

Loyalty to 'the system' is the importa

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PART II



WHAT "the system" is can be defined simply. It is a police service which must be seen to be running smoothly, efficiently, honestly, satisfying the public and looking after its members' well-being.

To critics of the police, the protection of the system assumes paramount importance, and leads to the quick, quiet, "efficient" handling of internal problems — shunting erring members out through the side door and keeping the lid on publicity.

It is a system in which each policeman has his position — and the more senior the policeman gets, the protection of that position becomes increasingly identified with protecting the system itself.

To the senior police, protection of their position depends on knowing what is going on so they will never be caught out when a question is directed at them by the Commissioner or an Assistant Commissioner, a politician or the media.

The result, according to critics, is that more junior police spend more and more time doing paper work, covering every angle against bureaucratic or political inquiry, or against litigation, instead of getting out on to the streets and protecting the public.

Occasionally, a policeman breaks ranks and says this. One was Stuart Pearson, who in 1981 when he was a senior constable went to the media.

Mr Pearson, who was sub-

sequently retired from the police force — with a pension — on the grounds that he was medically unfit, was unrepentant when The Sydney Morning Herald contacted him.

"The police would like to assist people in many ways except that the people at the top are so old and dodderly that they will give us a mountain of paper work to protect themselves," he said.

"The seven-minute car chase ends up in seven hours of paperwork. There was a stolen vehicle, driven by a juvenile, and in the chase police vehicles and other vehicles were damaged.

"We wrote reports in quadruplicate and I think even the cleaner got a copy. You multiply 10 minutes of police work with one hour of supporting paper work and see what you have got."

Mr Pearson, whose criticisms of police conditions brought him widespread publicity, was suspended from the force not long after his statements. He then appeared before a medical board

which, he said, declared him unfit on mental and physical grounds.

He believes he was unjustly dealt with and he was singled out because of his act of "breaking ranks." A senior police officer said that police work was very stressful and from time to time policemen, such as Mr Pearson, succumbed to the stress.

The preoccupation of senior police officers with knowing what is going on, even when such details could normally be dealt with by more junior officers, was underlined by Justice Lusher in his report on NSW police two years ago.

Mr Bill Allen, the former Deputy Police Commissioner who retired in disgrace last year, was good at getting "answers" quickly from the Police Department when, for example, a question was asked in Parliament.

"He'd get in among his staff and browbeat them till they got what was wanted where it would otherwise have taken another day," a member of the Police Department staff said.

Sometimes police officers are caught out doing something corrupt or irregular, and are given the option of resigning rather than being dismissed.

Last year, two police officers were the subject of an Internal Affairs inquiry into allegations that they were extorting money. Internal Affairs found the allegations substantiated.

I asked the Deputy Commissioner (Administration), Mr John Perrin, why criminal charges were not laid against the two. He said the evidence was not hard enough to justify putting them before a court.

"We accepted their applications to resign," he said. "The worst action we could have taken against them was to dismiss them, and that would have been a costly process."

"To have them appear before a Police Tribunal and have the case against them presented by a departmental prosecutor, involving witness, police, court staff and a judge would amount to many thousands of dollars — anything up to \$20,000.

"Then they could go before a review division of the Police Tribunal and this would bring more costs and they could also turn to the Government and Related Employees Appeal Tribunal. And in the end, they would be dismissed anyway."

Mr Perrin said a policeman resigning under a cloud would not escape entirely from the stigma. He would get a Certificate of Ser-

vice, giving only his length of service in the NSW Police Force.

A policeman resigning for other reasons was entitled to a Certificate of Discharge, similar to a reference.

But some long-time observers of police operations, such as Mr John Dowd (Lib, Lane Cove) are not satisfied that such a system leads to sufficient justice.

"Very often in the past a senior person in the force has come to a police officer and has said: 'Look, we will probably get you on a charge. You can fight the charge but we are pretty sure of convicting you. If you resign we will no longer have this charge against you.'"

"How many police have left the force when someone has got them by the scruff of the neck?"

Mr Dowd and other critics believe there is a less-than-rigorous treatment by the department of "straying" police officers, and that this leads to toleration of irregularities that would otherwise be rooted out.

Junior police, confronted for the first time with a minor gratuity, find that there is little risk in their accepting it because they are unlikely to suffer at the hands of the department.

They find there are other irregularities, such as fabricating statements ("verbals") against suspects to shorten the investigation and get a conviction.

A conflict develops between the high ideals of someone starting off in the service and the practical



reality he sees about him. It is a conflict seen elsewhere, as Dr Tony Vinson, a former chairman of the Corrective Service Commission, observes.

"What I found during my time there was that a subtle shift occurred in people's value judgments," he said. "I think perhaps the psychological mechanism of

walking seeing a to say: 'I cannot bu

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