

police attack palmer neighbors

The Fourteenth Police District takes in the Logan Square area of Chicago. It is a neighborhood of working class and lower middle class families. The area is predominantly white with a growing Latin population. The Shakespeare District police have a well earned reputation for harassment and brutality toward many of the residents of this area.

Just around the corner from the Shakespeare Police Station is Palmer Street. In this small area just west of California Street are reflected all the contradictions and forces that people throughout the Logan Square area and the city in general have to deal with every day in order to survive and to try to build better lives. The Palmer Gaylords hang out here. They have spray painted their names and slogans on the walls of the buildings and garages all around. Whenever something bad happens in the neighborhood, the Gaylords are the first to be blamed.

Many teenagers in the neighborhood hang out getting high sniffing toluene. Parents of younger children are worried that their kids are going to pick up on the example of others and start sniffing "tolly" themselves. These same people are of course worried about any of the gangbanging that comes down as the hassles that their kids face from living in the area. They would like to see the neighborhood be a safe place to raise a family. These concerned people have turned to the police for help. During the summer they had several meetings with the

police, but the situation was not improved. The police did nothing positive in the community.

On Monday, September 2, Labor Day, the police decided to act as they saw fit on the 'Palmer Street problem.' That evening, there were about twelve people on porches and the sidewalk around Palmer and Richmond. A cop car drove up and arrested one guy on a warrant. They told everyone else to get out of there. A young married couple, Mike and Kathy, were walking along with a friend of theirs. The cops told them to get off the street and they started to walk away. They weren't moving fast enough for the cops and one of them, Officer Ra ran over and grabbed Mike. He then hit Mike over the head with his flashlight. Mike and Rock started to struggle and one of Mike's friends tried to get both of them to stop. Mike and his friend were both arrested and hustled over to the station. Inside the station the police took Mike and beat him some more—hitting him in the ribs.

Meanwhile, back on Palmer Street, a crowd of people began to gather. Old and young people, Gaylords and parents, saw the police beating people up and they came out of their houses to see what was going on. The police kept running around grabbing people until they had arrested about five people. Everyone out on the street was yelling for the police to lay off but it was open season on Palmer Street residents as far as the cops were concerned. In particular, two cops, Officers and , made a strong reputation for themselves that night by abusing and beating a lot of people. Finally most of the police left and the scene quieted down—for a while.

About half an hour after they left, the police returned with reinforcements and surrounded the house of Bobby M. —one of the Gaylords. They sat there for a while eyeing people who were outside watching them. Suddenly, they rushed the house. Bobby's mother and one of his fourteen-year old sisters were sitting on the front porch. The police knocked them aside in their rush to get into the house. Bobby's mother demanded to see the warrant—one cop claimed he had it, but he never showed it, and another cop just yelled, "We don't need no fucking warrant." They smashed through the front door and swept into the house. There they found Bobby and proceeded to beat him with their clubs. A wound was opened on his head that required seventeen stitches to close. His mother tried to get into her house to see what was going on, but the cops kept pushing her out. Finally, they dragged Bobby out of the house and down the stairs. In the process, the cops dragged him over his mother and threw his sister over the railing of the porch. They then grabbed his sister by the hair and dragged her to a squad car. Down at the station, the police continued to beat Bobby in front of both his mother and sister.

While this assault was going on, the police continued to run amuck on the street—hitting, pushing and arresting people. One of the neighbors, Dave, was near the Mason house trying to keep little kids out of the way. Suddenly, a cop ran up and grabbed

him by the arm. "You're under arrest." The cop started to pull Dave toward the street when his wife ran up and grabbed him by the other arm and told the cop that he hadn't been doing anything. For a minute the cop and Dave's wife staged a tug-of-war. Finally the cop said the hell with it and let Dave go.

By the time the night was over they had arrested about twelve people and had punched, kicked and hit many more. Afterwards Officer said to some of the Palmer Street residents, "Everyone on Palmer is an animal and they should be exterminated."

Everyone who was injured was taken to the police to St. Elizabeth's Hospital. When doctors and nurses asked the police what had happened, the cops told them not to believe anything the people said because they had all been injured in a gang fight. Sure enough on the medical records of those treated at St. Elizabeth's, they wrote down, "injured in a gang fight." Thirty and forty year old people injured in a gang fight?

Rumors spread rapidly through the neighborhood about what had happened. People who don't like the Gaylords and had not seen the attack were led to believe that the incident was started by a group of thirty or forty Gaylords drinking in the street. Supposedly these Gaylords had attacked the police when they first showed up. But they didn't care what happened anyway because as far as some of these people are concerned it was just a humbug between the Gaylords and the police and they feel the Gaylords deserved everything that happened to them. Other neighbors felt that the police indiscriminately attacked people who were out on the street that night regardless of whether they were doing something illegal or not. And if they were breaking the law, people ask, why didn't the police simply arrest them rather than trying to heat people into submission?

What the police seem to be doing now is appealing for support from people who do not like the Gaylords. They want to lay the base for future actions such as what happened on Labor Day. They are saying that the neighborhood's problems will be solved when 'certain elements' on Palmer Street are wiped out. This way they can build a little police state in the area where the cops know that they can get away with anything they want against unpopular groups. First they will build a law-and-order support group that will applaud attacks on 'gang members' (but in fact will include anyone who gets in the way of the police), then they can try to unite whites against the latins.) Who knows where this can lead?

The problems of this neighborhood are not going to be solved by cracking heads. The police cannot make the neighborhood better through brutality and intimidation. It can best be done by the people in the area realizing that they have a lot more in common than they may think. Tolly-sniffing and gangbanging are bad. They are symptoms of social disorder—the real causes are the economic conditions and lack of control over one's own life that all the people of this area are experiencing, regardless of whether they are young or old, white or latin, Gaylord or not. Only the people can make their community better. The police can help, but they must be controlled by and serve all the people of the neighborhood.