

NEWS

Riots are similar in style, but not in motivation

By LOU ANN JONES

Although there are similarities between the recent urban youth riots in Britain and those of the 60s in the United States, a conservative economic program rather than racial tensions has provoked the outbursts by British youths, one UNC professor said. "The riots in Britain aren't racially motivated," said James H. Thompson, his-

tory professor and director of the library at UNC-G. "Both blacks and whites are together against the establishment.

"The 60s riots in the U.S. were racially motivated in support of civil rights, public facilities, and voting for blacks," he continued.

"Except for some resentment among immigrants from commonwealth nations against police, this is basically not the prob-

lem or the motivation in England."

Thompson cited economic problems, particularly high unemployment in the more industrial cities of England, as a partial cause of the social unrest among youths. He said he perceived it as more a psychological problem primarily.

"The economic situation—the unemployment, the malaise—plus the lack of government programs to modernize the urban core causes a rotting of the industrial cities and a deep mental depression," he said.

Thompson said he does not blame only the tight monetary policies of Prime Minister Margaret R. Thatcher for the violence.

"It's not just Thatcher. It goes back to the fault of the labor governments as well as the conservative governments now," he said.

Some political leaders believe there could be protests against President Reagan's policies in the form of riots just as there have been against Thatcher's policies. Thompson partially agreed.

"Certainly there is a lesson to be learned by us from what's going on in Britain," Thompson said. If a disadvantaged class thinks the government doesn't care, whether it's practical or in its perception, there still is a problem."

Anthony Jones, assistant professor of sociology at UNC, described the riots in Britain as class riots.

"It is a mixture of two separate groups who'd be left out in the cold. Race and class are mixed," he said.

Jones said he believes a combination of three elements to be the cause of the riots.

"The first is the long-term economic problem, which began in the early to middle

60s," Jones said. "The working class, the unskilled, were left out in the cold.

"Secondly... Thatcher took money out of the system and increased taxation. She took money from low income groups, which made a bad situation worse. She had a drastic impact. She was the last straw.

"Finally, for the first time in Britain's history, there is a fairly large non-white population which is not as tolerant as their parents were."

Jones said another major component of the situation was the British police.

"The police, who are openly racist, have become the main focus of the riots," he said. "You've got disaffected black kids, frustrated and anxious white kids and the police. The kids are only the tip of a large iceberg that has been gathering at least 15 years.

"A number of us have been predicting the British riots for years. Such a thing is likely in the U.S. if Reagan's policies persist."

Jones noted a difference, however, between the economic policies of Thatcher and those of Reagan.

"Thatcher took money out of the economy," he said. "Reagan took money out, but put some of it back in. So, there is monetary control as well as aid. This does not have the same effect (as Thatcher's programs)."

Jones said if the unemployable take to the streets of U.S. cities, the outcome would be very much the same as that in Britain.

Whereas social controls through the class system in Britain keep things quiet, U.S. citizens would be willing to make demands, he said. "It would explode here sooner," Jones said.

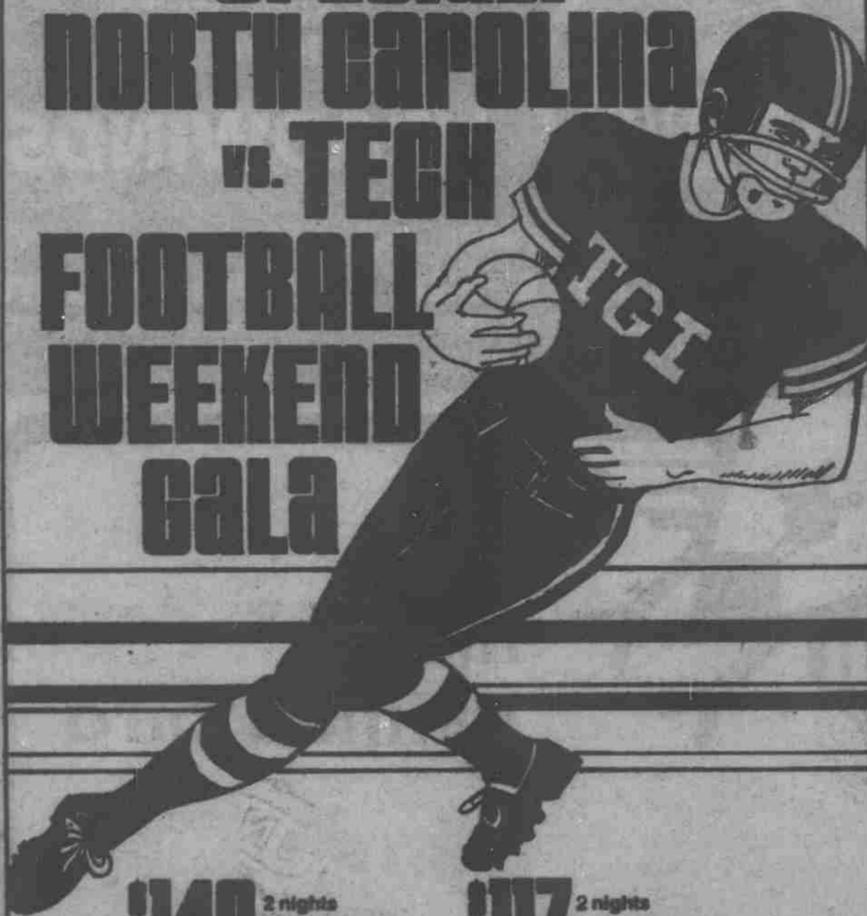
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