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COMMENTARY ON THE SYMPOSIUM

ROBERT B. MILLS

One of the hidden satisfactions derived from this symposium was the numerous reports from participants of the excellent support they had received from police administrations in their respective cities. While reports were not always that rosy, nevertheless a definite trend appears to be developing for law enforcement systems to seek non-traditional ways to resolve their problems. The willingness of the police to permit "outside experts" to attempt new programs indicates that law enforcement agencies are becoming increasingly sensitized to their key role in the urban crisis. It still comes as a shock to some police administrators to find that psychologists and other social scientists are not all long-haired dreamers and headshrinkers. Likewise, some professors are still surprised to find that policemen are usually men of considerable skill in practical human relations, not intent upon trampling civil liberties in their zeal for social order.

As ancient stereotypes yield to new realities in the fire of social action, psychologists and police both are struggling together to find collaborative ways of solving community problems. The kinds of innovative programs described in this symposium necessarily involve risk-taking; risks of failure, of public criticism, and of dissension within police organizations. Police are great risk-takers in certain well-known ways, but often stubbornly resistant to taking risks at other times. Police today are particularly eager to influence public opinion favorably, to "tell their story". The increasing prevalence of community relations programs today certainly attests to police need to justify and explain their viewpoint, but such programs are also a symptom of the failure to communicate adequately to the community. Police systems want to influence, but must also be open to influence. Communications is a two-way street. Most police organizations, operating from a para-military stance, are particularly subject to a kind of cultural myopia which may hinder them from changing in a problem-solving direction under the threat of altered social conditions.

All of the questions regarding channels of communication with the community come to their

sharpest focus around *professionalization* of police functions. The major response by the police establishment to the multiple challenges of how to relate themselves effectively to the urban crisis has been to demand professionalization for themselves. Professionalization has usually been defined by police to include higher entrance requirements, higher salaries, more liberal educational and training opportunities, greater public recognition, a narrowing and sharpening of the police role to that of scientific crime-fighters, and greater autonomy and self-determination by police in setting their own standards and controlling their own vocational destinies.

There is an honest question whether the unanticipated consequences of the drive for professionalization have acted to aggravate rather than help relations with the community. For example, one of the greatest advances in efficient patrol power, the almost universal use of 4-wheeled patrol vehicles, has also resulted in sharply curtailed social contact between patrolmen and citizens. The friendly cop on the corner has largely vanished; he was the victim of increased efficiency, and the high wages necessary to maintain the modern professionalized police officer. An officer typically spends his 8-hour shift talking almost entirely to citizens in his official capacity only, and he builds his impressions of community attitudes primarily through fellow-officers who operate under a similar handicap. Such an officer is subject to the same biases as the psychotherapist who extrapolates "normal" behavior on the basis of the patients who pass through his office; like the therapist, he may come home from work and complain of "feeling lonely".

In fact, police have sometimes pictured themselves as a persecuted minority in a community which seldom shows its appreciation; police have termed themselves "the blue race". The point is that some features of professionalization act to insulate the policeman from larger community processes, and make him more ingrown, less accessible to influence, and more maladapted to his own community.

The response to Dr. Bard's family crisis inter-

vention program is very instructive on this point. Many of the patrolmen who initially scoffed politely at having their law enforcement functions "diluted" and "undermined" by having a type of family counselor added to their ranks, began to come back for a second look when results of the FCIU began to show themselves. While long-range results of his program are not yet available, it seems quite possible that the most important long-range payoff for the family crisis intervention program will be better "community relations". The benefits of new types of community service built into the police role have not been adequately explored.

It all comes down to one's definition of "professionalism". An important part of the value system of good professionals in all fields has

always been openness, a willingness to risk innovation in the service of their objectives. Part of this openness is constant monitoring and research of results obtained, and the candor to admit mistakes in order to improve the functioning of the whole system. In industry management has benefitted greatly by commitment to periodic self-critical scrutiny. The police establishment, along with other segments of municipal government, is lagging badly in its attention to organizational development of the type used by industry.

The stimulation provided by the examples shown in this symposium could aid the police organization greatly, particularly if police administration would adopt wholeheartedly the idea of innovative change as a part of their drive toward professionalization.