent over a sergeant to observe the search. The sergeant was told by the Metro agents "We're handling this. Get out of here."

Most of the people taken to jail were hippies. Anyone walking along the ocean front was subject to police investigation. Hippies

were told to "Get off the streets" and "If you don't want to get arrested, leave Venice."

Norman Goss, a Pepperdine graduate student and Sunday School teacher, told the Free Press how he was arrested and charged with battery and interfering with an officer for asking the Man "Hey man, what's happening." Goss said he had only

walked a few steps from his apartment to pass the time of day with two guys on the corner of Brooks and Speedway when they him they were officers.

Goss politely replied "You don't look like police officers." The undercover agents then ordered him to "Get out of here. Move on." When Goss said "it's a public sidewalk," the officers grabbed him by the arms and began to beat him. According to a friend standing nearby, Officer Segars then pulled out his pistol and threatened Goss that he was going to kill him if he gave further resistance. Goss doesn't remember offering any resistance.

On the same Thursday three more persons were arrested by the Metro Squad at the other end of Brooks. All within one hour, they busted a truck driver, a

hitch-hiker on the corner, and soon thereafter a friend of the truck driver who came to pick up the truck.

Another instance of the Gestapo tactics used by the Metro Squad occurred on Brooks when officers stopped a guy outside his apartment and frisked him. When they only found an apartment key, the undercover agents marched him back to his door, opened it, and searched the place. Finding nothing, they left.

Most of the complaints filed
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trial by now. They don't fool around with that kind of character.

GARRISON: Yes. And he wouldn't get too much sympathy from these guys either. They don't fool around with that kind of character. You know they're interested in law and order too.

LANE: It is incredible. With the assistance of a federal district court, a defendant need never go to trial.

GARRISON: You can sum it up in a sentence. A live President is much more important than a dead President. A dead President has

the same power as a dead cockroach. They know that. They didn't go to law school for nothing. The subject is power.

LANE: Do you think there will be an effort to enjoin the trial until the next election for District Attorney?

GARRISON: I don't think it will ever come to trial.

LANE: Yes, but what do you think the tactics will be?

GARRISON: Confidentially, not to be dramatic, I don't think that they have any alternative but to try and find a way to remove me one way or the other.

I don't think they have any alternative. I just put myself in their place time and again. And I'm not trying to be dramatic nor do I worry about it. But I think they just have no other alternative. They have been showing great concern over our steadily becoming more aware of the role of the CIA. Somewhere along the line they became aware that the facades no longer fool us.

Anybody who has looked at the Kennedy assassination has seen what federal funds and the CIA operation can produce when it has to. It does what it has to. They are working on a project now. They have a desk set up—probably here in this city—just to counter this operation. They have several programs. For example, a discrediting program with the national press. Ultimately if they can't do it any other way they'll use their final approach. This is the greatest power in the world. It is bent upon imperialism. All that it wants is merely control of the world. That's all. They are insane. Power does this to men.

LANE: What do you think the Supreme Court will do with the application for an injunction?

SCIAMBRA: Do you think that we ought to move to have Warren removed from considering the case?

GARRISON: Yes. And Fortas too. Fortas played an active role in helping to conceal the truth from the American people, for it was he who helped work out for the President the creation of the Warren Commission whose findings have now been totally discredited. Why Fortas would not be free to look at the case objectively, nor would any other man who received his judge's robes from Johnson. As for Warren, he played corner linebacker for the President's defensive unit back in 1964, and the American people

are still trying to find the ball.

SCIAMBRA: Then I suppose we should make a motion to recuse in the next few days.

GARRISON: Yes. I'll get to work on the phraseology soon. What will the Supreme Court do? I don't know. With Warren and Fortas out of the case the Court might surprise a lot of people. They have come up with some important and sound decisions lately. They may just be the last hope we have."

Who's next, Garrison or Lane?