

THE PARKER-CALLAGHAN DISPUTE

Meanwhile, it had become known that the secretary of the Board of Education, Arnold Hess, planned to resign, that Councilman James T. Callaghan would be appointed to replace him and that Mr. Ness would continue as a \$25,000-a year consultant.

On May 23, 30 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People proposed that City Budget Director Wilbur Parker, the first Negro to become a Certified Public Accountant in New Jersey, be appointed to the post on the Board of Education. Mr. Callaghan is a former labor official who never went to college. Besides his council post, he held a \$10,300 a year job as secretary to the Essex County Purchasing Agent.

The Newark Evening News commented editorially that politicians were fond of saying that Negroes, where qualified, received equal opportunity in public appointments, but that "in Newark's educational system politics is paramount to equality of opportunity."³¹

The Board of Education deferred a decision on the appointment and, on May 29, Fred Means, acting president of the Negro Educators of Newark, said: "The Negro community is in turmoil over this injustice. If immediate steps are not taken, Newark might become another Watts."³²

The Board of Education finally took up the matter at a meeting on June 26. The meeting opened at 5 P.M. There were 70 speakers. It ended at **3:23** A.M. The final decision was that Mr. Hess would stay in his job for another year.

It had been a difficult year for the Administration. Mr. Spina testified to the mood that had developed:

"As you sit in the office of the Police Director and you see those swirling movements grow surrountling you, you will note that they grew in crescendo . . . The type of speeches that were made before the Planning Board and the Board of Education tell you, almost predict, that there is going to be blood running in the streets."³³

The medical school and Parker-Callaghan controversies helped set the stage for the July riot. They served to focus the dissatisfaction of the community. The fact that the hearings had been held back-to-back intensified the high feelings.

Former Commissioner Bontempo maintained that it was bad government for the Mayor even to suggest the Callaghan appointment.³⁴ Mr. Bontempo said that previous mayors had left Board of Education affairs to the board's members and were glad not to have the responsibility.

In this case, with the community already in a mood of dissatisfaction and protest, the Mayor made a political move that could be expected to have racial implications. James Threatt, director of the Human Relations Commission, said:

"The only issue on which I've seen Negroes get truly excited and concerned was Parker-Callaghan. For the first time, you really had a community."³⁵

On Saturday, July 8, the East Orange police were involved in an altercation with a group of Black Muslims at 91 North 14th Street, on the Newark border.³⁶ The Newark police were called to the city limits to stand by in case they were needed. There was a fight, and the Newark police moved in to help the East Orange police. Mr. Threatt said the Muslims were beaten as they lay on the ground. Each department, he said, "accused the other of doing the beating."

Newark's mood was ugly.

In spite of all the build-up and tension that Mr. Spina could feel in his office, there is no evidence that the Administration made any preparations for a riot. Its attitude was that to prepare for a riot might spark one.³⁷ The riot started on the Wednesday after the incident in East Orange.