

Boston Police Foray Spurs Investigations

By J. ANTHONY LUKAS MAY 15 1970
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BOSTON, May 14—At least three official investigations were under way today into what one city official described as "the worst case of police overreaction" in recent Boston history.

The Massachusetts Attorney General's Office, the Mayor's Office of Human Rights and the police department itself were studying a flood of citizen complaints about police actions in breaking up an unlawful block party in Boston's Back Bay area early Monday morning.

Residents of Hemenway Street, most of them college students or other young people, alleged that policemen indiscriminately clubbed innocent bystanders, broke down apartment doors, destroyed personal property and threw bricks, rocks and bottles at youths.

Among those who said they had been beaten by policemen were a blind musician and his wife; the assistant director of Northeastern University's Office of Housing; and a resident assistant in one of the university's dormitories. Among those who said policemen broke into their apartment were an elderly Austrian couple who were still so frightened yesterday they begged a reporter not to use their names.

Questioned about the events today, several high-ranking officials said the police had encountered resistance from

youths who threw rocks and bottles at them. But they conceded that some policemen had exceeded their authority and used undue force in clearing the area.

"Some policemen used the occasion to work off their frustration and anger by engaging in random acts of punishment and torment," said Barney Frank, executive assistant to Mayor Kevin H. White.

A. Reginald Evaves, administrator of the Mayor's Office of Human Rights, said, "on the basis of our findings so far, I am convinced that a number of police officers displayed insensitivity and aggressiveness in their overreaction to the events on Hemenway Street. If the police department does not check those officers who commit such acts under the cover of law and order, this summer is going to be extremely warm."

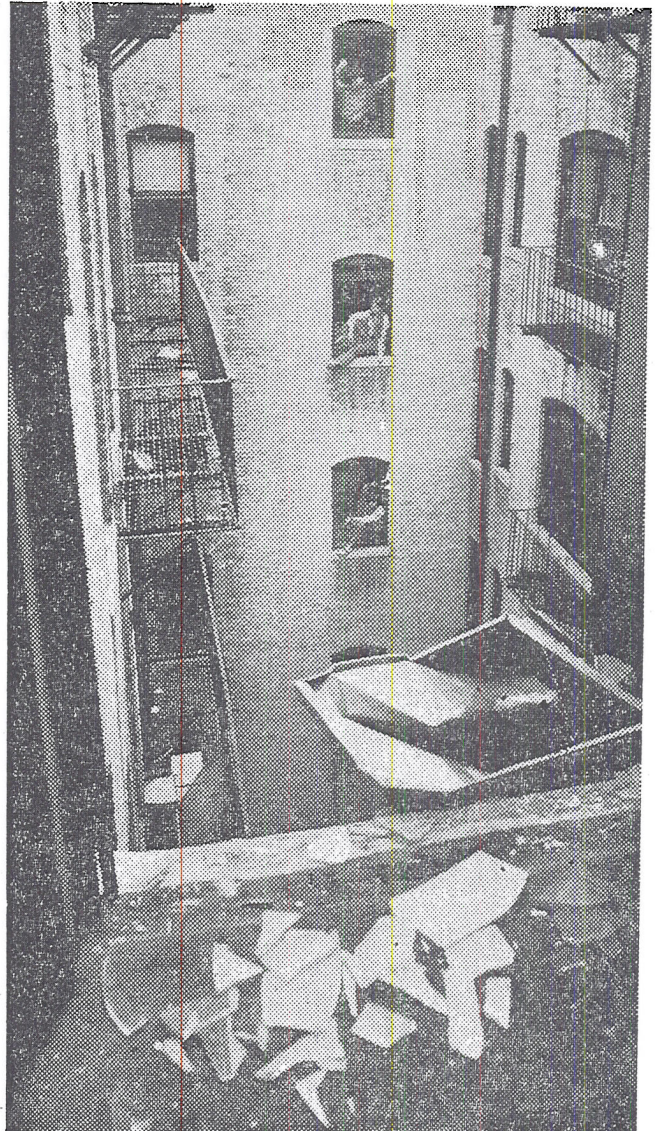
It was Mr. Evaves who called the Hemenway Street events "the worst case of police overreaction" he knew of in recent years here.

Another high-ranking city official, who asked that his name not be used, was told that many residents of Hemenway Street felt the police had "simply gone berserk" Monday.

"I'd have to agree with that," the official said, his head in his hands.

However, Police Superintendent

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Joyce Dopkeen for The New York Times

Residents of 115 Hemenway Street in Boston show windows they say were smashed by police on Monday. View of courtyard is from window allegedly broken that morning.

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William A. Bradley said: "I wouldn't want to make any judgment now." He said the department would thoroughly investigate all complaints before coming to any conclusion.

"These are not wasty times," the Superintendent said. "These are not times that people can make easy judgments after an event has happened. But I can tell you this: Property owners in this area are sick and tired of disorders totally caused by irrational irresponsible people."

The disorders on Hemenway Street grew out of a series of late-night "block parties," which were loosely related to student strike at nearby Northeastern University protesting the war in Cambodia and the killing of four students at Kent State University. Hemenway Street, a narrow, curving thoroughfare near a grassy park is home to many Northeastern students and others who attend the dozens of colleges and professional schools in the Back Bay area.

Marijuana and Frisbees

Spurred partly by the strike, partly by the balmy spring evenings, students began gathering in the street around 11 each night to listen to rock music, dance, drink, smoke marijuana and skim Frisbees until 3 or 4 A.M.

The first two parties — last Thursday and Friday nights — went smoothly with policemen from Boston's Station Four offering their cooperation. "They were really terrific parties," one student recalled. "And the police were as nice as they could be."

But then complaints from older citizens, unable to sleep, began filtering into the station-house. Just after midnight Saturday, the Tactical Police Force — a special police unit — moved into the area and cleared the street after brief skirmishes with the young people. This alarmed Northeastern's student "strike marshals," who asked Barney Frank to keep the patrol force out of the area Sunday night. Mr. Frank said today he agreed with the marshals to keep all policemen off the street as long as the students themselves could keep order.

Biggest and Noisiest

But Sunday's party was the biggest and noisiest yet. And apparently the news of Saturday night's skirmishes had spread quickly in Boston's radical community because most observers agreed that among the crowd of about 300 there were between 20 and 30 young people who were determined to resist the police.

Around 11:30 P.M., somebody

threw a flaming mattress off a roof. Others dragged garbage, a chair and a table into the street while some students stopped traffic.

By midnight, Mr. Frank said, more than 50 calls from outraged residents had poured into City Hall alone. "I contacted the student marshals who told me they were unable to control the crowd," he said, "so I called the police and told them to go in."

Around 12:40 A.M., the police moved. Estimates differ on the size of the force. Superintendent Bradley said it consisted of 60 to 70 men, about half from Station Four and half from the Tactical Patrol Force. Residents say they saw well over 100 policemen.

What They Met

Versions also differ somewhat about what the policemen encountered. Superintendent Bradley said the men were met by a "barrage" of rocks, bricks and bottles thrown from roofs. Residents said some rocks and bottles were thrown at the police but only by a very small group.

Most of the crowd, they said, retreated peacefully before the police.

According to eyewitness accounts, when the police reached the middle of Hemenway Street they broke and ran into many of the houses and Northeastern dormitories along both Hemenway and adjoining Gainsboro Street, clubbing anyone in their way.

At 110 Gainsboro Street, Michael Mandel, a blind student at the Berklee School of Music was sitting on the steps with his wife, Elizabeth, playing the flute. He recalls:

"I heard people shouting. Here they come," so I turned and walked up the steps to our first-floor apartment. I had my key out and was trying to fit it into the lock when I heard this tremendous smash of glass and then these blows hitting my head."

"We Kept Yelling"

Mrs. Mandel, who was following closely behind her husband, says that six to eight policemen broke through a glass door and began clubbing both of them. "We kept yelling 'We live here' but they just kept flailing away. Then they just turned around and ran out."

After lying for several hours in their darkened apartment listening to the police outside, they say, they crept out to their car and drove to Massachusetts General Hospital where Mr. Mandel received six stitches for a wound on the top of his scalp and three more stitches over his left eye and Mrs. Mandel received two stitches to close a cut on the back of her head.

Meanwhile, at 153 Hemenway Street, a Northeastern University dormitory, David Robbins, the university's assistant director of housing, was trying to get students into their rooms when the police charged into the building, he recalls.

Mr. Robbins says that he saw Charles Bearce, a resident assistant in the dormitory, wedged into a corner by one policeman. "As he was attempting to identify himself as a staff member of the dormitory, one officer knocked him down with a swing of his baton to the legs," Mr. Robbins said. He continued:

"When I saw what was happening I yelled and took one or two steps down the stairs to help. On seeing this, one officer advanced up the stairs and started swinging. I attempted to tell him who I was, but my statements were only met with a swing of the baton and epithets hurled at me. I was struck across the thigh four times."

Later, Mr. Robbins said, the police kicked open the door of his apartment and broke the lock but did not enter. Then they went to another apartment where he reported they rammed their clubs through shower doors, crushed bottles from the top of a dresser onto the floor and tipped a phone receiver off and struck it.

"When it failed to break he [the policeman] said, 'The God-damn thing didn't break' and laughed," Mr. Robbins said.

Student Tells of Attack

At 111 Gainsboro Street, George LaPerche, 20, a student at the Northeastern School of Photography, was standing on the steps with five friends when they saw the police round the corner, he recalls.

"We jumped up and ran into our first-floor apartment, but six or eight policemen followed, busted down the door and beat us over and over," he says.

Mr. LaPerche was treated at the hospital for a broken hand. Bob Donovan, 25, received four stitches in the head. Bill Nickerson, 20, was severely bruised on the left arm.

At 153 Hemenway Street the Austrian couple recall that they were in bed when policemen suddenly broke through their door, swept a fluorescent light off a table, tore a picture off the wall and then—without a sound again.

Meanwhile, several students recall a group of policemen had reached the roof of 103 Hemenway Street. Harvey W. Gershman, a resident assistant there, says he saw 10 policemen standing on the roof "throwing pipes, rocks, stones and anything else they could find onto the sidewalk, parked cars and people." Four Northeastern freshmen in the same dormitory—Tom Hofer, Alan Pajuh,

Norman Lash and Rich Langford—report seeing the same thing.

Tom Hofer says, "It was incredible. I saw this policeman hold a huge rock over the edge of the roof and then drop it directly on the roof of this green Plymouth."

During this time, policemen and students were shouting epithets and obscenities at each other. Students concede they heard their colleagues shout "Pig," "Power to the people" and worse at the police. In turn, they say, some policemen shouted "Kent State got four—we want more," "If you think Kent State was bad, just wait," "Marxist Maggots" and "Commies. If we catch you, kid, we're going to beat your head into jelly."

Ed Ferguson, 19, a reporter for WNEU, the Northeastern radio station, said he saw a student walking along Hemenway Street when a policeman atop one of the buildings threw a rock at him. "It hit right in front of the guy," Mr. Ferguson recalls. "He looked up and saw the policeman and shouted, 'Hey, I'm going home.' The policeman shouted, 'Go ahead.' But when the kid had taken two more steps the policeman threw another rock that landed a foot in front of him."

Three policemen were reported slightly injured in the melee. Myron Butman, 22, a student at Northeastern's College of Criminal Justice, said he saw a policeman throw rocks from the street through dormitory windows.

Mr. Butman, who worked for two months this year in the police department's Communications and Records Bureau, said, "There was provocation for clearing the street, but there was absolutely no provocation for the police to enter the buildings or to do what they did after they entered the buildings."

"This whole experience has just driven home to me the need for professionalization of police," he said. "In New York, police stand by while construction workers attack kids. Here police attack kids with animal joy. They weren't police officers, they were a mob."