

# Accord Set In Strike by Firefighters In Memphis

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By James Cole

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**MEMPHIS**—An agreement ordering 1,400 firemen back to work was negotiated abruptly in a tense courtroom late yesterday after an angry judge voiced harsh words about the strike that caused a state of emergency in this city.

The consent agreement between city and firemen's union officials may bring an end to the three-day walkout. Since the strike, more than 300 fires, many of suspicious origin, occurred in the city. A force of 1,100 National Guardsmen, State workers, volunteers and fire department supervisors tried in vain to cope with the outburst. No one was injured in the fires, but city officials said more than a million dollars worth of property was damaged.

It was not clear late yesterday whether rank-and-file members would abide by the consent order. The union leadership called a meeting for late last night to discuss the agreement.

City and union officials were unable to reach agreement on a back-to-work order during almost two hours of closed-door bargaining late yesterday. But when attorneys for both sides appeared in Chancery Court to announce a stalemate, it became clear that Chancellor Robert A. Hoffmann would issue an injunction against the firemen.

"The people concerned are the people of Memphis," the chancellor said, raising his voice to union attorney Allen S. Balir. "That's the primary concern. All other rights are secondary to the citizens of Memphis, Tenn."

"Your honor, we are unable to agree," BLAIR ANSWERED!

"Why?" Hoffmann shot back. "We're not playing games. We're dealing in people's lives. I've given you an hour and a half of work this thing out. What is the impasse?"

Blair asked to approach the bench, but the chancellor refused. "No," Hoffman declared. "I want to hear it out in the open."

Rather than offer an explanation for the impasse, Blair was allowed to confer in the courtroom with attorneys for the city. Blair then shuttled over to Kuhron Huddleston, president of the Local 1784 of the International Association of Firefighters. They



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Memphis Fire Captain Bill Hughes sits exhausted amid rubble of a feed mill.

spoke in whispers, then Huddleston nodded. And Blair announced that an agreement had been reached.

Blair told the chancellor that the strikers would be told to return to work. A timetable for their return was not specified, however.

The agreement will permit firemen to place two union members outside each fire station as "informational pickets," indicating that a contract with the city remains in dispute.

Earlier yesterday, firemen set up a picket line outside four city public works depots. Sanitation workers, represented by the American Federation of State, county and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) refused to cross the lines, thereby halting garbage pickups in Memphis.

An attorney for Memphis sanitation workers was present at yesterday's proceedings. He said sanitation workers would cross an informational picket line and would be on the job tomorrow.

Firemen struck Saturday morning after rejecting a contract that would have raised the salary of top-level privates from \$13,300 to \$15,550 by Oct. 1, 1979.

Union officials claimed that the city negotiators had assumed a "take it or leave it attitude." But the only remaining issue on the bargaining table when talks broke off was a question of night differential pay.

Union officials have blamed vandals, young arsonists, and "people out to collect fire insurance" for the dramatic increase in fires during the strike.

Three firemen have been arrested on arson charges since the strike. And Fire Director Robert Walker said the fires were often at the boundary of fire station districts, and when firemen responded to them, another would break out in the center of the district. Walker's meaning was clear that the fires were being set by persons familiar with firefighting districts.