

AFTER RIOT - WHAT?

By R. L. Miller

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The voice of hungry workers has been heard in Chicago. It was translated by local papers into "red riots". In the course of this "desperate red riot" police found it necessary to fatally shoot down three unarmed colored workers who were resisting the eviction of a 73 year old negro woman from her squalid home.

The feeling stirred up was intense. Underlying the stories about "communist propaganda" and threats of deportation for "alien agitators" a serious situation was evident. For while much may be said and written against inciting organized resistance to police, and leading desperate people into demonstrations which can only result in bloodshed, the fact remains that riots of this kind would have inevitably occurred.

Unemployment Burden Heavy

In this, as in every preceding depression, the negro has been hit hardest. Of total applications for relief, 16% came from negroes, who constitute only 5% of the city's population. Figures are those of the Urban League. Of the hundreds of daily evictions on the South Side, the majority are colored families.

Colored living districts are densely populated. Inability to pay shuts off gas and electric. Security of a roof overhead - the only thing left - is taken away when the bailiff appears armed with a court order. The few sticks of furniture are carried to the street. With this procedure enacted again and again daily, why should there be any wonder at physical resistance?

City Government Indifferent

A city government which had been really alive to conditions among its citizens could easily have foreseen these riots and taken measures for relief that would have completely forestalled agitators advocating violence. But warnings from the South Side were made directly to the City Hall by leading Negro citizens, so that the last possible excuse for Chicago's negligence vanishes. Two weeks before the riot, the Rev. Harold Kingsley, pastor of the Congregational Church of the Good Shepherd, which has been feeding three hundred people in direct relief out of its own limited resources, wrote to Mayor Cermak, predicting precisely the situation which came about, and warning that danger was imminent. His letter was "referred" to an aldermanic committee, which did nothing.

Evictions Halted After Riot

Seemingly it needed the riots which city officials deplored to make them take notice. From his vacation retreat in Michigan the mayor gave orders to halt further evictions until his return to the city. He said he had some funds at his disposal which may be used for the relief of evicted families. What are these funds and why were they not brought into use before the riot, when the situation was no less desperate?

Officials have promised to take care of evicted families in the future. How can they supply flats for from 100 to 500 families evicted every day?

Plans for the Future

We face the problem - what definite steps are being taken to end the misery of eviction and unemployment? We are referred to charity. But the charity organizations are broke. Efforts will be made, of course, to collect some funds for the charities from the rich but it will be a drop in the bucket. Besides, the problem has gone beyond the point where charity can materially improve conditions. It is the duty of the city, the state and the nation to take a hand in the situation.

The Socialist Party has been doing all it can to arouse the consciousness of the people to the seriousness of the problem. The conference on unemployment insurance, which was originally called by the Executive Committee of the Socialist Party of Illinois and is now composed of delegates from 100 labor unions and fraternal labor organizations, has widened its scope and has formulated practical propositions to be submitted to state and city authorities. Its unemployment insurance bill was killed in the last legislature. A new bill will be introduced at the next session.

The League for Industrial Democracy has also brought together a conference of public minded people to formulate a program of immediate and adequate relief.

It is up to the workers - to those who feel most keenly the lash of unemployment. Are we going to sit by and applaud the efforts of others in our behalf? Or are we going to demand and work for our own salvation?

For next winter, we must band together and insist that the government itself provide adequate relief.

To prevent similar needs arising in the future, we must add to our demand for immediate relief at least this program:

1. Government-operated free employment agencies that will allot jobs to Colored Americans in proportion to their numbers in the population.

2. Plans for public works made far enough ahead so that in an emergency they may be speeded up, giving work to those whom private industries are unable to employ.

3. A system of unemployment insurance so that a man willing to work but unable to find employment will not have to depend on degrading "charity", but may--after he has signified his willingness to work by registering with the government employment agency--receive insurance benefits as his due.

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