

The Washi

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

The President's Commission

The mandate which President Johnson has given to his new Commission on Civil Disorders is one that should be interpreted narrowly. The Commission should set out promptly to determine what triggered the recent riots in Detroit, Newark, Plainfield, and elsewhere and what lessons we should learn from these cities about controlling riots. It should not set out to deal with the underlying causes of the trouble in our cities.

The Nation needs quick answers to the narrow questions raised by these bursts of violence. It needs them before this summer has ended so that the lessons we have learned can be applied in other cities.

The Nation needs to know what events set off these riots and what can be done to prevent similar events from occurring in other tense situations. It needs to know if the riots were planned and if outside agitators were responsible for them. It needs to know whether local police acted wisely in trying to put down the violence. It needs to know whether the police and the National Guard are equipped, physically and mentally, to cope with warfare in the city streets and, if they are not, what can be done about it.

In answering these questions, the Commission must take evidence and seek out the best advice it can get. It should not be harassed by competing investigations on Capitol Hill. It should not accept the easy answers we have already begun to hear—that the riots are part of a conspiracy, that outside agitators always are responsible, that the police acted wisely or unwisely—unless a full hearing supports those conclusions. It should remember that it is much easier to find organization after a riot than before it because, as every policeman and newsman knows, there are dozens of incidents in which some man or some group calls for a riot that never happened for each riot that does occur.

If this Commission is to produce this kind of information in time for its work to help the Nation this summer, it must forego the large questions raised by trouble in the cities—why and what can be done about it? A quick answer to those questions can consist of nothing but old generalities which, as the disaster in Detroit has shown us, are inadequate.

In addition, this Commission is not the kind of

body to deal with these fundamental questions. Those members of it who can bring some sort of expertise about cities to bear on its work are the very members whose jobs are most likely to keep them from spending much time on the Commission's study.

To deal with these basic problems, the President needs a second Commission — one composed of thoughtful men of national standing whose report would transcend the boundaries of politics, race, or section, men of the stature of those who served on the Warren Commission, the Hoover Commissions, and the Citizens Committee that produced the Marshall Plan. The President should tell such a Commission that the time has come to stop arguing about what should be done and to agree on what must be done. There may be no answers that we are sure will work but there must be better answers than those we are trying now.

The role that Congress can play is to establish a joint committee manned by powerful leaders of both houses. This committee could work with both Presidential Commissions to see that their recommendations are lifted above politics and are put into effect. Endless hearings of dozens of committees and subcommittees on Capitol Hill can produce at best only a fragmentary program. The Nation needs a unified effort to save its cities; the President and Congress are obliged to provide nothing less.