

Police Chief Demands a Fuller Inquiry In Slaying of 2 Newark Puerto Ricans

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Special to The New York Times

NEWARK, Feb. 25 — Apparently recalling the inconclusive investigations of civilian deaths during the 1967 riots here, police Director Hubert Williams today demanded a fuller investigation of grand jury allegations that unnamed policemen killed two men during disturbances in the city's Puerto Rican community last September.

Tapping his finger on his desk for emphasis, Mr. Williams was visibly upset as he addressed a news conference in the wake of a grand jury presentment that laid the deaths to police action. The grand jury members also said that a "conspiracy of silence" among witnesses who testified during the three-month investigation had prevented them from indicting the guilty policemen.

"There are allegations that killers exist on this police force," Mr. Williams said. "We cannot allow this cloud of suspicion to remain over this department."

Mr. Williams said that without further efforts to find the guilty policemen members of the Spanish-speaking community "will be deeply disturbed" and will understandably "question my performance as police director."

Mr. Williams called upon Joseph P. Lordi, the Essex County Prosecutor, to empanel

a special grand jury, if necessary, to get to the bottom of the allegations. He said the prosecutors should initiate the new investigation even "if it means interviewing every member of the Police Department."

The latest grand jury presentment was reminiscent of the lengthy document handed up by another county grand jury in the wake of the July, 1967, riots in the black community in which 26 persons died.

The jury at that time found that 23 persons had been homicide victims, but said that it was impossible to fix culpability for any of the deaths.

The victims of gunshot wounds included a city detective, a fireman and 21 black residents. The city Police Department, in a report issued after the riot, accepted responsibility for the deaths of 10 persons, saying seven were justified and three were accidental.

But a blue-ribbon commission appointed by former Gov. Richard J. Hughes to investigate the causes of the riots was not convinced by the police report.

The commission said the sites of the shooting incidents as well as "the number of wounds and the manner in which the wounds were afflicted all raise grave doubts about the circumstances under which many of these people died."

The commission, which issued its report in February, 1968, found that there had

been "a good deal of indiscriminate shooting" by state and local policemen and members of the National Guard called in to restore order and end looting in the city's Central and South Wards.

The commission was unable to get an estimate of the amount of ammunition fired by the city police, but the state police estimated that troopers had fired approximately 2,500 rounds of rifle, pistol and shotgun ammunition and the National Guard reported expending 10,414 rounds.

The report expressed some disappointment that the investigation into the deaths of the riot victims by the office of Brendan T. Byrne, who was then Essex County Prosecutor, had produced no results by the time the commission was ready to release its report.

Mr. Byrne was appointed to the State Board of Public Utility Commissioners shortly before the report was published, and he was succeeded by Mr. Lordi, who recalled today that a lengthy presentment had been handed up a few months later.

Hopeful on Progress

Mr. Lordi pointed out that there was no statute of limitations in homicide cases and that persons responsible for the deaths in 1967 could still be prosecuted if witnesses would come forward and enough evidence could be developed.

He said he was hopeful that that would happen in the case of last September's alleged police homicides. "Now that the presentment has been released we hope people will be encouraged to come forward if they have any information," he said.

The Prosecutor said that both he and Mr. Williams were in firm agreement that the investigation would continue. However, it appears no move will be made to empanel another grand jury unless some new evidence is adduced or new witnesses appear.

In addition to the "silence" of some witnesses noted by the jury, Mr. Lordi said others "told less than the truth." He added, however, that there was nothing in the testimony by the 150 witnesses that would support the filing of perjury charges against anyone.

The apparent reluctance of witnesses to testify against members of the Newark Police Department on the latest incident recalled passages of the 1967 riot panel report, which said that interviews with members of the black community revealed the widely held belief that anyone filing a police brutality report would be subjected to police harassment.

One member of the black community familiar with the events in 1967 and the latest disturbances said a fear of police reprisals had been discussed by some of the witnesses in the newest investigation before they testified.

Shake-Up Promised

Mr. Williams promised a shake-up in his department because of the failure of his own investigation to come up with any police involvement in the deaths of David Perez, 30 years old, who the grand jury said was beaten on the head by a mounted policeman, and Fernando Rodriguez de Cordova, 23, who was killed by buckshot.

The police director said he intended to implement several grand jury recommendations, including a requirement that policemen wear name tags. Anticipating a fight from the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, Mr. Williams said he would take the union to court if it opposed the name-tag regulation.

Raul Davila, a member of Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson's information staff, said there had been a sense of "satisfaction" in the Spanish-speaking community following the release of the critical presentment and said members of the community believed an attempt was being made "to carry out justice."

"Compared to 1967," he said, "there is a feeling that something will come of this to benefit the community." Leaders of the Hispanic Emergency Council formed in the wake of the September disturbance were scheduled to meet tonight to discuss the presentation and subsequent developments.