

# U.S. Report Fears Violence by Groups May Become Norm

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By JAMES M. NAUGHTON

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 3 —

Group violence in America poses a danger that "extreme, unlawful tactics will replace legal processes as the usual way of pressing demands," the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence said today.

The commission, in a 16-page statement on group violence, made clear that it viewed violent tactics as a threat to the democratic process, whether they were used by protesters or their opponents.

Despite increased violence in the last decade of social unrest, the commission found that the "widely held belief that protesting groups usually behave violently is not supported by fact."

But it expressed a sense of urgency in advocating that the nation take steps now,

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before group violence became more prevalent, to make it "both unnecessary and unrewarding" as a political tactic.

Ever since the commission was established by President Johnson on June 10, 1968, it has emphasized in a series of reports the need for renewed vigor by government and society in reaching the goal of equal justice.

The same theme underlies the commission's latest report. To it are added pleas that channels be kept open for the expression of protest, but that violence by dissidents or their opponents be controlled through firm but fair action.

Specifically, the commission recommended that:

¶Police departments improve their capacity to anticipate, prevent and control group disorders. The commission saw a need for authorities to cooperate with peaceful protesters, for instance, in granting parade permits and emphasized that "use of excessive and illegal force is an always dangerous and usually ineffective tactic for authorities seeking to quell unrest.

¶The President should seek legislation granting Federal courts authority to grant injunctions, sought by the Attorney General or private citizens, against "threatened or actual interference by any person, whether or not under color of state or Federal law with the rights of individuals or groups to freedom of speech, freedom of the press, peaceful assembly and petition for redress of grievances."

Private and governmental institutions should encourage development of competing news media and discourage "increased concentration of control over existing media," further, journalists must continue to improve and re-evaluate their standards and practices, including creative self-criticism.

At the heart of the commission's report was the belief that violence was not new to American history, that it was best avoided by providing peaceful methods of voicing protest and that, in the complex United States society of today, there was an increasing burden on news media to analyze and explain social problems.

## When Violence Occurs

"All societies generate some discontent because organized life by its very nature inhibits most human beings," the report said. "Group violence occurs when expectations about rights and status are continually frustrated and when peaceful efforts to press these claims yield inadequate results.

"It also occurs," the report continued, "when the claims of groups who feel disadvantaged are viewed as threats by other groups occupying a higher status in society."

Violent conflicts between such groups occur more frequently in times of rapid social change, the report said. Since America always has been a nation of rapid social change, violence is not new to it.

At the outset, however, it should be made clear, the commission said, that group violence is not necessarily related to group protest. In the words of the report, "it is group protest, not group violence, that is as American as cherry pie."

The commission cited earlier violence in United States history: the Boston Tea Party, the Whisky Rebellion, John Brown's raid, Ku Klux Klan terrorism, draft riots in New York in 1863, racial clashes following the Civil War and severe clashes as organized labor grew in the half century before 1930.

During such periods of unrest, "most of the community continued to live in peace," the report said.

## 'Danger of Contagion'

The commission's concern, however, was with what it termed "the danger of contagion," with violence tending to become a style — tactics of protesters in one country spreading into others, techniques of university radicals leading to their adoption by students in high schools.

"Given present trends, it is not impossible to imagine an America in which the accepted method for getting a traffic light installed will be to disrupt traffic by blocking the intersection, where complaints against businessmen will call for massive sit-ins, where unsatisfactory refuse collection will cause protesting citizens to dump garbage in the street," the report said.

"We do not believe that a healthy society can result from the widespread use of such tactics."

Even in the short run, the commission said, it is doubtful that violence as a tactic helps protesters' cause. "The fears and resentments created by these tactics have strengthened the political power of some of the most destructive elements in American society," the report said. It did not elaborate.

In support of its view that most protesters are peacefully inclined, the commission cited the antiwar march in Washington Nov. 15.

Attorney General John N. Mitchell has charged that the demonstrations were "marred by such extensive physical injury, property damage and street confrontations that I do not believe that — over-all — the gathering here can be characterized as peaceful."

The commission, however, said, "In the largest single protest demonstration in American history, the overwhelming majority of the participants behaved peacefully."

## Eisenhower's View

Milton S. Eisenhower, chairman of the commission, said in a news conference today that his personal view of the march Nov. 15 was that it was "quite remarkable" how small the violence was. He cited two outbursts—one at the Justice Department and another near the South Vietnamese Embassy—but said the event had been "on the whole peaceful."

The commission commended the District of Columbia police for their handling of the outbursts during the peace march and for their conduct last January during President Nixon's inauguration.

In contrast, the report cited "excessive force" used by the Chicago police and the refusal by the Chicago officials to grant permits to demonstrators during the Democratic National Convention in August, 1968.

A "hopeful sign" noted by the commission, however, was the decision by the Chicago authorities to grant march permits last October to the Weatherman faction of Students for a Democratic Society and the "calm and restraint" of the police in quelling violence begun by the protesters.

Just as the police must have clear and fair plans to deal universities," the report said. It added that the practice of "keeping rules fuzzy so that dissident groups are 'kept off balance' has failed miserably."

The commission's recommendation for new Federal court authority to protect against First Amendment violations is aimed both at legal authorities and "unruly mobs."

## Injunctions Favored

Although the Constitution safeguards the rights of teachers to teach, student to learn and speakers to speak, the report said, existing remedies available to individuals are "not adequate."

The commission's proposal would permit the Attorney General or citizens to seek injunctions against such things as interference with speakers at public meetings, seizure of campus buildings or blocking of public areas.

At the same time, the commission said "difficulties presented by today's society for those who want their protests and demonstrations to be seen and heard leave most people unaware of how deeply felt many grievances have become."

It urged news media to continue to probe underlying social conditions. As Mr. Eisenhower put it, the sole freedom an individual cannot exercise is that of information, and this places a heavy responsibility on mass media to provide information and give alternative solutions to problems.

Whether violence follows discontent "depends on popular attitudes and how effectively political institutions respond to the threat of violence and to demands for the redress of group grievances," the commission wrote.

It said that not all demands deserved to be granted, but added:

"What is essential is that when the basic justice of the underlying grievance is clear, an effort to take suitable measures of accommodation and correction must be made.

"The effort must be made even though other groups feel threatened by the proposed correction, and even though they may resort to violence to prevent it. We cannot 'insure domestic tranquility' unless we 'establish justice'—in a democratic society one is impossible without the other."