

June 4, 1964

FOR RELEASE

STATEMENT ON POLICE MALPRACTICE BY THE C O R E CHAPTERS OF  
METROPOLITAN LOS ANGELES TO THE JOINT COMMITTEES OF THE CITY COUNCIL:

On May 4th, CORE chapters in this area issued a statement calling for the resignation of Police Chief William H. Parker. Since then, a great many people, both Negro and white, have expressed strong approval of our stand. However, reactions in the press and on radio and television indicate that there is considerable misunderstanding of the reasons for CORE's demand.

Los Angeles is faced with an emergency situation arising from the sharply increased tension between the police department and the minority communities. Minority dissatisfaction with police attitudes and methods is long-standing and for the past several years individual attorneys and civil rights organizations have warned of the growing crisis, documenting their reports with innumerable cases from their files of complaints regarding malpractice by police personnel.

Without quoting statistics, such as the number of arrests per reported crime in one section of the city as compared with other sections, or the number of warranted searches per arrest, or the number of felony arrests which end either in dismissal for lack of evidence or reduction of the charge to a misdemeanor, CORE asserts that the Los Angeles Police Department operates with two very different sets of rules, one for the "respectable" white majority and the other for Negroes, Indians, Mexican-Americans, as well as for such white "minority" groups as the very poor and those who might be called non-conformist or bohemian. Granted, there is no stated departmental policy dividing the citizenry into two classes. Granted also, the police officers who make such a policy their common practice are only a minority of the entire force. Nevertheless, there are those officers who, in the absence of any strong administrative restraint, habitually display prejudice toward those

they consider second-class. The result is a wide range of illegal or unacceptable police actions which include verbal insults, unwarranted search and seizure, the use of excessive force and incidents of outright brutality.

It is our experience in CORE that virtually every Negro in Los Angeles, whatever his occupation, education, or income, can relate personal incidents of police abuse of power. And our white members who encounter the police in both the white and Negro sections of the city can attest to the very different attitude and behavior of officers in the two areas. In the past few months, there has been an alarming increase in the number of complaints referred to CORE's Police Malpractice Committee. While only a few involve clear-cut brutality and many do not constitute grounds for legal action, CORE has been documenting and recording many of the less serious cases, for it is our belief that arrogance, hostility and day to day harrassment are a major reason for the present climate of ill-feeling between Negroes and the police.

To cite some recent complaints now being processed by our committee:

On April 2nd, 1964, the house of Mrs. Alice Smith was twice subjected to unwarranted entry and search by LAPD Sergeant K \_\_\_\_\_ and his partner. Mrs. Smith's son Raymond was arrested that same day, on suspicion -- without a warrant. Raymond was detained twelve days and released -- without being arraigned.

On May 24th, at 4:30 in the afternoon, Mrs. Case was halted by an LAPD officer at Western and Hollywood Boulevard and accused of jaywalking. ( Mrs. Case claims the light had changed after she started across the street.) When she was unable to produce a driver's license for identification -- Mrs. Case does not drive -- she was placed under arrest. She charges that en route to the police station, she was handcuffed, her arms were twisted and her shoes were removed, and that at the station she was subjected to a search in the presence of male officers. She further charges that although she told the officers that she suffers from glaucoma,



they refused to give her the medicine in her purse. Mrs. Case was detained in a cell until 11 P.M. when she was allowed to phone her daughter who came and bailed her out.

We are not attesting here to the complete truth of all these charges, but from those facts which can easily be checked, we feel we have illustrated the kind of abuses -- multiplied many times over -- which have created the present explosive situation in Los Angeles. In recent weeks, there have been a number of incidents of violence involving a few members of the minority communities and police officers. These incidents are symptomatic of the widespread smoldering resentment of Negroes and Mexican-Americans and should alert us to the need for prompt action to alleviate the causes of friction.

In the face of this clear and present danger, what has been the role of Chief Parker, the man responsible for setting law enforcement policies? CORE contends that he has been adding fuel to the flames by refusing to acknowledge that there is any need for reform in his department. Instead of accepting at least some share of the blame, he has tried to put all blame on the minority communities as a whole, making inflammatory generalizations to the effect that "these people" have no respect for law and order. Or he has tried to hold the civil rights movement responsible for all these violent incidents, equating nonviolent demonstrations with violence and accusing anyone who criticizes the police of "inciting anarchy".

CORE charges that Chief Parker has proved himself unwilling or unable to cope with the duties of police chief. We realize that in professional circles he is reputed to be an efficient police administrator. However, CORE contends that in the name of efficiency, Chief Parker is willing to sacrifice individual rights in favor of more effective law enforcement, as evidenced by his numerous public outbursts against court decisions which protect individual civil liberties. In this, his



attitudes parallel those of his counterparts in totalitarian societies -- to whose basic social philosophies the United States of America is diametrically opposed.

It is in light of the present grave situation which threatens the peace of our entire city and Chief Parker's negative role in this emergency that CORE has asked for his resignation, as a first step, but only a first step at improving communications between our minority communities and the city as a whole. Other steps must be taken soon if we want the Negro people of this city to retain their faith in democratic processes. First, CORE urges civic leaders to step forward and acknowledge that a problem exists. To date, with the commendable exception of two members of the City Council who live in the Negro community and therefore know the facts, city officials have either been silent regarding charges of police malpractice or have issued statements praising Chief Parker and deprecating the gravity of the situation. We cannot urge too strongly that the white community and especially those in public office acknowledge that where there is so much smoke there must be some fire. We further urge that civic leaders declare their opposition to police excesses and their intention of discovering the truth or falsity of charges levied against the Los Angeles police department. On no other issue is there such a wide gulf between our racial groups, and continued silence or indifference from the white community will soon persuade a majority of our Negro citizens that their fellow Angelenos, the white majority, are opposed to the concept of equal protection under law.

Other positive steps can be taken to improve police methods, such as improved training of officers in human relations. But the greatest need is for an adequate system of handling malpractice complaints. At present, complaints are filed with the Board of Police Commissioners, but due to lack of money and staff and the burden of other duties, the Board is unable to conduct investigations. Complaints are therefore in nearly all cases turned over to the Police Internal Affairs Division



for investigation. According to the Board's own statement to the press, further action is taken only on those complaints referred back to it by the chief of police. Clearly, this system cannot operate fairly, since the police are given the advantage of investigating themselves. Furthermore, we insist that these complaints are not an internal police matter. They involve two parties with diverse interests and require investigation by a third impartial body.

To correct this fallacy, CORE recommends either that the Board of Police Commissioners be adequately staffed and supplied with sufficient funds so that they may be charged with the duty of investigating and adjudicating all complaints against police personnel; or that an independent civilian police review board be created to investigate, hear and make disciplinary recommendations on all such allegations of malpractice. Whichever body is assigned this duty, it should have the power to subpoena, should have full access to all police records and all police installations, and should be required to hold public hearings on complaints at which all parties could appear and be represented by counsel. CORE urges the City Council to publicly take a stand in favor of this proposal.

In making this statement, we wish to emphasize that we feel great respect toward most of the officers in the Los Angeles Police Department. We understand that their work is hard and often dangerous and that the rewards are few. We sympathize with their difficult task of trying to maintain good relations with the community while enforcing the law. And we understand all too well that by a few of their brother officers many good and decent men are the target of undeserved hostility. It is for these good, hardworking men as well as the minority citizens of Los Angeles that we are pressing for quick and drastic action by the City Council and the Mayor. We insist, their work will be far less hazardous and far more satisfying when they can carry out their duties in a climate of trust and mutual respect.