

Bradley and Holden pledge support for KA merchants

By Richard Reyes Fruto and Gloria Chung
Korea Times

Sang Tae Kim lost more than \$40,000 in merchandise when his store was looted during the riots. When he applied for a government loan to restock his store, he learned he could only get \$8,900.

Frustrated, Kim joined riot victims who have been marching at City Hall since June 22. On July 1, rally organizers threatened to engage in civil disobedience and risk arrest.

The next day, Mayor Tom Bradley and Councilman Nate Holden in separate meetings pledged to help Korean American victims rebuild their businesses.

The two elected officials specifically said

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they will intervene in cases of disaster relief applications that the Small Business Administration and Federal Emergency Management Agency rejected.

Bradley met with a delegation of victims, while Holden, with a Korean-speaking aide translating, spoke to about 275 demonstrators he had invited into the council chambers.

"Overall, it was very productive," said Jin Ho Lee, spokesman for the Association of Korean American Victims of the L.A. Riot. "I personally think we had some kind of misunderstanding with the mayor's office. I'm very happy with today's result."

The meetings might finally have put to rest the issue of "reparations" or compensation for riot losses, a core demand of many demonstrators since the beginning.

Deputy Mayor Linda Griego had said that compensation was a matter for Congress. Even Lee said, "I think we have to go to court. I don't think the city can compensate us right now."

Mediators from the U.S. Department of Justice brokered the negotiations that led to the meeting with Bradley. The mediators also had conferred with leaders of the riot victims in a strategy session the night before, making suggestions on how the meeting could be more productive.

The previous day, the team of mediators likewise helped to head off a clash between demonstrators, who threatened to stage a sit-in in Bradley's office, and city officials and security officers, who clearly did not want to send anybody to jail.

Many demonstrators didn't realize they could be arrested, but they didn't care. They had come to press their demands for "reparations." "Why should we pay?" said Kim. "It's a Black-White problem, and Koreans are caught in the middle."

Negotiations took place while about 250 people, mostly Korean immigrants, beat drums, banged gongs and shouted, "We want answers." After three hours, Mayor Tom Bradley himself told rally leaders he would meet with them the next day.

Demonstrators left with a sense of victory, but Yoon Hee Kim, the mayor's Korean American liaison, said Bradley's office has not ignored them.

Kim said she has met their representatives almost daily and

they had a meeting with Bradley himself in May and with Deputy Mayor Linda Griego in June.

The daily demonstrations were organized by the Coalition of Asian American Los Angeles Riot Victims Associations to push for "reparations" and express their anger about feeling left out of the rebuilding process.

Organizers had planned to mobilize 10,000 people for a blockade of City Hall on July 1, but despite the poor turnout, the protest was taken seriously because of the threat of a sit-in.

Rally leaders said in a news release that they wanted a meeting with Bradley and they would "declare war" if he refused. "They've been here for two weeks, and they're ready to fight," a security officer said.

The Asian Pacific American Legal Center and the Asian Pacific American Dispute Resolution Centers sent some of its staff in case arrests were made. Other lawyers were present.

Four police units arrived to back up City Hall security officers keeping an eye on the demonstration. The protest started in the west piazza and ended with a sit-in outside Bradley's office.

Kathy Imahara, a staff attorney at the legal center, said an arrest would mean a felony charge with minimum \$10,000 bail and 72-hour detention.

But many demonstrators neither understood what could happen if they were arrested, nor knew about negotiations with Justice Department mediators, Bradley's aides and security officers.

"They only know they're here to get money," said UCLA student Sue Cho, a City Hall intern who joined the demonstration. "They're getting desperate. They need money to feed their family."

The mayor's aides said they offered to arrange a meeting with Bradley the next day even before the protest began, but rally organizers insisted on hearing it directly from him.

Councilman Mike Hernandez came out and also offered to meet with them. "I want something specifics so we can direct them to the right people. These are general requests," said Hernandez, referring to the victims's long list of demands.