

WHY WATTS EXPLODED

HOW THE GHETTO FOUGHT BACK



By DELLA ROSSA

25¢

AN AFRICAN REVOLUTIONIST COMMENTS ON WATTS:

When I was driven through Watts and I saw the gaping holes and I saw the result of the fires that went up those seven days, it reminded me of my own country, and I saw that we are indeed the same people. I looked at this sight, which moved me beyond words. Because I know one thing. Those people who have never known oppression must have been puzzled by what took place at Watts here... But when I saw those remnants of the old shops I knew *exactly* how the people felt at the time when the flames went up.

What went up that day, those flames, represented one thing. It was a burning not of those houses there you see, not of those shops there that you see, it was a burning up, a setting into flames, of a past, a whole past of suffering, generations of suffering, were going up into flames, from the days of slavery, right up to this day. . .

I know that together with that went something else, the old slave mentality. When a man is a slave, he is a slave so long as his *mind* is also enslaved... A slave who has sloughed off his slave mentality is already half free. This I know. To me those flames then burnt that part which is a relic of the past – the slave mentality. This has happened in my country, and that is why today the black man in my country stands up and faces the other men as a man. He *demand*s the return of his country to its rightful owner and he *demand*s his rightful place among other men and the restoration of his dignity, his human dignity. This is possible, because over a period of years we have sloughed off the slave mentality.

– I.B. Tabata, *President,*
Unity Movement of South Africa
Los Angeles, Dec. 10, 1965.



WHY WATTS EXPLODED

BACKGROUND FOR AN EXPLOSION

The explosion known as the "Watts Riots", which covered a 50-square-mile area of Los Angeles, damaged or destroyed 600 buildings and resulted in 34 deaths, was actually a Negro uprising with revolutionary implications. Through this act of rebellion, the Afro-American gained a consciousness and stature never before known. Although it was without leadership and lacked an articulated program, it shocked the white world into an awareness of the deep-seated discontent of the Northern Negro. The Watts events of August, 1965 remain a subject of world-wide interest.

The basic causes of the uprising were the constant abuse by the police, symbol of the white power structure, and the prevailing unemployment that continued generation after generation. Almost the entire Negro ghetto, men, women and children, either participated in or supported the revolt.

The McCone Commission, appointed by Gov. Edmund G. Brown to investigate the Watts uprising, in its report issued in December, 1965 admitted that there were at least 25,000 Negro unemployed in central Los Angeles and that this was a main cause of the ghetto's "spiral of failure." Resentment of a society that offered neither jobs nor hope for jobs had brought about the fury of destruction, the report stated. While the Commission described the basic ingredients of the uprising, it offered no solution to the plight of the Negro. It suggested a series of reforms designed to make ghetto life more tolerable, but not the abolition of the ghetto.

Unprecedented in this country in its magnitude and fury, the Watts rebellion stood on the shoulders of all previous struggles for civil rights and integration. Going beyond these struggles, it was a sharp rejection of Negro leaders who wanted to stop the fight short of complete human rights. The 1965 Voting Rights Act had just been passed. This had little meaning for the Northern ghetto Negro, whose primary interest is in getting a job.

The six-day uprising that began the evening of August 11 in the Watts area quickly spread through the whole southeast Los Angeles ghetto and there were flare-ups in Pasadena, Long Beach and San Diego. The fury of the rebels brought a loss estimated at \$40 million to white shop owners. Of the 34 who lost their lives in the rebellion, almost all were Negroes killed by police and National Guardsmen. Over 4,000 people were arrested, including many women and children.

LIFE IN THE GHETTO

There is a deceptive look about the southeast Los Angeles ghetto area, in Watts and along the side streets that go off Broadway and Central Avenue. The homes are neither the dark, rat-infested tenements of the Eastern cities nor the shacks of the South. Some of the streets are lined with palms or shade trees. Yet it was here that the biggest Negro uprising this country has ever known took place.

Frame houses that were built as single family units are often subdivided by absentee landlords and rented to several families. The buildings are allowed to deteriorate until condemned by the Health Department. The rickety structures are then torn down and the land sold.

About 22.5% of the houses in Watts and about 26.5% of those in Willowbrook and North Compton are dilapidated, according to a report from Los Angeles County Community Services, using 1960 census figures.

The Los Angeles City Department of Building and Safety insists that only 4% of the buildings in Watts are below standard. But a University of California at Los Angeles poverty study published at the end of 1964 noted that Watts is saturated by poor quality rentals, "the only type many residents there can afford."

Although more than half of Los Angeles County homes are owner-occupied, only 17% of the houses in the ghetto study area were found to be occupied by their owners.

Even houses that look fine on the outside are often run-down on the inside. On Beach Street, a two-bedroom, \$80-a-month apartment is only nine months old, but the family there says, "It's so cheaply built, it's already falling apart."

Some of the houses are even outwardly ramshackle, with peeling paint, broken windows and yards littered with refuse. A 20-year-old mother of three children lives in a broken-down court apartment on East 120th Street. Her rent is \$59.50 a month. At one time a dead dog lay in the litter of rotting furniture outside. It had been there for days, but the tenants of the court were not concerned enough to bury it - evidence that the demoralization of continued poverty can be as deadening as poverty itself.

There are people who suffer from hunger and malnutrition in Los Angeles, one of the richest cities in the world. Seeking the underlying reasons for the explosion in a series of post-uprising articles entitled, "The View From Watts," Jack Jones, a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote: "No one knows how many children in that poverty-ridden region find learning of little importance compared to hunger pains."

At least 13 of the elementary schools in south Los Angeles do

not have cafeterias because the pupils cannot afford to eat in such places, even though they are operated at cost. The Parent-Teacher Association provides 1,300 free lunches a day in the school district, but these are not available in schools that have no cafeterias. Yet it is here that the need is most desperate.

Armand Duvernay, a Negro graduate student advising parents in one area, said: "There is no attempt at some of these schools to find out why kids misbehave. Hunger has a lot to do with it."

One family with six children could not enroll them in Weigand Avenue School at the start of the semester because some of them did not have shoes.

A girl dropped out of Jordan High School in Watts at 16 when she had a baby. Actually, she said, she hadn't been learning much anyway. "I don't think the teachers I had in an all-Negro school were really concerned with the kids learning like they are in white schools. I think I could have learned more at a white school."

Marie, a 20-year-old welfare recipient who also dropped out of high school at 16, recalled that when she was in elementary school, "My daddy had me reading all kinds of books at home, astronomy and all that, and the teachers would get mad at me and say I was tryin' to be too smart in class. I had this attitude - what can the teacher teach me? I quit studying." In high school she was stifled in an elementary course. "After two months of this - and coming to school loaded every day, there wasn't nothing else to do, so I might as well come to school drunk - I quit."

These were the conditions in Watts that led to the uprising. They remain basically unchanged.

THE AUGUST REBELLION

The uprising began with a routine arrest of a Negro in the Watts ghetto by a white officer of the California Highway Patrol. Marquette Frye, 21, was charged with drunken driving and his mother and brother were arrested when they protested.

Young Frye was handcuffed and forced into a squad car with a billy club jabbed into his stomach. He was badly beaten on the head. He later said that "it was a day or two before I knew what was going on."

The arrests, the abuse, the beatings, were routine. But this time a crowd of 200 gathered. They shouted at the police and threw rocks. This, too, had happened before in Los Angeles, not only in the Negro ghetto but in the Mexican-American areas.

That night, the story of the arrests was passed from mouth to mouth and the people of the ghetto were ready to believe the worst. Brutalities, including unjustified killings by police, are part of their lives. School boys are often stopped, questioned, insulted and ac-

cused by the police as they walk home from school. Women never know when they may be confronted by police and accused of being prostitutes. One Watts man had been stopped by police and accused of burglary. He told police that they had the wrong man. "You're lying, nigger!" the policeman yelled at him and hit him across the mouth with his pistol.

Repeated indignities and brutalities had been seared into the minds of the crowd of about 1,000 that gathered that night of August 11 to confront the police. The man who had been hit in the mouth with a pistol, a mild-mannered person, was among them. Anger was evident in the excited talk, witnesses said afterwards, but there was no violence until some 25 squad cars of the Los Angeles police descended on the Watts ghetto with sirens screaming. Anger then reached the flash point and the rebellion was on. That night about 50 police cars and cars of white persons entering the area were stoned. Some cars were overturned and burned.

During the first hours, police made no effort to keep unsuspecting whites from driving through the area along a main thoroughfare. Later, an eight-block section was barricaded.

Rock-throwers attacked any "Whiteys" who entered the area. Negroes driving through held up one, two, or three fingers to indicate they were from the Watts, Compton, or Slauson area. These signals, developed on the spot, were quickly recognized by the rebels as "blood brother" pass signals — one of the first indications of the fraternity and solidarity that characterized the uprising.

The "rioting," as the authorities called it, was an outpouring of frustration and fury. A teen-age girl threw rocks at police with tears streaming down her face. "Fuck you, cop!" she yelled, "Fuck you!" A middle-aged woman watching a KTTV television mobil unit burn, smiled and said, "Ain't that something. That truck is burning UP!" A lot of people were smiling.

The next day, on August 12, the "responsible leaders" of the Negro community tried to get the "rioters" together for a meeting in Athens Park in order to ease tensions. About 250 people of the ghetto, mostly teenagers, were there. The meeting turned into a denunciation of police brutalities. One 16-year-old grabbed a microphone and threatened to attack white neighborhoods.

It was on this second day that people of the ghetto began smashing the shop-windows of the "Whiteys, the blood-suckers," and taking merchandise. Liquor stores were raided. Pawn shops and gun shops were stripped of guns. Next, they went after food and clothing. Around 7,000 people took to the streets that second night. Most of the store windows along 103rd Street, in the heart of Watts, were smashed and emptied of merchandise.

"By this second night," wrote Jerry Farber of the Non-Violent

Action Committee,* "the people of Watts were in possession of a good deal of their own community. People were proud. The overall mood was joyful. The looting itself was done with joy but it was no joke. They wanted that food."

It was on this night that Comedian Dick Gregory, a civil rights activist, spoke to the rebels through a police bull-horn. His appeals to go home were ignored. A stray bullet grazed his thigh.

On Friday, August 13, the burning of stores began. In one area 3,000 people were confronted by 900 armed police. Markets, liquor stores and overturned cars burned unchecked in an eight-block area along Avalon Boulevard. Police admitted that the situation was completely out of control. "All fire trucks and ambulances were ordered to keep out of the area because of the rampaging mobs," the *Los Angeles Times* reported. All whites, except police and firemen, were warned to stay out of the ghetto. Police Chief William H. Parker put in his first call for the National Guard.

By the early evening of August 13, the whole southeast section of Los Angeles was veiled in a pall of smoke. From high points in other sections of the city, a dense gray cloud could be seen over the entire area. As the rebellion gained momentum a group of about 50 people formed an Ad Hoc Committee to Support Grievances of Watts Negroes. There were spokesmen in the committee from the Young Socialist Alliance, the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party, and the DuBois Club.

Oscar G. Coover, spokesman for the Socialist Workers Party, said at the meeting: "What we should do is give our support to the Negro community. They have been invaded by outside forces, just as the U.S. troops did in Vietnam. All police and all troops should be withdrawn from the ghetto. Let the Negro people organize themselves to restore order."

As the meeting ended, a report came in that a deputy sheriff had been killed. Now police vengeance could be expected, but the group followed its decision to go directly to police headquarters to demand an end to police brutality. Police with shotguns watched the demonstrators from the roof of the police garage.

The police did not withdraw from the ghetto. Using their accustomed methods of "restoring law and order," they killed four Negroes that Friday night.

Fires blazed from 41st Street to 108th Street. Fire damage was estimated at \$10 million. The first of 2,000 National Guardsmen reached the area about 9:45 p.m., bolstering the outmatched force of 560 local police.

* The Non-Violent Action Committee (N-VAC) is a split-off from the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). N-VAC headquarters is in the heart of the Central Ave. ghetto and it is the only ghetto-oriented civil rights group in Los Angeles. N-VAC members were in the midst of the uprising.

"Race rioting has brought anarchy," said the *Los Angeles Times* Saturday morning, August 14. "Anarchy is spreading."

Times reporter Charles Hillinger had entered the area August 13 and brought back this report:

"'White devils, what are you doing here?'" the rebels chanted at newsmen. One teen-age girl shouted:

"'White man, you started all this the day you brought the first slave to this country.'

"Another called out: 'You created this monster and it's going to consume you. White man, you got a tiger by the tail. You can't



hold it. You can't let it go.'

"'The next time you see us we'll be carrying guns.'

"'It's too late, white man. You had your chance. Now it's our turn.'

"Stores were set afire as newsmen stood watching, surrounded by mobs of angry Negroes.

"'That's the hate that hate produced, white man,' the Negro owner of a service station declared.

"'This ain't hurting us none. We have nothing to lose. Negroes don't own the buildings. You never did a decent thing in your life for us, white man.'"

As the white reporter, Hillinger, saw it: "The mood was ugly, almost hopeless, sickening."

But the general mood, according to Negroes who live in the area, was one of "a strange, carnival gaiety."

One Negro observer said, "Somebody would throw a brick

through a window of a store owned by some blood-sucking Whitey who victimized the black residents by selling over-priced items on gouging credit terms. Then everyone would pour in and come out with arms loaded with goods, happily smiling. Then the place would be set on fire, 'So they can't send us any bills anymore.'"

This writer watched August 14, about 1:00 a.m., as the rebels broke into shops at Venice Blvd. and Western Ave. and then confronted the police as the squad cars roared up. It wasn't just the merchandise that was important to these poverty-stricken people of the ghetto. Evident was the spirit of combat against long-standing wrongs, of fighting back in joyous retaliation, and a new fraternity.

"BURN, BABY, BURN!"

"Burn, baby, burn!" the hep phrase borrowed from a disk jockey, became the slogan of the rebellion. It expressed the mood of the uprising and became a password for safety in the riot area. "Burn, Watts, burn!" was spray-painted on buildings as far north as the intersection of Vernon and Central Aves., the original heart of the ghetto.

One participant in the uprising said, "The people have made up their minds, if I'm killed, so what, I have nothing to live for anyway. Nobody who lives here says, let's stop what's going on. Some of them are pretty happy about it. The young guys say, 'Why die for the white man in Vietnam? I'd rather fight my own war here!'"

"We've got no leadership," this Negro spokesman continued. "The official Negro leaders don't even live down here. They're too far removed and we've pushed them aside.

"The naive whites just can't understand the revolutionary aspect of the looting and burning. This is a rebellion and the Negroes who get arrested don't call it jail - they call it concentration camp."

The Negro rebels were attacking "anything white that moves." But they were attacking the white power structure rather than seeking racial vengeance. In one case, Negroes jeered and pelted firemen with stones as they fought a fire. A wall collapsed, trapping two firemen. For a moment the rioters fell silent. Then they rushed in and with bare hands tried to save the two men. One died, but the other was rescued by the rebels.

By the afternoon of August 14, seventeen Afro-Americans had been killed by police. Arrests were made on a wholesale, indiscriminate basis. The old Lincoln Heights jail was reopened to accommodate some of the thousands of prisoners. Property losses at this point were estimated at \$100 million.

Gov. Brown flew home from Greece. "Nobody told me there was an explosive situation in Los Angeles," he complained. "California is a state where there is no racial discrimination." Police Chief Parker revealed his deep-seated prejudice against Negroes with the

statement: "Somebody threw a rock, and then, like monkeys in a zoo, everybody else started throwing rocks."

Republican politicians made their statements by August 14. California's Senator Thomas Kuchel called the uprising "the rule of the jungle," and Assemblyman Don Allen called it "the stairway to anarchy." To Evangelist Billy Graham it was a "rehearsal for a revolution."

The *Los Angeles Times* called the Watts uprising a "guerrilla war." The Firestone sheriff's substation reportedly was under siege, with armed men zipping past and taking potshots at the station.

An 8:00 p.m. curfew covering a 50-square-mile area was declared by Acting Gov. Glen Anderson on August 14. At the same time, he proclaimed Los Angeles a disaster area. Watts had become a battleground. There were 21,000 National Guardsmen and local police in the area. They had killed 23 residents of the ghetto. The number of arrests had grown to 1,701.

When the National Guard rolled in to restore law and order, the killings really began. "Law and order means that the police are free to start beating heads again," said Woodrow Coleman, co-chairman of the Non-Violent Action Committee (N-VAC). "I called to a policeman to come help a wounded man. But what happened was that a car with five uniformed officers in it came along and when they saw a crowd on the corner they got out and just started swinging with their billy clubs. They didn't say anything, just started swinging."

With the National Guard to back them up, Los Angeles police swung into action. One story in the Negro press told of the murder of Aubrey Griffen, killed by a fusillade of bullets as he stood, unarmed, in his lighted doorway in the early morning of August 16. Awakened by noise, he had turned on the light to investigate. As he fell, he called to his wife, "I've been shot, call the police." But it was the police who had killed him.

The Los Angeles power structure was shaken by the scope and intensity of the rebellion. "There are no words to express the shock, the sick horror," the *Los Angeles Times* said in a front-page editorial on Sunday morning, August 15. "The first grim order of business is to put down what amounts to civil insurrection, using every method available." Mayor Samuel Yorty inspected the area — from a helicopter.

That Sunday the sun shone only dimly through the smoky murk that hung over the 50-square-mile "riot area." Broken glass and other debris blocked the streets. The intersection of Vernon and Central Avenues looked as though it had been bombed. Gutted buildings still smoldered. New fires were springing up. National Guardsmen clustered at corners with machineguns and police patrolled the area with shotguns bristling from the windows of squad cars. The sound of gunfire was still heard.

Before August 15 was over, police and National Guardsmen had killed 27 people. One was a 19-year-old Japanese youth "suspected of looting." Police aimed at his head — and killed him. Over 2,500 were arrested. A judge set bail at \$5,000 for all offenses.

Gov. Brown arrived in Los Angeles and said the violence was caused by "a hoodlum gang element that took advantage of a situation." When push came to shove, this liberal Democrat showed that he was as solidly with the power structure as any reactionary Goldwaterite.

"Here in California," the governor said, "we have a wonderful working relation with the Negroes. We got along fine until this happened. This is the first trouble we have had." The terminology (that "we" must have a "working relationship" with "them") is indicative of the gulf separating the ghetto dwellers from their white rulers.

On the night of August 15 there was a scare report that a "major riot" had broken out in Long Beach and that a policeman had been killed by snipers. The next day it was revealed that hundreds of Negroes were throwing things at police, but no snipers were found. The policeman had been killed by a shot fired by a fellow policeman.

Although sniping was reported throughout the uprising, and four white youths were arrested as snipers, no Negro sniper was found. One observer, writing in the *Los Angeles Free Press*, maintained: "There were no snipers!"

Over the weekend, frightened whites rushed to buy guns. Sales went up 250%. A white woman brought a gun into her home and her child accidentally killed himself with it.

Church groups and liberal elements were keeping themselves busy sending food into the riot area. For the most part, these elements, comfortably feeling they had done their part, felt no need to uncover the causes of the uprising, or to find a way to eliminate them.

On the evening of August 16, Gov. Brown made a tentative declaration that the "riot was over." The dead now totalled 32. The 8:00 p.m. curfew was lifted the next day. But there were still reports of fire-bombing and sniping. Officers in a sheriff's car complained that shots had been fired at them.

MUSLIM MOSQUE ATTACKED

The night after the uprising had been declared ended, Los Angeles police used the ghetto rebellion as cover for an attack on the Black Muslims. Shooting their way into the Muslim Mosque at 56th Street and Broadway, they arrested 59 Muslims, eight of them bleeding from cuts made by flying glass. Muslims testified at a court hearing that they were beaten by police during the raid. Nineteen of

those arrested were charged with "assault to commit murder," but all were acquitted in subsequent trials for lack of evidence. The charge was based on an unverified report that a shot had been fired from the building. The Muslims believe in self-defense but take a principled stand against the use of guns or knives. Police said they went to the building because they had a report that guns were being unloaded at the Mosque from a truck. The report was false. Not a single weapon was found in the Mosque.

It became evident that the police had seized a long-awaited opportunity to terrorize the Muslims, make arrests, and seize membership lists and other records. They left the Mosque a shambles.

(The Los Angeles police shot down a group of unarmed Muslims in April of 1962, killing one and permanently crippling another — and then charged the others with assault to commit murder.)

A feeling of outrage spread through many areas of the ghetto community after this attack on the Mosque. Expressions of anger began to be directed at church and civil rights leaders who failed to defend the black nationalists against the white man's police force.

At a meeting of the NAACP in the Grant A.M.E. church on August 29, angry young militants shouted at the old-line leadership, "Why are you not defending our black brothers, the Muslims?" That night a fire-bomb damaged the pastor's office at the church.

The Watts rebels were looking for new leaders. The Rev. Martin Luther King came to Los Angeles. On August 18, he spoke to an overflow crowd at the Westminster Neighborhood Association building in Watts. He was heckled, jeered, and rejected. The Northern ghetto Negro was showing a readiness to fight for more than the right to vote.

"All over America," Dr. King said, "the Negroes must join hands —"

"And burn!" interrupted a man standing on the edge of the crowd.

A woman told Dr. King, "Let Chief Parker and Mayor Yorty come down here and see how we live."

"And," yelled a teenage girl, "they will burn the most!"

Dr. King promised to try to get Chief Parker and Mayor Yorty down to Watts.

"I know you'll be courteous to them," he said. The crowd roared with laughter.

Dr. King and his co-worker, Bayard Rustin, decided to hold no more meetings in Watts.

4,200 PRISONERS

Over 4,200 people were arrested during the uprising. Men, women and children were jailed. Many were arrested just for being

in the area or for being black. Most had great difficulty in raising bail-bond money. Two-and-a-half months after the uprising, 200 of the prisoners were still in jail.

Of the 4,200 arrested, 400 were juveniles. Among the adults, 1,500 were charged with misdemeanors and 2,260 with felonies. Over 900 of the felony charges were later dismissed. Of those brought to trial, nearly one-half were acquitted. It became obvious that a good many of the arrests were without cause. The jailed innocents suffered loss of income and in some cases loss of jobs.

Some of the rebels asked, "Who's been doing the stealing? It's the Whitey merchants in the ghetto who've been overcharging us because they know it isn't easy for us to go someplace else."

A story is told of the "\$1,000 lamp." The salesmen in a ghetto furniture store called it that because it had been sold on credit, repossessed, and put back on sale time after time as new. It was smashed in the uprising.

The American Civil Liberties Union, which supplied volunteer attorneys for the prisoners, requested vainly that all prisoners be released without bail. The Socialist Workers Party, in a press release dated August 19, asked for a general amnesty for all prisoners, maintaining that they were not criminals but victims of class warfare and that "their grievances are just." But the authorities were determined to punish those who had dared challenge the white power structure.

INQUEST WHITEWASH

Coroner's inquests into police killings in the Watts uprising were "attempts to justify the shooting of elderly citizens, unarmed youths and innocent bystanders," declared City Councilman Billy G. Mills, who made the accusation publicly at the conclusion of the inquests in October.

The coroner's inquests called 26 of the killings "justifiable homicide." The victims were rebels accused of looting. They included a 17-year-old boy who had dropped his package and was running from police gunfire when he was shot and killed. Five of the deaths were called "criminal homicide," because they resulted from the general conditions of the uprising, with the rebels as the implied "criminals." This included a bystander killed by police as they shot at a "rioter" and a woman whose body was found in a burned building.

Families were not permitted to have their attorneys ask questions at the inquests. "The result of the inquests," Councilman Mills said, "has been that, regardless of the facts, there has been a complete exoneration of law-enforcement personnel."

It was the police who were guilty of criminal homicide, according to the National Lawyers Guild. "It should be a crime for a police officer, or anyone else," they said, "to shoot anyone for a mere offense against property."

ONLY HOODLUMS AND CRIMINALS INVOLVED?

Some months before the Watts explosion, Police Chief Parker had stated flatly in an article in the *Reader's Digest* that "There Can Be No Race Riots in Los Angeles." When the uprising came and spread even beyond the 50-square-mile curfew area, Chief Parker, like Gov. Brown, insisted that only hoodlums and criminals were involved. This fatuous opinion was echoed by other capitalist politicians.

The Los Angeles press reported that 7,000 people were involved during the second night of the uprising and probably equal masses of different people were part of the uprising over the ensuing weekend. A *National Guardian* reporter estimated that as many as 65,000 people were involved. Obviously, these were not hoodlums and criminals but the vanguard of a community in rebellion.

(There are about 600,000 Negroes in the Greater Los Angeles area and about 65,000 in the curfew area.)

"Everyone was involved in the so-called riots," said Woodrow Coleman, a Negro who was in the midst of the uprising. "The Negro people live in little houses just behind the business street. Somebody would break a window and then everyone would go in. From everywhere you could see the women and kids and families coming up and getting this merchandise, getting food, getting clothes. And these people, they were hungry. I could see them as they'd go into stores and come out and they'd have smiles on their faces, they were happy. None of them thought they were stealing — they didn't look at it that way. The way they saw it, they were taking what rightfully belonged to them.

"The type of guys who were in there taking things," Coleman said, "they were guys I knew of, unemployed and honestly out looking for jobs. Some I recognized from my union, the Laborers' Local 300. These were the guys I know didn't have a job, didn't have any money. They were coming in by the hundreds. I was standing at 103rd and Compton watching them, and I could tell by their look that these guys were *hungry*. I've seen that look before."

A Los Angeles County Probation Department study revealed later that the typical juvenile arrested during the uprising had little or no previous contact with the police. He was a native of California, and from a broken home, with his mother as the head of the household. The total average family income was \$300 a month.

RESPONSE OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT

Even though the Watts upheaval took on some of the aspects of armed insurrection it did not shake the complacency of the official Los Angeles trade union movement. AFL-CIO spokesmen admitted that the "riots" were caused by widespread discrimination against Afro-Americans and deep poverty in the Watts area. But the union officials have not made any serious effort to fight these causes, including anti-Negro discrimination in their own locals.

An exception in the right direction was a joint effort on the part of the garment workers' unions in November, 1965, attempting the organization of a training school in the ghetto to teach garment-trade skills.

An organization set up just before the uprising that is in a good position to break down the barrier between the unions and the ghetto is the AFL-CIO's Community Labor Action Committee.

Spencer Wiley, its co-chairman, said, "Our Committee was formed by Negro union members and officials who live primarily in the Watts area. We decided, at last, that as union people and residents of the area we must ourselves offer leadership in our own community."

"NUMBER ONE, WE GOT TO HAVE JOBS!"

"This thing in Watts started with police brutality, but number one, we got to have jobs!" said Woodrow Coleman. "It's a sin, a sin, for people to have more than they can use. There are warehouses just bulging with food while others go hungry."

The McCone Report admits that there are 160,000 unemployed Afro-Americans in Los Angeles County. Most of them live in southeast Los Angeles. Over 34% of the adult Negroes in the Watts area are unemployed and the average is twice as high for teenagers. Over 60% of the people in the area exist on welfare or relief payments.

There are more jobs available for Negro women, such as domestic work, than there are for the men. This results in one of the big problems in the ghetto. The woman, as the breadwinner, becomes the head of the household. It is another factor in the frustration of the Negro man.

The first demand of the ghetto Negro is for jobs. Yet: "Promises of jobs are a cruel and dangerous hoax on hundreds of thousands of Negroes and whites alike who are especially vulnerable to cybernation because of age or inadequate education." This statement came from the Committee on the Triple Revolution of the Center for Democratic Institutions at Santa Barbara. When they made the report in 1964, the authors warned of the possibility of "unprecedented economic and social disorder."

Jobs as we have known them, mostly in production, are disappearing because of the introduction of highly efficient, progressively less costly machines. The cost of a machine using cybernation is now as low as one-third of the current annual wage cost of the worker being replaced. Machines produced today have skills equivalent to a high school diploma. Yet the Department of Labor estimates that 30% of all students will be high school drop-outs in this decade.

There are six to seven million unemployed in the country today, according to the Triple Revolution report, and 38 million Americans, one-fifth of the nation, live in poverty. At the same time U.S. capitalism spends a million dollars a day just to store its excess food.

Unemployment rates for Negroes, the report says, are regularly more than twice those for whites, whatever their occupation, educational level, age or sex.

Just after the Watts rebellion, the Labor Committee of the Los Angeles branch of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) issued a call to the Los Angeles trade unions to join with the civil rights movement in considering the demand for "jobs or income now." The call stated that it was particularly urgent, in the wake of the ghetto uprising, for the union and civil rights movement, which had little joint activity, to work together to win the urgent demand of "jobs or income" for the ghetto Negro.

"THIS IS GOING TO HAPPEN AGAIN. . ."

"What happened here was a rebellion," said Woodrow Coleman, "and as a black man, I say that it was the best thing that ever happened in Los Angeles. If there are no basic changes, this is going to happen again and again."

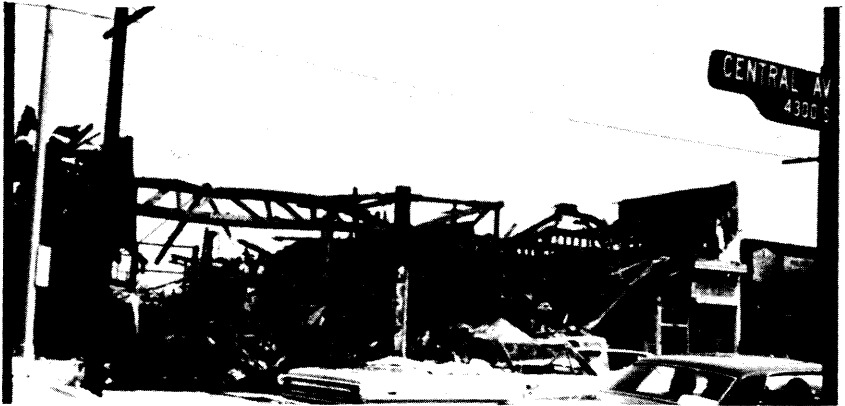
As yet, in early 1966, there have been no significant changes. The demand for 5,000 jobs by Thanksgiving, 1965, was forgotten. The vicious abuses of Chief Parker's racist police have not been checked. The rented housing conditions are still miserable. High school students continue to drop out of school, stunted by inadequate and white-dominated schooling in a white-dominated society.

McCONE COMMISSION OFFERS NOTHING

The McCone Commission met for 100 days at a cost of \$250,000 but brought forth no answers. The Commissioners saw no possibility of increased Afro-American employment. They neither agreed that Chief Parker should be fired nor that a civilian police review board should be set up to investigate charges of police malpractice. They admitted that Chief Parker and his police were hated in the Negro community. Their somewhat incongruous answer to the problem was that the police department designate an Inspector-General!

The admissions in the report carry a particular weight because the commission, headed by John A. McCone, former head of the Central Intelligence Agency, represented the white power structure.

Police brutality was a recurring charge from witnesses before the commission, the report stated. "One witness after another has



recounted instances in which, in their opinion, the police have used excessive force or have been disrespectful and abusive in their language or manner."

(The American Civil Liberties Union brought at least 50 documented cases of police brutality before the commission, but the commission refused to accept the report.)

Chief Parker, the McCone Report said, is a man distrusted by most Negroes. "Many Negroes feel he carries a deep hatred of the Negro community." The report pointed out that only 4% of the sworn personnel of the police department is Negro, and an even smaller percentage Mexican-American.

"The most serious, immediate problem that faces the Negro in our community is employment," the report said. "Many witnesses have described to us, dramatically, and we believe honestly, the overwhelming hopelessness that comes when a man's efforts to find a job come to naught. Inevitably, there is despair and a deep resentment of a society which he feels has turned its back on him."

"Welfare does not change this," the report says in an unexpected burst of candor. "It provides the necessities of life, but adds nothing to a man's stature, nor relieves the frustrations that grow. In short, the price for public assistance is loss of human dignity."

"The welfare program that provides for his (the Negro's) children is administered so that it injures his position as the head of his household," the report admitted, "because aid is supplied with less

restraint to a family headed by a woman, married or unmarried. Thus, the unemployed male often finds it to his family's advantage to drift away and leave the family to fend for itself. Once he goes, the family unit is broken and is seldom restored."

"It is clear," the McCone Commission decided, "that unemployment in the Negro community is two to three times that in the white community," and that the approximate 25,000 unemployed Negroes in central Los Angeles County "is matched by an equal number of unemployed Mexican-Americans in the adjoining area."

Neither government programs now nor those proposed are helping employment, the report said. Government training programs "skim the cream of the unemployed and unfortunately it seldom includes the most disadvantaged."

ILLITERACY IN THE GHETTO

Are students in the ghetto able to read and write? The McCone Commission found a "distressing answer," that the ghetto student is in the lowest 20% in literacy ratings of the national fifth-grade population. As for eighth-grade students, the "melancholy message" was that the achievement here was even lower than the national average.

Los Angeles drop-outs are highest in the three ghetto high schools, where two-thirds drop out before graduating.

"The educational level of any community and of parents," the commission recognized, "substantially influences the achievement of children in school. . . The same educational program for children of unequal background does not provide an equal opportunity for children to learn."

Witness after witness told the McCone Commission about abuses by white merchants in the ghetto. Higher prices were charged in the ghetto and spoiled meat, produce and stale bread were sold at the same prices as fresh. High interest rates were charged on time-purchases of clothing and furniture and shoddy material was sold at exorbitant prices.

There was a pattern of vengeance in the destruction of stores in the curfew area, witnesses said, and it was directed particularly against whites who "took from the area but put nothing back into it."

The commission decided, however, that abuses by merchants in the ghetto were common to all poverty areas, and that this is largely due to lack of transportation. The McCone Report said that only 14% of the families in Watts own cars, compared to 50% elsewhere in Los Angeles County, and no one denies that the Los Angeles public transportation system is totally inadequate. This leaves the

ghetto residents at the mercy of local merchants, the commission admitted, and at the same time keeps Negroes from getting jobs outside the ghetto.

Poor transportation, the McCone report said, "has had a major influence in creating a sense of isolation, with its resultant frustrations."

The McCone Commission recognized the demoralizing effect of living on welfare, "But the simple arithmetic of the matter makes us uncertain that it is better to have a job. A worker gets about \$220 a month at the minimum wage rate. The average family with dependent children gets about the same with welfare payments.

"Indeed, we are told," the report said, "that the 18-year-old girl who is no longer eligible for assistance when living with her mother may have considerable incentive to become a mother herself so as to be eligible as the head of a new family group."

The commission recommended child care centers, because there are 2,000 mothers in the curfew area who would like to be free to work.

Health conditions in the ghetto are poor, the report said, and the infant mortality rate is one and a half times greater than the city average. Yet there are three times fewer doctors in the south central area than in the county as a whole.

The Southern rural Negro, coming into the city, finds that equality of opportunity is an illusion, the McCone Report said. Lacking education, training and experience, and blocked by racial barriers, "he found himself, for reasons for which he had no responsibility and over which he had no control, in a situation in which providing a livelihood for himself and his family was most difficult and at times desperate.

"Thus with the passage of time, altogether too often the rural Negro who has come to the city sinks into despair. And many of the younger generation coming on in great numbers, inherit this feeling but seek release, not in apathy, but in ways which, if allowed to run unchecked, offer nothing but tragedy to America."

Is the report warning of a social revolution which would mean "tragedy" for America? For the America of the capitalist class, yes, but not for the other America of the exploited poor. For them, a social overturn would be the greatest triumph.

NATIONALIST CHARACTER OF THE REBELLION

What happened in Watts in August, 1965 was an elemental rebellion and marked a new stage in the Afro-American's struggle for freedom. It was a recognition of the need to go beyond the actions carried on so far, that used civil disobedience and passive resis-

tance as the methods and civil rights and integration as the goals. The methods in the Watts rebellion were sabotage and violence and the goal was human rights, the complete recognition of the Negro as a human being. "It is better to be feared," they said, "than to be treated with contempt." This is how Dr. Harold W. Jones, a Negro psychiatrist in Watts, summed up the attitude.

There was a pride in race in the southeast Los Angeles uprising that has never been seen before in this country outside the black nationalist movements. The term "blood brother" was used widely and proudly through the entire black community in a 50-square-mile area. Even middle-class Negroes gained racial pride from the rebellion.

The revolt had a nationalist character in the sense that it rejected the white power structure, even though the objectives were not thought out, defined and articulated by those who burned and looted. This nationalist character came from the nature of the Negro ghetto, which has many of the aspects of an imperialist colony, where the inhabitants are segregated on the basis of race and ruled from the outside by white governments. This white government acts through a police force that plays the role of an occupying army — supplemented and reinforced in the Watts uprising by the National Guard.

Frantz Fanon, in *Wretched of the Earth*, describes what happened in the North African colonies, such as Algeria, before the stage of rebellion was reached. He could be speaking of the Negro in the United States. "His reactions are complex and undergo a characteristic evolution. In the early stages he devises appropriate forms of evasion and sabotage. . . He vents his anger and aggressiveness against his own fellows."

But there comes the point when the oppressed takes up the struggle against the oppressor, and "in doing so makes himself over into a new man, both in his own eyes and in the eyes of the world."

In rebelling, says Fanon, "the thing which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself."

Like colonial freedom fighters, what the ghetto inhabitants were attempting to do in southeast Los Angeles was drive out the invader. For two days they took control from the hands of the police. The police were there but could not subdue the rebels. It was only after the National Guard became effective on August 14 that a *Los Angeles Times* headline was able to say, "Area Regained."

The Socialist Workers Party call for the withdrawal of all police, all troops from the ghetto, if heeded, would have saved many lives, since all deaths from gunfire during the uprising were caused by the guns of sheriff's deputies, the police and the National Guard. Some destruction of buildings could have been avoid-

ed had the armed forces been removed from the ghetto, for their presence enraged and inflamed the rebels.

THE VICTORY OF WATTS: THE NEGRO BECOMES A NEW MAN

Stanley Sanders, a young Rhodes scholar who grew up in Watts and who was there during the uprising, said that the advance made in the August days was in that the Negro became transformed from a traditionally passive person to a person who made decisions and acted on his own. "The passivity imposed on the Negro is something the white man does not understand," he says "but it is the same passivity imposed on women."

Dr. Jones, the Watts psychiatrist quoted earlier, says the ghetto Negro "feels morally right about what he has done. They look upon it as a revolt rather than a riot and therefore subject to a different value system. They see their insurrection as an opportunity to achieve dignity and self-respect."

The common motivation, according to Dr. Jones, was "a determination to *show their strength* by using violence." He says that the Negroes now "feel more confident about themselves and their power and scoff at pronouncements that the city authorities have won the battle."

The achievement of a new consciousness was a distinct gain. But it was limited by the lack of program and of leadership. Without leadership and organization, a second Watts uprising would not be a victory.

"With the right type of leadership and the right type of planning, you wouldn't have these many killings in Watts. . . . If the Deacons had been started out there, the way these people been fighting, it would be revolution in California." Thus spoke Charles R. Sims, a spokesman for the Deacons for Defense and Justice. The Deacons believe in armed self-defense and are rapidly becoming a protective power for the civil rights workers in the South.

This is a period of new beginnings and regroupments in the Negro movement. James Farmer has resigned as national director of CORE to do government sponsored social work, leaving the civil rights movement. At the same time, the "Black Panther Party" and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party are developing their own independent political perspectives.

Out of the searching, thinking, and discussing, new leaders, new organizations and new perspectives will emerge, in the direction of building revolutionary organs of struggle.

Such a development would follow the tendency toward increasingly militant activity in the Negro freedom struggle in the United States. The 1956 Montgomery bus boycott went beyond the "legal" activities of the National Association for the Advancement of Col-

ored People. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and CORE led the militant civil disobedience actions of the past period.

From these grew the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee which now supports independent Negro political action through the "Black Panther Party." The movement headed by Robert F. Williams of Monroe, N.C. took the position "We must fight back!" They were the first to see the necessity and legitimacy of organizing for self-defense. The Deacons today are following the lead of Williams.

The only Negro leader who could have given the right kind of leadership needed in the Watts uprising was Malcolm X. But he was assassinated eight months before the August uprising. Malcolm remained a black nationalist after he left the Black Muslims. Yet he came to understand that although black nationalism could help to build an independent Afro-American movement, it does not necessarily provide the program that would lead such a movement to victory.

Just before he was killed, Malcolm indicated that the winning of complete human rights for the black people of America required a rejection of the capitalist system. On May 29, 1964 he told the Militant Labor Forum in New York:

"It is impossible for this system, this economic system, this political system, this social system. . . to produce freedom right now for the black man in this country. . . All the countries that are emerging today from under the shackles of colonialism are turning toward socialism. I don't think it is an accident."

Malcolm X was right. The contradictions of American capitalist society are such that the system cannot grant basic rights to Afro-Americans. The elemental demand of the Negro ghetto for jobs comes at the very time that the opportunities for employment are being diminished by automation. And the war against the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam takes precedence for the capitalist class over the "war on poverty" that was miserly even in its original conception.

But if employment is not available to the black ghetto masses under the capitalist profit system, the need to change this system becomes obvious. This task, however, requires a revolutionary leadership and organization, such as Malcolm X was starting to build. Such a leadership and its organization must understand the nature of capitalism and of socialism and how to work toward replacing one with the other. This understanding implies cooperation and joint action between the Negro and white working class, as foreshadowed by the CIO upsurge of the 1930's. The special demands of the Negroes, arising from their racial subjection, do not contradict the broad interests of the working class as a whole. On the contrary, they are a necessary part of the struggle for a new society.

MORE PAMPHLETS ON THE AFRO-AMERICAN STRUGGLE

TWO SPEECHES BY MALCOLM X . . . . .	.25
MALCOLM X, THE MAN AND HIS IDEAS by George Breitman . . . . .	.25
FREEDOM NOW: NEW STAGE IN THE STRUGGLE FOR NEGRO EMANCIPATION. . . . .	.25
HOW A MINORITY CAN CHANGE SOCIETY by George Breitman . . . . .	.25
MARXISM AND THE NEGRO STRUGGLE by Breitman, DeBerry and Cruse . . . . .	.50
HOW CUBA UPROOTED RACE DISCRIMINATION by Harry Ring. . . . .	.15
DOCUMENTS ON THE NEGRO STRUGGLE Socialist Workers Party Convention Resolutions of 1939 and 1948 and texts of discussions with Leon Trotsky . . . . .	.65

ON THE
CUBAN
REVOLUTION

ON SOCIALISM
and the LABOR
MOVEMENT

Send for Complete Catalogue



MERIT PUBLISHERS
873 BROADWAY
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10003

MORE PAMPHLETS ON THE AFRO-AMERICAN STRUGGLE

TWO SPEECHES BY MALCOLM X . . . . .	.25
MALCOLM X, THE MAN AND HIS IDEAS by George Breitman . . . . .	.25
FREEDOM NOW: NEW STAGE IN THE STRUGGLE FOR NEGRO EMANCIPATION . . . . .	.25
HOW A MINORITY CAN CHANGE SOCIETY by George Breitman . . . . .	.25
MARXISM AND THE NEGRO STRUGGLE by Breitman, DeBerry and Cruse . . . . .	.50
HOW CUBA UPROOTED RACE DISCRIMINATION by Harry Ring . . . . .	.15
DOCUMENTS ON THE NEGRO STRUGGLE Socialist Workers Party Convention Resolutions of 1939 and 1948 and texts of discussions with Leon Trotsky . . . . .	.65

ON THE
CUBAN
REVOLUTION

ON SOCIALISM
and the LABOR
MOVEMENT

Send for Complete Catalogue



MERIT PUBLISHERS
873 BROADWAY
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10003

THE MILITANT

A hard-hitting socialist weekly newspaper with extensive coverage of the Freedom Now struggle, Vietnam, Cuba, Congo, national and world politics and developments in the socialist and labor movements.

4 MONTHS - \$1.00

1 YEAR - \$3.00

THE MILITANT
873 Broadway
New York, N.Y. 10003

Los Angeles Militant Labor Forum
1702 E. Fourth St., Los Angeles, Calif. 90033

Please send me notices of forums

Send me free literature on the Negro and labor movements

Enclosed find \$ _____ for _____ sub to The Militant.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____