

The Detroit Police Department exists now and functions daily in Detroit as a political force, both latent and overt. The police department exists, and has existed since at least July of 1967, as a latent political force due to two factors: the make-up and attitudes of the department, and the racial division which has created an ever-increasing polarization of the community since July of 1967. The police department through the actions of its official organization, the DPOA, exists as an overt political force which has become conscious of itself as a political entity and has from 1967 to the present pursued a continually more aggressive course in influencing the political decisions of the community.

The reality of the political make-up, situation, and overt actions of Detroit's police has resulted in severe injustice and injury to all the people of Detroit, but especially to the black community which comprises some 40% of the city's total population. The disasters which this reality has brought on the community, black and white, will continue as long as the police force continues to function as a political body enforcing its own views of society on the community at large, rather than as an agency of protection and prevention under the control of the civilian community.

DETROIT'S political police

Given the present polarized condition of the city, the racial and class make-up of the police dept. makes its day-to-day functioning a political matter. The department is 91% white in a city which is 40% black. It is filled with white men of working class background whose racial beliefs are formed before they become officers, and are quite different than those held by 40% of the people they are paid to protect and 9% of their fellow officers. Nothing in the grossly inadequate 12 week training program which the department provides a man before he is placed on the street, or the on-the-job involvement with other officers which takes place thereafter provides any stimulus that might begin to change these beliefs, so they remain. Black and Spanish Americans know that the white police officer who deals with them lives in, sees, and judges another world than the one they inhabit. They know this on the painful level of experience. On the scientific level the fact that the white officer perceives what goes on around him differently than does the black man or the Spanish American, or even than a fellow black officer, has been given validity by the Mendelsohn study, conducted from November 1967 to February 1968. In this study Detroit police were questioned about their views of the 1967 rebellion and their attitudes towards basic social problems connected with the race issue. The results of the study indicate that white police officers see and act in a different world than black officers because they believe in a different set of underlying social realities.

On a question as vital as "What will be the main effects of the riot?" (i.e. positive or negative), 47.2% of black officers felt that it would have positive long-range effects, while among white patrolmen only 15.1% held the same feeling. On another question concerning the riot, the seemingly factual, concrete question of "Did you see Negroes giving assistance to policemen and firemen during the riot?" the racial split on the answers seems to indicate that what white and black officers con-



cretely perceive may in times of crisis be different. The report states that an "overwhelming number" of white officers of all ranks said they did not see Negroes giving assistance. On the other hand, two-thirds of the black officers answered that they had seen blacks going to the assistance of police and firemen. This would seem to indicate that during the turmoil, racial feelings of white officers who felt personally threatened because of their color became extreme and they saw every black man as a threat, none as impartial or helpful. The same beliefs which in crisis times could produce this apparent psychological blinding effect function on a less extreme level every day. For example, on the basic issues of discrimination in housing, jobs, and law enforcement police opinion polled by the study was strongly divided along racial lines.

92% of black officers felt that Negroes were treated either very or slightly unfairly in the area of housing, while only 41% of white patrolmen felt the same way. More than half the white patrolmen polled felt either that housing was equal or that Negroes were actually favored, this in spite of the fact that many of these officers work daily in areas which attest to the falsity of this position.

In the area of jobs, 89% of black officers felt that Negroes were treated unfairly, while 74% of white patrolmen, and 59% of white inspectors (who, according to the study, have less extreme racial attitudes due to the fact that they come into contact with many levels of society, black and white, and so do not experience Negroes only in "apparent crime" situations, as does the white officer on a beat.) felt that Negroes were favored or treated equally in this area.

And in the all-important area of "Law Enforcement Agencies," how police view police, 87% of black officers felt that Negroes were treated either "very" or "slightly" unfairly (56% very, 31% slightly while only 7% of white patrolmen felt that Negroes were treated even "slightly" unfairly. No white patrolman, detective, or lieutenant polled felt that Negroes were treated "very unfairly" by law enforcement agencies, 57% of white patrolmen felt Negroes were treated the same as whites, and 34% thought they were actually favored.

This indicates that in that area which effects most directly community-police relations, how police view their own treatment of the black community, the 91% of the force which is white sees no need for improvement of police work in this area (with the exception that the 34% of white patrolmen who see blacks as favored may feel that police should be more severe in their treatment of blacks than they have been.)

OVERT POLITICS

Calls for greater repression blacks usually appear under the guise of "increased professionalism" in the department. This means, among other things, that police recruiters continue to disqualify black recruits on the basis of a written test that has been proven to be (1) culturally biased, (2) of no value in predicting the officer's subsequent service ratings, and (3) subject to grading on a "flexible cut-off score" at the discretion of the (white, racist) testing officer. (see p. 2) The entire public political problem comes to a head around the issue of police hiring of more blacks and its corollary, the hiring of white police who live in the suburbs.

The situation is essentially this: There are three large groupings involved, the 91% white, incredibly racist police department, the predominantly white, moderately racist liberal faction (Mayor Cavanagh, members of the Common Council, the New Detroit Committee), and the people, the members of Detroit's non-affluent, non-white community. Since July of 1967 the liberal big business-city govt. faction has become frightened enough of the potentially explosive racial situation to apply some pressure to the police department for change. The police department and the DFOA have successfully resisted this pressure and in so doing have become a political entity which is its own boss. The people have suffered continued repression.

The history is this: Following the July 1967 rebellion it became obvious that the police dept. needed improvement. Racial imbalance in the dept. was the most politically visible, easily correctible sore spot. On May 13 members of the Mounted Bureau engaged in witnessed, confirmed acts of police brutality during the Poor People's Campaign march at Cobo Hall (Cobo Hall I). Although unprovoked violence by police officers was clearly the case, a "thorough investigation" was promised by the mayor's office. On June 1 Mayor Cavanagh promised action "within two days" and at the same time announced an extensive campaign to increase the number of black police officers. The result? No action was taken until 7 months later, when two officers were slightly disciplined. (Patrolman John Kursteiner forfeited 15 days sick leave for using his night stick on a marcher, Patrolman John Kress forfeited 3 days sick leave for threatening a marcher with a carbine and then refusing to give his name to a marcher who protested the display of the weapon.) The "thorough investigation" had been entrusted to the police dept., and was not made public.

On August 9, Cavanagh sent a secret communication to the police department, ordering that Negroes be hired at a 4 to 1 ratio over whites until the vacancies in the department had been filled. Several days later, Councilman Van Antwerp, a former police inspector, revealed the memorandum to the press. Just previous to this Cavanagh had denied the existence of such a document, so Van Antwerp's action, which could not have been possible without the cooperation of high-ranking members of the police department, served to discredit both Cavanagh and the recruiting program. It also proved that the city administration did not have enough control over the department to command loyalty on important issues when those issues conflicted with the department's view of the way Detroit and the department should be.

In the months preceding the Nov. 5, 1968 election, the DPOA spent \$250,000 to beat a Cavanagh-backed program to weaken police pension benefits. The bill passed by 26,000 votes, but the DPOA had come into its own as a political organization openly at odds with the people. DPOA president Carl Parsell called the close vote margin a "moral victory" for the DPOA.

On October 29, 1969 at the Cobo Hall Wallace For President Rally (Cobo Hall II) Detroit police again went wild. The furor aroused over this incident was heightened when on Nov. 1 off-duty policemen beat black youths at a dance in the Veterans' Memorial Building. Once again Cavanagh announced an investigation. This time police openly blocked (rather than covertly as in Cobo Hall I) the investigation. The "blue curtain" hampered efforts to find out who had taken part in the beatings. After much publicity and continued efforts at investigation, nine white officers were charged. Two officers received citations, 5 went before a Police Trial Board, and 2 are presently awaiting trial in civil courts. One of the trial-boarded officers, Patrick Cooney, was discharged from the force.

Public anger over police behavior surrounding the Veterans' Memorial incident had not yet entirely died away when the New Bethel shootings once again put the department on the front page. The death of Patrolman Czapski and the terrorist image of the RNA which the media conveyed resulted in a great deal of sympathy for the department, especially in the white community. The DPOA used this sympathy as a wedge to further split Detroit into two hostile racial camps by circulating a "Petition for Impeachment and/or Removal of Judge Crockett," who had acted in a perfectly sane, legal manner in releasing the 124 persons police had arrested in the church.

This brings us up to the present situation, the upcoming mayoral campaign, the Citizens' Trial Board Petition, and the result of the push for a more racially balanced police department.