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THE POLICE ADMINISTRATOR—A POLITICIAN?

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EDITOR.

If one should spread a map of the United States on a desk and start inserting a black pin in every location which represented a police jurisdiction, it would not be too long before the outline of this country would begin to disappear, and at the completion of the task only a large, black blob would remain.

The "intricate mosaic" of overlapping jurisdictions which Bruce Smith¹ had decried in the 1920's has changed little in subsequent years. There are over forty thousand police jurisdictions in the United States of which the vast majority are municipal and township agencies. There is no indication that the number will decrease since once a village or town becomes incorporated an independent police agency is usually created almost simultaneously, if none existed prior to the act of incorporation.

Each of the pins also represents a police administrator responsible for the direction, control, and coordination of an operation employing from one man to twenty-four thousand five hundred.

While there is a remarkable similarity in responsibilities and objectives, even compared to Federal law enforcement agencies, there is a significant dissimilarity relative to structure, organization, resources, quality of personnel, attitude, performance, and ability. In fact, the only similarity among these agencies is the all too apparent dissimilarity.

Most, if not all, municipal police administrators would categorically and enthusiastically agree that they possess administrative, legal, professional, and moral responsibilities of the most profound nature. We wish to propose that most would be deeply shocked if it was suggested that they have political responsibilities of an equally profound

¹ SMITH, BRUCE, *POLICE SYSTEMS IN THE UNITED STATES*, Harper Brothers, Publishers, New York, 1940.

nature.² Further, we wish to propose that the other responsibilities, crucial as they certainly are, are secondary in importance to the political and less likely to contribute as much to the eventual "professionalization" of the police service. Justification for this statement will appear later in this paper.

Inherent in the statement is the implication that political responsibility, as it applies to the police administrator, does not mean politics in the *partisan* sense of the word. The term, as applied in this context, simply means a healthy and aggressive ability to develop and maintain relationships with men, politicians if you wish, who are in a position to allocate authority and power and who are able to assist the police service and often do not because police administrators, in general, are not communicating their needs and desires sufficiently well to obtain support from the politicians (be he mayor, city manager, or city councilman) and the powerful interest groups which usually articulate the community's specific wishes or demands.

The particular set of values by which American police administrators are directed are largely historically derived. The Jacksonian concept of democratic administration—that government can be conducted by intelligent, well-meaning and honest citizens, and that particular training and education is not vital—is a concept that many municipal mayors and city councilmen still entertain when appointing administrative and line personnel of the local law enforcement agency.³

² There are always exceptions, of course. It is possible to name several chief executives of cities across the United States who are acutely aware of their political responsibilities and are performing them brilliantly.

³ After a recent police scandal in a small mid-western city, prosecuting officials and the chief of police attempted to rationalize police criminality and corruption on the basis that the department had no training program. They are neatly ignoring the fact that training schools are not Sunday schools and that the original

Actually, one can hardly blame them in that it is difficult to expect an elected official to be aware of the philosophies and intricacies of police administration unless he is informed, even educated, by the person responsible for the efficiency, effectiveness, and further development of the organization. The situation remains impossible if the chief administrator of the department is unable or unwilling to express himself or is unaware of the basic problems involved.

The emergence of the large political machines in American cities in the latter part of the nineteenth century has contributed to the growth and installation of a set of personal and institutional values held by officers and agencies which only in the last twenty years, and particularly in the last ten, has begun to disappear.

Political appointments to police departments, uncertain tenure of top administrators, involvement of high echelon command officers in partisan politics and criminal activities, and a host of other improprieties have all contributed to a mass withdrawal of American police officers of all ranks and education levels from active participation in community government. Theoretically, a policeman's loyalty is directed toward the community but in actuality it is shunted inward and becomes a loyalty to his fellow officers and his department to a degree which can and does become unreasonable. Misdirected loyalties such as this make it almost impossible for one officer to inform on another for brutality and dishonesty, and it is the same type of loyalty which causes administrators to ignore or cover up improper police actions. At the very least excuses are made where swift disciplinary action and expulsion should follow an illegal action.

Part of the blame for such reactionary values can be placed directly at the feet of the public. Whenever a strong chief executive does arrest his own criminals and clean his own house the general outcry is so great that one might wish the cleanup had not happened. The honest and efficient officers are vilified and classed in the same grouping as the police criminals who were discovered. Ernest F. Roberts, brilliantly depicts the schizophrenic attitude of the "public" toward criminality and police efforts to exterminate it.⁴ This writer has

selection policies are totally inadequate. In addition, the concept of ultimate responsibility had been totally ignored.

⁴ ROBERTS, ERNEST F., Paradoxes in Law Enforcement, *JOURNAL OF CRIMINAL LAW, CRIMINOLOGY, & POLICE SCIENCE*, 52(2): 224-8 (July-August, 1961).

seen this happen time and again—the effort to cover up because of the adverse publicity and the resultant lack of community appreciation. A further withdrawal results in a more complete isolation from the general mainstream of the community.

The disappearance of the traditional political machine has left in the minds of many police administrators and lower echelon officers a feeling of fear and distrust of politics and interest groups which is extremely difficult to dispel. The result of all of this is an insularity, conservatism toward things new and strange, in-bred values, and a reaction against education and intellectualism.

The literature concerning all phases of police organization and administration contributes greatly to the negative values we are discussing. The standard writings and textbooks in the field denounce "politics" in no uncertain terms. There is never any mention of the role of politics in the democratic processes other than to make it very clear that politics has no place in police administration under any conditions. The fact that "public administration operates in an environment of interest group activity"⁵ and that police agencies are an integral and indispensable part of public administration is ignored. It is our contention that police administration is an important segment of the spectrum of public administration and is *deeply involved in the political process* whether it is a conscious involvement or not. The periodic battle for its share of the public dollar alone makes it so.

Police administration literature is replete with references to community groups and organizations (churches, labor unions, newspapers, etc.) which have a tremendous influence on public opinion and the effect of this influence on the effectiveness of the police. However, they are rarely referred to as "interest" or "pressure" groups nor are they identified as groups exhibiting and participating in the political processes. They are seldom referred to as a valuable element in the American political scene; the general implication is that one should "look out for them".

Information about groups of this type in police literature is included in chapters entitled "Police and the Public", "Police and Community Relations", "Public Relations", "Human Relations", or something similar in nature. The messages of

⁵ ELEMENTS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, Edited by Fritz Morstein Marx, Prentice, Hall, Inc., 1959, p. 294.

wisdom in writings of this nature are usually aimed at the officer on the street and seldom at the administrator. We contend that there is too much writing about the vague and nebulous public opinion which is never too well crystallized in a community, at least in respect to the law enforcement function, and very little relative to the efforts needed to cope with specific, well-defined, and organized interest groups which do have crystallized opinions regarding specific areas of governmental activity. It would seem appropriate if there were more suggestions as to how and why administrators should work with interest groups consciously and energetically in or out of the political arena.

As a result of the rigidly set value premises possessed by most police administrators, the powerful and influential group interests which exist in all communities either control or totally ignore the needs of the police service. It is highly probable that most police administrators do not know that "... important matters are decided by relatively hidden and secret oligarchies—not by the 'people' ".⁶ This is not to say that the "people" are not heard from occasionally. For example, a particular issue may be so important, such as the disclosure of police dishonesty or brutality, that the resulting outcry can cause a strong impact on an administrator's policies and procedures. We mean only that the public at large has very little to say as well as very little interest in police administration and that it is incumbent upon the administrator to identify, work with or against (depending upon the particular situation), and use, if you will, the various groups in any given community that do have much to say in the determination of the agencies' policies and procedures.

Simon, Smithburg, and Thompson, in their excellent book on public administration, bluntly state that an administrator must depend on the legislature, executive officer, and other people and groups within the administration and jurisdiction and must seek the backing of people who influence the legislature and the executive. They continue by saying "if the required amount of cooperation is not forthcoming, the organization will fail to accomplish its objectives and hence to satisfy its supporters." In other words, one "cannot ignore the organized interests."⁷ To do so may not be

committing organizational suicide but can possibly be painfully crippling.

Authorities in the field of public administration generally agree that a unit or agency at any level of government, federal, state, or local must identify and obtain the support of specific clientele groups or at least keep their antagonism to a minimum to survive as a governmental entity. Clientele groups are those "who provide the principal sources of political support and opposition."⁸

Oddly enough, police administrators rarely employ interest groups to intervene for them when they are attacked or when selling a program deemed important or even vital to the welfare of the community.

If the theories entertained by the public administration people are valid, and we believe they are, then how and why do law enforcement agencies survive in view of the fact that police administrators do not and have not, in general, approached their problem solutions from the "political" aspect. We have a theory concerning this phenomenon.

Our contention is that the traditional values entertained by police administrators have invested them with the self-satisfied feeling that the law enforcement function is necessary for the welfare of the community and cannot be eliminated because of a lack of need since the need is always present. Consequently, since there is no danger of organization elimination, there is no necessity to struggle for survival as other departments, such as planning units and recreation departments must do. As a result of such a philosophy, police administrators have taken a back seat to librarians and recreation directors, among others, in the struggle for prestige, influence, and position in the municipal government panorama.

Librarians and recreation directors usually have strong backing by specific community pressure groups which are vitally interested in the success or failure of their particular objects of interest. There is usually only one group in any given community which is interested continually in the over-all efficiency of the police—that is the criminal element and it is hardly in a position to contribute assistance of a positive nature.

The values imposed upon and accepted by police administrators stemming from history and tradition must be shrugged off and relegated to the

⁶ SIMON, SMITHBURG, THOMPSON, *PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1958, p. 529.

⁷ MARX, FRITZ MORSTEIN, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

⁸ SIMON, SMITHBURG, THOMPSON, *op. cit.*, p. 461.

past. Outside interest groups must be recognized as potential help and responded to in a positive manner. There must be a recognition of the political realities on the part of police administrators and support from interest groups must be consciously and aggressively sought after. As Roberts indicated in the article referred to earlier, the police must be their own spokesmen; "the district attorney or the local mayor have too many other irons in the fire to represent fairly and accurately the police point of view."

In our view, it is not immoral or unprofessional for a police administrator to engage in "politics" in this manner. Indeed, it is our contention that he does whether he wishes to or not since the nature of his function dictates that he must. It becomes a matter of degree as to how effectively the relationships are established. The continuum of effectiveness ranges from wilted and silent submissiveness to active and vital participation in the "battle".

It is unreasonable for an administrator to expect only the legislator to be involved with pressure groups. The role of the administrator has changed radically in the last three decades, and it is no longer possible for the legislator alone to be the sole buffer between the interest group and administration. Because of the increasing complexity of government, the development of specialties requiring expert knowledge, and the increase of time needed to complete the legislative process, the legislator needs the assistance of able administrators to solve group conflicts with him and in some instances for him.

In this context a strong police administrator must be political and, in so doing, retain complete control over the policies and operations of his agency. To avoid political responsibilities dangerously hinders proper administration in that basic responsibilities are not met and grappled with. An attitude of isolation leads to an insularity so complete that effective administration is bound to suffer.