

Harassment in Chicago

To the Editor:

The harassment by Chicago police of medical volunteers serving on the street during the recent Democratic convention was an unprecedented action and an affront to the medical profession.

The two hundred or so practicing physicians, residents, internes, medical students, nurses and other health professionals, although clearly distinguished by white coats and red armbands, were repeatedly subjected to deliberate clubbing, macing and threats by the police while attempting to aid the wounded. To be seen on the street wearing a white coat and armband was often enough to invite police attack. Statements establishing medical identity were uniformly ignored or met with curses. At least a dozen medical personnel were clubbed or maced during the week.

One medical student was set upon by several policemen, knocked to the ground and repeatedly struck with nightsticks. Another student walking along the street with his white coat was struck in the neck by a steel ball propelled by a slingshot from a passing police car. Vehicles for evacuation of the wounded were denied access to the demonstration areas.

The medical contingent was

organized jointly by the Chicago chapter of the Medical Committee for Human Rights and the student health organizations of local medical schools. More than 75 per cent of the medical personnel were from the Chicago area. In spite of this Mayor Daley made a statement in the press implying that the medical contingent was a part of a terrorist group of outside agitators. Actually the medics took great care to maintain a position of neutrality at the demonstrations, and they had conferred beforehand with city and police officials to explain their presence as neutrals who were there to provide aid in the event of casualties.

The right of the ill and the injured to prompt medical attention is recognized throughout the civilized world. The denial of this right by Mayor Daley and his police force constitutes a breach of human rights and a denial of the right of the medical profession to carry out its traditional functions. It is imperative that this outrage not be permitted to go unchallenged by our profession.

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