

Bedeviled by long, hazardous hours, low pay, public abuse and unrealistic court decisions, policemen across the country are at an all-time low in morale. Is it any wonder that police departments are so dangerously undermanned that crime is flourishing?

## Our Alarming Police Shortage

BY WILLIAM SCHULZ

**M**ORE THAN 2500 major crimes are committed during a typical week in the city of Los Angeles. Twenty-five women are raped; four citizens are murdered; 190 others are beaten, knifed or shot. Police switchboards light up with reports of 153 robberies, 445 stolen cars, 637 larcenies involving \$50 or more, and 1076 housebreakings. Yet this orgy of lawlessness is no reflection on the Los Angeles Police Department. "We just don't have the manpower to keep crime in check," says embattled police chief Thomas Reddin. "We need 10,000 men, but we can't even fill our authorized strength of 5383."

Officials in every section of the country echo Chief Reddin's complaint. America is desperately underprotected—at a time when crime is growing six times faster than population—and the situation is worsening rapidly. Demoralized by inadequate wages, frustrated by judicial nitpicking, sickened by citizen apathy, policemen by the thousands are turning in their badges, while potential replacements look elsewhere for employment. A survey of 36 major departments from Boston to Honolulu discloses that *not one* is up to authorized strength. U.S. Assistant Attorney General Fred Vinson, Jr., puts the

nationwide police shortage at a frightening 50,000.

**On the Run.** New York's 73rd Precinct—the teeming Brownsville section of Brooklyn—is a microcosm of the national problem. Last summer, the “normal complement” of 374 men needed to safeguard the area was short by more than 100. Bone-weary officers put in 16-hour days in the attempt to maintain law and order. But they were no match for marauding criminals. Homicides soared. Stores were repeatedly burglarized. Policemen themselves were mugged in broad daylight. “They’ve got us on the run,” an exhausted patrolman said bitterly. “And they know it.”

To remedy the situation, New York officials have launched a high-powered recruiting campaign. But their problem is not unique. Recruiters from the Washington, D.C., police department comb the eastern United States, and cannot fill the nearly 400 vacancies on their 3100-man force. Meanwhile, crime in the nation's capital increased 38 percent in a recent 12-month period.

Behind the cold statistics are the individuals who suffer: the merchant forced out of business by repeated holdups; the pretty teen-ager disfigured for life by an assailant's razor; the young housewife thrust into widowhood by an armed robber—and you may well be next. For make no mistake about it: every gap in the “thin blue line” means that more citizens get hurt.

This was demonstrated vividly in

mid-1966, when hundreds of Chicago police were taken off their regular beats to quell potential riots in the tense Eighth District. During this time, the city's crime soared 29.8 percent over the previous year, with increases recorded in 20 of 21 police districts. The sole exception: the Eighth District.

**High Risk, Low Pay.** The shameful events of last summer, during which more than 100 communities were ravaged by riot, have made the police manpower situation even more acute. For example, 20 men had signed up to take the examination for admission to the undermanned Plainfield, N.J., police department. Then came that city's riot, in the course of which a young patrolman was stomped to death by a savage mob. Only five of the applicants showed up to take the test. Of the five, only two qualified. In nearby Newark, a policeman threatening to turn in his badge said, “They just buried the best man I've ever known”—this of Frederick Toto, a decorated policeman shot to death by a sniper during the July riot. “I'm not afraid, but my wife's near a nervous breakdown.”

But the riots are only part of it. In recent months I have traveled from one end of the country to the other, interviewing former policemen as well as harried young patrolmen who, at least for now, are sticking it out. From their stories this deplorable financial picture emerges:

Although the Office of Economic

Opportunity puts the poverty level at \$3200 for a non-farm family of four, patrolmen in Dickson, Tenn., start at \$2400 a year; in Durant, Okla., at \$2760; in Glasgow, Ky., at \$3000. Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, pays its patrolmen an annual \$5280, but requires them to work 54-hour weeks.

Salaries in larger cities, while higher, are nonetheless disgraceful. In Seattle, cable splicers earn \$375 a month more than policemen; Chicago electricians receive \$1.40 an hour more than the patrolman on the beat; carpenters in New York command 50 percent more per hour than patrolmen. Moreover, the cable splicer, electrician and carpenter work 35- or 40-hour weeks, with generous overtime. The policeman toils nights and holidays, rarely with overtime, often under incredible strain, his life frequently in danger. In 1966, 23,000 policemen were assaulted in the line of duty.

More appalling than low pay to many policemen is the attitude of the public. "I'm willing to take my chances with the punks and the hoods," says a veteran policeman in Baltimore. "All I ask is a little support from the average citizen."

Yet, all too often, people "walk the other way." For half an hour, two members of the California Highway Patrol teetered on the edge of a bridge 185 feet above San Pedro Bay, struggling to save a man bent on suicide. Again and again they shouted for help to passing cars. Not one driver stopped, or even bothered

to call for aid when he reached the end of the bridge.

In another instance, a San Francisco policeman attempted to arrest two drunks on a downtown street. Forty minutes later he was carried into San Francisco General Hospital, his cheek slashed open, his nose broken. "The crowd just let them beat me," he said. "People act as if the police were their enemies."

**Case Dismissed.** Another major factor in the sorry state of police morale is the series of vague and loosely worded Supreme Court rulings handed down in recent years. Consider these typical cases reported to the Senate Subcommittee on Criminal Laws and Procedures:

- "This fellow went through a red light and ran into me," an angry motorist told the policeman dispatched to the scene of a traffic accident in Providence, R.I. "Is that so?" the officer inquired of the second motorist. The latter admitted that he had indeed run the light. Later, the case against him was thrown out of court. Why? The policeman had failed to notify him of his rights, as required by the Supreme Court's 1966 *Miranda* decision,\* before asking, "Is that so?"

- An officer in Torrance, Calif., picked up two young men on narcotics charges. Acutely aware of *Miranda*, the policeman informed the suspects, "You have the right to

\*Which says that a suspect must be informed of his right to silence, of his right to a lawyer even if he cannot afford one, and of the fact that anything he says can be held against him in court.

the services of an attorney during all stages of the proceedings against you." Not good enough, Judge Otto Willett ruled in dismissing the charges. What the officer should have said, Willett declared, was, "You have the right to the services of an attorney prior to any questioning." The defendants left the courtroom grinning.

"Nitpicking of this kind has had a disastrous effect on our force," says Lt. Lee J. Ashman, head of the Torrance narcotics squad. "Some veteran officers have become so frustrated they've simply quit."

**Turnstile Justice.** Just as demoralizing is the cavalier attitude that many judges have toward juvenile crime. Consider the case of Harry Sylvester Jones, Jr., a Washington, D.C., delinquent who was given an early release from reform school—only to embark on a criminal career that included rape, auto theft and grand larceny. Sentenced to prison three times in eight years, Jones was three times released on parole or probation. Within seven months after he was released for the third time, he had raped two women at knife-point, stabbed another nine times as she knelt in church, and committed his third rape against a 54-year-old woman he trapped in an elevator.

Jones is hardly unique. Police files in every state bulge with cases in which innocent members of society pay for the mistakes of unrealistic judges and parole officers. The careers of Gregory Ulas Powell and

Jimmy Lee Smith, young Californians who had amassed 25 arrests by the time they were 30, are depressingly typical.

On the night of March 9, 1963, en route to their fifth robbery in two weeks, Powell and Smith were stopped for a defective taillight by Los Angeles policemen Ian James Campbell and Karl Hettinger. The unsuspecting officers were promptly kidnaped at gunpoint, driven north into Kern County and marched onto a deserted field. As the officers stood with their hands raised, Powell calmly fired a .32-caliber bullet into Campbell's mouth. Hettinger whirled and ran, miraculously escaping as Powell sought to gun him down and Smith pumped four more slugs into the dying Campbell.

The lesson to be learned from that March night is the folly of turnstile justice. Campbell's killers were both on parole. *Eight times* they had been the recipients of judicial leniency in the form of conditional release, parole or probation. Nor has their luck run out. Captured within hours of the murder, the two were convicted and sentenced to death. But, last July, the California Supreme Court reversed the convictions on the ground that the defendants had not been fully advised of their rights, and ordered a new trial, perhaps providing another opportunity to prove that crime does pay.

"The weakness in our handling of repeating offenders has caused vet-

eran law-enforcement officers to throw up their hands in despair," says FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. "Worse, it makes outstanding young men reluctant to enter the law-enforcement profession at the very time their services are so gravely needed."

**A Major Commitment.** What can we do to close the dangerous "police gap"? Two steps are clearly called for:

1. *We must pay the police a living wage.* James Royer, father of two, resigned from the Cincinnati police department in the summer of 1966. "My rank is that of police specialist," he wrote. "My salary, after nine years, is \$7507. I have no union, no guild and very few rights—civil or otherwise. Our city personnel officer classifies me as semi-skilled labor—my college degree, graduate work, advanced training and years of professional experience notwithstanding. Private industry has offered me a substantial salary increase and an opportunity for advancement. I regret that this could not be achieved as an employe of the people of Cincinnati."

Jim Royer was not alone, as City Councilman John E. Held was shocked to find. Many of the city's outstanding policemen were quitting the force to accept higher-paying jobs as guards, truck drivers, salesmen. Crime was up sharply; the number of offenses culminating in arrest was down 25 percent from the preceding year.

Held led the fight for the creation

of a nonpartisan crime committee. Mobilizing public support, the committee won an immediate \$1000 pay hike for Cincinnati's policemen, with promises of more to come. Today, a bit more than a year later, morale is measurably improved. Resignations and retirements have been slashed by two thirds, and the force is again attracting ambitious young recruits. "We've got to understand," says John Held, "that you can't stop crime with an undermanned police force whose morale has been broken."

2. *We must provide the police the moral support they so desperately need.* Throughout the country, police efforts to improve community relations have been undermined by a concerted campaign of abuse. Commonest charge is that of "police brutality." Yet a task force of the President's Crime Commission, which witnessed 5339 "police-citizen encounters," during 850 eight-hour patrols, found only 20 cases in which police were felt to have used unnecessary force. "That is a record of satisfactory performance in 99.63 percent of the sample under study," says syndicated newspaper columnist James J. Kilpatrick. "What other occupation or profession boasts a better record?"

To counterbalance the work of police-baiting groups, Fred E. Inbau, professor of criminal law at Northwestern University, recently formed an organization called Americans for Effective Law Enforcement "to represent the law-abiding public and

its embattled protectors." Enthusiastically supported by many of the country's top experts on crime and punishment, AELE will defend, among others, policemen it considers unjustly accused of brutality; draft model anti-crime statutes; and argue major cases in the nation's courts.

Meanwhile, in Indianapolis, a band of housewives has demonstrated that *anyone* may enlist in the battle for law and order. Stunned by the brutal slaying of a 90-year-old woman, a group of women residents initiated the Indianapolis Anti-Crime Crusade in March 1962. Since then, enlisting more than 60,000 women in its ranks, the Crusade has won badly needed pay hikes for the Indianapolis police, lobbied for effective anti-crime measures and sat in on more than 80,000 court cases to keep local judges on their toes. Its dogged efforts have helped to curb Indianapolis crime and have

won the kudos of the President's Crime Commission.

The exodus of policemen *can* be stopped. Thousands of young men *can* be persuaded to make law enforcement their career. But it will require a major commitment from ordinary citizens across the land, not only in dollars but in spirit. As Rep. Joel T. Broyhill, of Virginia, has said, "In part because we, as ordinary citizens, have waited too long to fight back, a police uniform today is the target for epithets and abuse. It is time to ask our decent citizens for collective action; our public officials for more backbone; our courts for more reality. We must stop this nonsense not tomorrow, not next week, but *today*."

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