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Abraham P. Chess

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CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES IN A POLICE DEPARTMENT

ABRAHAM P. CHESSE

The author has been a civilian employee of the New York Police Department for a number of years, first as an attorney in the Legal Bureau and presently as a Survey Officer. In his present position he has charge of the responsibility of management analysis. Furthermore, over the years Mr. Chess has been interested in and active in the decipherment of gambling ciphers. His present paper was presented to the Academy of Police Scientists and Administrators, New York City, last April.—EDITOR.

As preliminary to any discussion of such a topic, it would appear necessary to define some of the basic terms to be used. For example, we shall have to determine what we mean by the word "civilian." In the context used, we must conclude that it means, specifically and exclusively, "all who are not members of the force." This leads us to inquire as to what is meant by the term "member of the force." The answer must be that it applies to those persons specifically defined as members by the Administrative Code (in New York City) or other Local Law or Statute (elsewhere).

We see, in New York City, that doctors, a superintendent of telegraph, and a veterinarian are included as members of the force. By exclusion, the Police Commissioner and his Deputy Commissioners assume the status of civilians. Historical review of the situation within New York City reveals that certain doormen and clerks were made members of the force in the latter part of the 19th century. Consequently, we must conclude that a person's designation as a civilian or as a member of the force may sometimes seem to be arbitrary and somewhat independent of the nature of his duties. Nevertheless, most members of the force are those who are peace officers and perform duties as such.

We are led now to the first big problems involving our subject matter. Those are, "Should any civilian employees at all be engaged by a Police Department? Can we do without them? If we can, are there other impelling factors which would cause their employment?"

Review of police and related activities reveals that a minimum of stenographic work is essential. The police administrator must recognize the fact that such a need is particularly great within recent times, and that it would usually be an impossibility to obtain all of this service from members of the

force alone, assuming that they include an average number of persons with this technical skill. The New York City experience has been that there are just not enough competent stenographers among members of the force. Nevertheless, there is a great need for them in such places as administrative offices and detective squads, among other places. Consequently, it is necessary to employ a certain number of civilian stenographers.

Going on to consider other technical tasks, we find that a need for persons of the medical profession must be met from among civilian employees. Here, however, the New York City Police Department situation is unusual. Its medical men are members of the force by virtue of Local Law. The situation elsewhere in the United States would not necessarily reflect such status.

In the field of engineering, past years showed there had been a need to employ civilians. At present, municipalities are finding great difficulty in employing such civilian personnel because of greater opportunities afforded them in private industry. As a result, police agencies find greater difficulty in this area. Agencies like the New York City Police Department, however, find that they have available among the members of the force a certain number of persons with engineering experience or background.

In the legal profession, too, there was a time during which need for such service had to be satisfied by recruiting from among civilians. Today, however, we find that there are many lawyers among members of the force.

We could review many other special fields such as chemistry, etc., to point out needs which entailed civilian recruitment at one time, but the conclusion to be drawn from such data is that there will usually be some civilian skills which are needed by a police force and which cannot be found among its members even though the situation

affecting a particular calling may be changed over the years.

Aside from the aspect of need, we must recognize that there are some services which can be performed cheaper by civilians. Among these, we could include laborers, clerks, stenographers, telephone operators, etc. Nevertheless, this conclusion cannot be accepted without some dispute. It is common knowledge that police salary scales are not the same throughout the United States and that the same is true in respect to civilian salaries. In addition, it has been argued that, even where the salary paid a civilian is somewhat less than that given a member of the force for performing the same work, the civilian would not turn out the same volume and quality obtained from the police officer. In other words, it has been suggested by some that, dollar for dollar, it is still cheaper to have a member of the force do such work even though it may be necessary to pay him a little more.

Among opponents to the employment of civilians, there is the added feeling that certain clerical work should not be handled by them since the records involved are of a confidential nature. Concerning this argument, we may point out that there should be no bar to any person handling confidential records, whether he be artificially designated a member of the force or a civilian, except that necessary rules and regulations should govern their handling of such records. Proper administration and enforcement should obtain the same compliance to these provisions from civilians as from members of the force.

Whatever the case may be, another factor enters the picture which should make us take another look at our objections as to comparative productivity and the confidential nature of the work handled. This element is the public attitude toward the operation of any public agency, including a police department. There is always constant pressure toward economy and there are always those, among citizen's committees, opposing political parties and other members of the public, who want the employment of civilians to be expanded. This factor is of sufficient importance to affect the attitude of the chief executive of any municipality as well as the head of a police agency. Although there is the possibility of educating the public to a different point of view, there can be no question that the government executive and administrator cannot fly in the face of public opinion.

One vital problem that we must resolve in making any determinations on the employment of civilians is the required attitude of the police professional and the needs of the new police profession or police science. In other professions, we can easily see that certain standards are maintained as to what the members may or may not do in performing their work. For example, we could not imagine a doctor of medicine, employed in a Department of Hospitals, seeking assignment to a clerical or stenographic position because it would give him regular hours and perhaps relieve him of certain professional pressures. This, of course, is an exaggerated comparison and not all of the factors are equal to the situation involved in our discussion. Nevertheless, we get the message that an amount of professionalism entails a certain standard and a desire to indicate that the profession includes a minimum of technical skills and knowledge and prestige which place it above other work (as, for example, work of a laborer) and that this standard should be maintained for the benefit of the profession and for the ultimate advantage of the public which it serves.

We see, then, that the true professional may not want a member of the force to perform some civilian work and that it may be essential to employ civilians for this reason alone.

Despite all our arguments for or against the use of civilians in a police agency, we cannot escape the fact that almost every police agency within the United States employs a certain number of civilians. Table 1 indicates the size of the police force, as well as the numbers of civilians, employed in agencies in cities having a population over 500,000. These statistics were obtained from the Municipal Year Book for the year 1958. It should be noted that the figures in table 1 do not include those persons employed as School Crossing Guards. Their inclusion, however, would not have materially affected our conclusions.

Examination of these figures indicates that the civilian employees average, very roughly, about 10% of the number of members of the force. Los Angeles has about 20%. The FBI, though not included on this listing, has more civilians in its employ than agents. Writers like Germann, in the field of police personnel administration, feel that it would not be amiss to have somewhere between 20 and 30% of the employees be civilians.

The fact cannot be overlooked that many agencies whose main body of membership could be

TABLE 1

	Members of Force	Civilians
<i>Over 1,000,000</i>		
Chicago, Ill.	10,731	1,131
Detroit, Mich.	4,853	370
Los Angeles, Cal.	5,592	1,098
New York, N. Y.	24,796	1,158
Phila, Pa.	5,650	500
<i>500,000 to 1,000,000</i>		
Baltimore, Md.	2,969	256
Boston, Mass.	3,012	196
Buffalo, N. Y.	1,702	185
Cincinnati, Ohio	919	50
Cleveland, Ohio	1,975	237
Houston, Tex.	1,029	290
Milwaukee, Wisc.	1,843	90
Minneapolis, Minn.	638	57
New Orleans, La.	1,122	47
Pittsburgh, Pa.	1,500	46
St. Louis, Mo.	2,606	674
San Francisco, Cal.	1,702	101
Washington, D. C.	2,502	187

considered to be "professionals" also employ extensive numbers of "non-professionals" or "civilians." A brief listing of such organizations would include the Army, Navy, Air Force, Departments of Hospitals of municipalities (professionals are doctors and/or nurses), Departments of Health in municipalities, Boards or Departments of Education (the professionals are the teaching staff), Fire Departments (members of the fire fighting force are the professionals), and Correction Departments (correction officers are deemed to be the professionals).

From what has been said before, the obvious determination must be made that some civilian employees will always be essential for a police agency operating within current times. The subsequent questions to arise are, "What civilians should be hired? What should be the criteria in determining whether a position should be filled by a member of the force or by a civilian?"

The Hoover Commission, in its studies of the Department of Defense, recognized these very same problems as they apply to that agency. Its Task Force report on Special Problems of the Department of Defense pointed out the need to earmark the positions to be filled by civilians and those to be filled by the professionals. Of course,

this would entail analysis of the positions by applying evolved standards. It is suggested that the very same formula recommended by the Task Force of the Hoover Commission can be adapted to Police Department use. That prescribes the following positions for civilian assignment:

1. Where clerical management and technical skills utilized by the civilian economy are required and can be exercised without the necessity for police status.
2. Where continuity of clerical management and experience are required and can be better provided by civilians.

The value of establishing over-all policy concerning such assignments and carrying out such a program can be seen in that it will minimize rivalry between the two classes of employees for particular assignments and, consequently, eliminate a source of friction. Another no less important value to be obtained from such delineation is that appropriate personnel could be trained for the positions in issue. Where it appears definitely that a member of the force must hold certain management or technical positions, measures must be instituted to train a suitable number of qualified and skilled members of the force to fill these positions. The same would hold true concerning the training of civilians.

At this point, the writer would like to digress for the purpose of considering the cadet concept in police administration and how it differs from ordinary employment of civilians. As a matter of fact, the idea of obtaining police cadets between the ages of 17 and 21 was basically a recruiting device. It was aimed at obtaining recruits at a young age when graduated from high school and before they were snapped up by private industry. This was believed to be desirable since youths who found good employment with private industry for a year or two or three would not likely give up such employment to enter the police field. The cadet plan was to get them to perform clerical and related work, other than actual police work, and then, upon their reaching appropriate age, to give them the necessary examinations and make them members of the force if they qualified. Among the many claimed advantages of such a system are that it is economical, it will allow preliminary training of recruits, it will allow a longer period for probation and selection of the best applicants, and it will permit the police profession to get first crack at some of the best young men. These advantages,

if true, are too formidable to be ignored. Nevertheless, we can see that the entire cadet plan must be classified as a recruiting process rather than a process for employing civilians, although it may have some features applicable to the latter situation.

In passing, it should be noted that there are those who enumerate considerable difficulty in the use of cadets. These include a great turnover caused by a number of factors (disappointment by the youth who is not permitted to exercise the police function, draft of the youth into the Armed Forces, etc.). Unsatisfactory work by the cadet who is not interested in performing routine work, diminishment of the morale of the entire force as the result of employment of such cheap labor to work side by side with the professional, etc., are among additional factors enumerated against the plan.

It should be further noted that England instituted such a cadet system in the early '30's and it appears to be thriving there, where it is well established. Milwaukee, Wisconsin has such a system that was instituted in 1952, but no evaluation of the program is available at this time. The same is true of Detroit, Michigan. However, Pasadena, California adopted such a plan in January 1954 and, in 1955, in the *POLICE JOURNAL* (3d issue of 1955) implied that it seemed to be working out favorably. Cincinnati, Ohio, instituted such a system and wrote about it in this *Journal* (Nov.-Dec., 1956) and the August 1956 *FBI BULLETIN*. No evaluation of the plan was given.

Perhaps the largest police agency in this country to have adopted the cadet system is that of the Port of New York Authority. Its program has been in existence for approximately three years. It employs its cadets to work purely as toll collectors for 6 hours each day. It found that a huge number of these men left its service, and the great turnover caused it to think of abandoning the program at one time. However, it found that those few who remained and were chosen to become police officers seemed to be of unusually high calibre. Consequently, it is now seeking to continue and expand its program by employing more cadets. It should be significant to note that quite a few of its cadets, upon receiving a college degree, defected to New York City and New Jersey Police Departments.

Having concluded that civilian employees will always be employed by a police department, to some extent, and having determined which posi-

tions should be car-marked as civilian and which as police, the question arises, "How can the civilians be used to the best interest of the police department?"

In resolving this issue, it must be recognized that such persons are employees of the agency no less than any member of the force though their importance to the operation may not be as apparent or even as great. Nevertheless, it is not disputed that their services are necessary and, being so, everything reasonable should be done to result in the highest quality and greatest volume of such service.

Essentially, the problem of the civilian employee, just like that of the member of the force, is one of a personnel nature. The New York City Police Department cannot afford to ignore its 1100 civilian employees any more than it can afford to ignore its 24,000 police. Sound principles of personnel administration must be used in dealing with both, and current humanitarian and democratic theories should be adapted in a universal approach to handling all employees.

One obstacle to a proper personnel program is the faulty notions harbored by some few members of the force. These feel that a civilian employee is depriving a member of the force of a desirable detail or assignment. Of course, no great rebuttal is required in view of the prior discussion showing the need for civilians in certain areas, the fact that a line should be drawn between civilian positions and police positions and the added factor that civilian positions will always exist within a police agency whether wanted or not.

Another obstacle to a reasonable approach in handling civilian personnel is the transfer, by certain few members of the force, of unreasonable antagonisms toward the general civilian public, toward civilian members of the police agency. The general public, the press, and certain public groups have always prodded police agencies and looked to find fault with their operations. The very nature of the police job means that there always exist some who want the police to take one course of action and others who want them to pursue the opposite course. No matter what a policeman does, the other side will jump to the opportunity of finding fault. This climate of harassment under which a police officer must perform his duties sometimes causes an unreasonable resentment against "civilians." Among certain police officers a feeling of

fraternalism seems to be developing to the exclusion of civilians who are outside this social circle.

It is these wrong attitudes toward the civilian public by some few members of the police force that are sometimes unjustly transferred to civilian employees of a police department. They forget that the civilian employee, in almost all instances, is prejudiced in favor of the police agency and operation and that civilian employees, generally speaking, come into the police department with a desire to do a job for it.

These peculiar attitudes (which fortunately have been disappearing to a great extent) are not the only factors operating against a proper personnel approach to the civilian employee. Other factors include:

1. An ignorance of, or lethargic attitude toward, proper principles of personnel administration, and
2. A managerial preoccupation with the line function to the exclusion of administrative correlative action (including proper personnel administration).

In the course of effecting improvements concerning these problems, what sometimes happens is that, first, they are made in the personnel situation re-

garding members of the force. Civilians find that they must wait for the same improvements, and the delay is sometimes appreciable due to the press of "emergency" matters.

Needless to say, civilian personnel must be exposed to sufficient and appropriate In-Service training, promotional training, and be provided whatever promotional opportunities can be afforded them. The Police Department must work at doing this no less strenuously than it does for its other employees. In addition, it must take positive and extensive measures to integrate the relationship between the civilian and police employee. Not only must antagonisms be obliterated, but there must be created a feeling of kinship that is to be found among employees who work for a common cause. Unless these things are done, in addition to establishing other principles of sound personnel administration for the entire agency, civilian personnel must become soured after a number of years, depending upon the individual involved. The maximum of work will not be obtained from these people and an unwholesome relationship will prevail. Such things are unfortunate and needless. Progressive police administration can avoid them to the advantage of all concerned.