

1953

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### Recommended Citation

O. W. Wilson, Problems in Police Personnel Administration, 43 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 840 (1952-1953)

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## PROBLEMS IN POLICE PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION

O. W. Wilson

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The purpose of this paper is to consider the influence of personnel administration on the quality of police service, to examine the adequacy of police personnel administration, and to discover the cause of weaknesses in personnel policies and practices.

Before undertaking these tasks, however, there should be agreement on the objectives of personnel administration. The objectives are (1) to select the best man available for appointment and promotion, (2) to train him for his job, (3) to discipline him (not necessarily in a punitive sense, although the power to punish is inherent in discipline), (4) to separate him from the service if he is incompetent or otherwise unqualified, and (5) to improve the conditions of service.

Any personnel program that is based on these five objectives may be considered sound. Any program that does not have these five objectives, or that has other objectives that make the attainment of these five difficult, is unsound.

### THE IMPORTANCE AND COMPLEXITY OF PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION

Of all the knotty problems that confront the police executive, none transcends in complexity and importance the problems related to the management of personnel. Personnel administration is important because the quality of police service is strongly influenced by the manner in which policemen are selected for appointment and promotion, trained in the effective performance of their duties, and otherwise managed. Police service is rendered by individual policemen on a person-to-person basis. Its quality, therefore, is determined by the individual men who provide it, and obviously cannot be raised above the quality of service rendered by the individual members in the aggregate. If police service is to be of a high calibre, the members must have suitable qualifications, and they must be directed and controlled.

The simple statement that the management of personnel is the most important of all police administrative tasks seems to be an entirely inadequate expression of such a tremendously important fact. The statement may be amplified by saying that within the field of personnel

administration lies the key to the professionalization of police service that is so earnestly sought by members of the International Association of Chiefs of Police; that there is no more direct way to raise the quality of police service and police prestige, either in a single department or in police service throughout the country, than through the administration of wisely conceived personnel policies; and that no matter how perfect the organization of a force, how progressive its policies, or how advanced its methods and techniques, it is not likely to provide a good quality of service unless suitable attention is given to its personnel administration. Even such amplification does not seem to express adequately the importance of this administrative task. Perhaps the best that can be done is to quote Confucius who, 2500 years ago, said: "The successful administration of government depends entirely upon the selection of the proper men."

Problems in personnel administration are not only important—they are also complex. Their complexity derives from the fact that they involve the appraisal of human qualities. The general physical (including the neurological), the intellectual, the ethical, and the emotional qualities of a man determine his basic capacities, his resourcefulness, his judgment, his character, and his personality. The need for high standards of physical perfection in police service has long been recognized. While the need for equally high intellectual, ethical, and emotional standards has also been generally recognized, such close attention has not been given to these factors probably because their appraisal has not been considered to be as simple as the measurement of the size, agility, and organic functioning of the human body.

The need for more than average intelligence in police service stems from the necessity of dealing with extremely complex situations and of matching wits with malefactors, some of whom are extremely intelligent though frequently otherwise deficient. The need for high ethical standards springs from the nature of police work; it involves dealing with many persons who are ethically deficient; it also frequently presents unusual opportunities and temptations that require more than average moral stamina to withstand. The need for emotional stability arises from the grave nature of the responsibilities that are imposed on policemen and the authority that is theirs. The need for a suitable personality grows from the fact that the principal duties of policemen involve dealing with other persons—getting them to conform to regulations and to do what the policeman wants with minimum friction and resentment.

So long as policemen indulge in the petty graft of a handout; so long as they are unable to control their own emotions; so long as they

arouse resentment in the persons with whom they deal; and so long as the level of intelligence in many is below average, professionalization of police service and the development of public respect and friendliness seem unlikely.

While all five of the previously listed objectives of a personnel program should be achieved, the undesirable conditions mentioned above result principally from failures in (1) selection, (2) discipline, and (3) separations from service. Attention will be restricted, therefore, to the discovery of the cause of the failure to achieve these three objectives.

#### PLACING RESPONSIBILITY FOR FAILURES

Responsibility for such failures must be placed if their frequency is to be lessened. In some communities the responsibility rests with the chief of police. In most jurisdictions, however, the blame lies in civil service agencies over which the chief and his immediate superior have no control. Civil service laws frequently impose restrictions which make it virtually impossible for the chief to administer sound personnel policies.

The fact that civil service is here to stay should not blind public and official eyes to the fact that many of these agencies do not have wise personnel policies and that some do not use sound techniques. The principal objective of some is to shield the derelict policeman from disciplinary action and to protect the incompetent and otherwise unqualified policeman from dismissal. Some overemphasize the right that the individual citizen has to the public job for which he is an applicant and, in consequence, they resolve all doubts in favor of the candidate instead of in favor of police service.

#### SELECTION FOR APPOINTMENT

The failure of civil service agencies to select the best man for appointment rests principally on a failure to adopt suitable selection procedures. Present procedures are frequently deficient in three respects: They fail to assure that those placed on the eligible list have at least average intelligence, that they are temperamentally and emotionally qualified for police service, and that they are persons of suitably high character.

The reliability of validated general intelligence tests enables an examining agency to measure the inherent intelligence of a candidate with reasonable accuracy. The experience of many police departments in the use of these tests extends over a period of more than 25 years; the re-

sults clearly demonstrate the merit of this testing device and the advantages gained by establishing minimum standards of intelligence for candidates.

The Detroit Police Department is not under civil service but instead operates its own personnel program on a merit basis with qualified examiners on its staff to assure the application of the best personnel techniques. This department will not accept a candidate who does not have average intelligence as a minimum. The average intelligence quotient is 100. Since no members fall below 100 and many have much higher I. Q.'s, the average for the Detroit Department is considerably above the average for the community as a whole.

The Los Angeles Police Department, which is under civil service, maintains a minimum intelligence standard of 105; the average for the department is therefore correspondingly higher than for Detroit. The Berkeley Department where Chief August Vollmer pioneered in scientific selection methods during and after the First World War, is now also under civil service; it maintains a minimum intelligence standard of about 112. In contrast to these departments, some only require that the candidate shall be able to read and write.

There is no valid reason why any police chief should not insist on having the eligible list restricted to candidates of any designated minimum level of intelligence that he desires, regardless of whether the list is prepared by a civil service agency or not. He certainly should not desire a level below the average intelligence for the population as a whole.

The personality and emotional stability of the candidate may also be appraised—by a qualified psychiatrist. The Berkeley Department has had its candidates examined psychiatrically for more than 30 years. Occasional accounts in the press of policemen who have raped and wantonly and sadistically maimed and killed or who have otherwise given evidence of emotional instability emphasize the need for psychiatric examinations of applicants. The person who is temperamentally but less seriously unsuited to police service may also be thus discovered. A failure to eliminate these candidates damages police prestige; it also destroys public respect, confidence, and friendliness, and increases personnel turnover.

The argument that psychiatric examinations are too expensive is not well founded. The elimination of one emotionally unstable candidate may well be worth more to the community than the cost of psychiatric examinations for all candidates for twenty years. Society is confronted with the need to restrain the Bayard Peakes and the Howard Ungers

before they kill or maim. How much more important is it to assure ourselves that we do not recruit a Peakes or an Unger into police service.

Civil service agencies as a general rule are not staffed to make extensive character investigations of candidates for police service. This is a task the police themselves are equipped to do. No person should be appointed without a thorough investigation of his character. The investigation should not be restricted to a check on fingerprint records. Inquiry should be made of his entire life and of his relations with his family, teachers, close associates, employers, and other persons as a further check on the suitability of his personality. Rejection should not be restricted to convictions on felonies and offenses involving moral turpitude. When the past actions of the individual raise doubt as to his qualification for police service, the doubt should be resolved in favor of the department and not in favor of the candidate.

Arguments that the individual candidate may make a good policeman even though his intelligence is somewhat below average; or that the psychiatrist is not infallible and, since the candidate has not been guilty of some overt act that would demonstrate emotional instability, he should not be rejected; or that the incident that raises doubt as to the suitability of his character was committed in the past, perhaps as a youthful indiscretion, and should not be held against him, must be recognized as unsound. Granting the possible truth of any one or all of these arguments, it is better to err on the side of safety; the doubt should be resolved in favor of police service.

Civil service laws may interfere with the selection of the best man for the job. Any that do should be repealed or amended. Pre-employment residence requirements clearly fall in this category. So also do laws designed to make difficult if not impossible the use of validated general intelligence tests.

#### SELECTION FOR PROMOTION

The failure of civil service agencies to select the best man for promotion most frequently rests on overemphasis of information tests and seniority. The objective in promotion should be to raise to positions of command as quickly as possible those members who excel in qualities of leadership. Laws, rules, and procedures that give seniority advantages, or that require long service in a lower rank, or that in any other way interfere with the attainment of this objective, should be abolished.

Overemphasis on information tests in selections for promotion grows out of a laudable desire to avoid the charge that the selection was based

on favoritism rather than merit. Written tests are objective; they can be scored, and the results checked and rechecked to counter charges of unfairness. The qualities of leadership on which promotions should be based are unfortunately not susceptible to easy objective measurement. Information tests tend to measure the know-how. Other qualities of leadership are more important than know-how. Some policemen who lack important qualities of leadership are highly successful passers of written information tests. To base the selection of men for positions of leadership exclusively or largely on information tests merely because these tests are objective is to show lack of courage in personnel administration.

#### RESTRICTIONS ON THE CHIEF IN PERSONNEL MATTERS

Civil service regulations which place sharp restrictions on the freedom of the appointing authority to select men from the eligible list for appointment and promotion should also be repealed. Techniques have not yet been refined to the point that they can with absolute certainty place candidates in the precise order of their excellence. This being true, the appointing power should have greater freedom of selection from a larger top section on the eligible list. There should be no statement required to justify not selecting those who stand above the one selected on the list. Those on the eligible list should not be considered as having a vested interest in the job.

The authority of the chief in disciplinary matters should also be expanded. He should be given a limited power to suspend, to impose added hours of duty, and to fine derelict policemen without provision for appeal to a civil service agency. Civil service restrictions that make it difficult if not virtually impossible to remove the incompetent, the dishonest, and the otherwise unqualified policeman should be repealed.

#### FAILURES OF THE CHIEF IN PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION

While criticism may justifiably be directed at the failures of civil service agencies to promote sound objectives in police personnel administration and while they may in many instances be charged with deliberately interfering with the achievement of sound objectives, the chiefs of police have also failed in the performance of their personnel tasks in important respects that deserve mention.

First, it is necessary that there be agreement as to what authority the chief of police should have in the management of his personnel. Since police service is essentially a personal service, if the chief is to be held responsible for its quality, he must have suitable authority over the

personnel who provide it. This means that he should have essential authority to assure that the best man is selected for appointment and promotion, to provide a suitable control of his personnel by disciplinary means, and to remove incompetent and otherwise unqualified men from the service.

Police failures in personnel administration may be considered under two heads. First, many chiefs have forfeited essential authority over their personnel either through capricious misuse of their authority or by default through indifference. Authority once lost is not easily regained. These failures, however, may serve as a warning to others who are fortunate enough to retain this essential authority. These chiefs should safeguard their rights by developing personnel administration programs that are above criticism on the grounds of either favoritism or capriciousness, that are based on merit, and that utilize the most progressive techniques.

The second police weakness in personnel management grows out of the failure of the chief to use wisely his remaining powers. In spite of the restrictions unwisely imposed by civil service laws and regulations, an energetic insistence on the accomplishment of the previously listed objectives can do much to strengthen personnel administration. A police chief cannot logically complain of his lack of authority in the selection of recruits when he fails to utilize the probationary period to dismiss the unqualified. A police chief cannot logically complain of the quality of personnel who are recruited for him when he has failed to prescribe the specifications that he desires. A police chief who demands that his recruits have as a minimum an average intelligence is in a position to examine those on the eligible list himself, if the personnel agency fails to do so for him, and to reject those that do not meet the specifications. Police chiefs have the responsibility to draft specifications for automobiles, radio, and other equipment. They should demand equal authority to draft specifications for their personnel and demand that the specifications be met.

The same weakness is evident in the failure of police chiefs to use their restricted disciplinary power to its full extent. Instead of resigning himself to the difficulty of successful disciplinary action against derelict policemen, the chief should redouble his effort to prepare disciplinary cases in such a manner that the results cannot possibly be in doubt. He should likewise redouble his efforts to build strong cases against the incompetent and otherwise unqualified so that they may be separated from the service. Such action requires courage, but American police chiefs are not deficient in this quality.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

A summary of what has been said may be given in the form of recommendations to guide the police chief in strengthening his personnel program.

1. Hold on to your present authority over personnel. Do not jeopardize this authority by capricious action. Establish grievance committees and disciplinary machinery which will assure fairness to your subordinates and also to the service.

2. Increase your authority over personnel in every way possible.

3. Appoint a police personnel officer on either a full-time or part-time basis. He should establish liaison with the central personnel agency and utilize every device to assure the achievement of the previously listed objectives of a sound personnel program.

4. Make your police service hard to get into and easy to get out of. Insist that all doubts be resolved in favor of your department and not in favor of the individual man. Promote the philosophy that police service and your department are more important than any individual and that the department owes nothing to the candidate.

5. Undertake a program of research intended to evaluate the quality of service provided by individual members and the suitability of personnel techniques and procedures.