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Police abuse

Present system needs look

By J.W. BELTRAME

How can we best control the abuse of power by police, was the topic of discussion Sunday, at the Moot Court, in the last of a series of lectures concerning civil liberty issues. Alan Grant, former Scotland Yard policeman presently teaching criminal law at Osgoode, delivered his research paper on the control of the police, to students and a panel of three, including deputy police chief Jack Ackroyd.

Outside the court, Peter Dorfman showed video tapes of the Nov. 12 confrontation between police, strikers and demonstrators at Artistic Woodwork, in which 18 persons were arrested. The tapes showed one case of police manhandling a demonstrator by bashing his head against a wall.

"We have reached the time when we have to seriously question the balance between police power and police accountability," said Grant, reading excerpts from his paper, which took 18 months to compile.

The thrust of the paper dealt with the possible abuse and public mistrust of the system of police investigating themselves. As it now stands the police are responsible for handling, investigating, and judicating citizen complaints.

"It is not an insignificant fact," Grant pointed out, "that neither the metro, provincial, nor federal police forces state in their annual reports how many complaints were lodged against them, nor how they were settled."

Grant cites the power of the appointed investigator to decide whether to press charges or exonerate the accused officer as one of the main areas of abuse. "The investigator can see something big or see something small — or like Nelson, he can see no ships at all," he said.

Grant compiled statistics of citizen complaints lodged against metro police in the last three years. During that period he found 1488 complaints lodged, of which some 20 per cent were judged substantiated (worthy of further investigation).

Of these 304 substantiated complaints, "I could find only 5 cases in which the officer actually went to trial, and 8 cases of police

resignation," he said.

In contrast with this Grant said, "in nearly all cases in which the complaint was instigated by the police themselves, the case went to trial."

In his paper Grant recommended that "all facets of the citizen complaint machinery be kept out of police hands." He said this was necessary to restore public faith in the investigating procedure and to keep the investigation objective.

Deputy police chief Ackroyd attacked the paper for going too far and said that the police were already under too much scrutiny. "The Bail Reform Act and the new wire tap legislation went too far," he said. "There's more control of the police today than ever before."

He cited the public, senior police officers, the news media and politicians as the main watchdogs of the police.

Attacking Grant's figures he said that "eighty per cent of all cases of citizen complaints against the police

are by persons under charges. Many of these cases involve plea bargaining."

York student Dorfman who was arrested for his participation in the Artistic strike, accused the police of beating him in the patty wagon and of covering up the truth.

"Even though I had witnesses to substantiate my charges," he said, "the police were acquitted."

"In virtually every case where photographs and video tapes were used, the police evidence was discredited," he added.

Ackroyd did not see this as a case of police covering up evidence to protect themselves, adding that strikes are especially difficult for police to handle. He did say that he was not "proud" of police behaviour during the strike.

Alan Borovoy, general council of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, concluded, "This case illustrates the need for the kind of machinery professor Grant indicated in his paper."



Photos lost

A bright orange box (8x10) with three negative envelopes and eight photographs was lost in the area of the post office on Friday, February 8th about 1:00 p.m. The photographs are a circus shot at the C.N.E. and of abstract images of rocks, ice and snow like the picture above.

If you see this box lying around, would you please hand it to any security guard or to the lost and found. My name is Doug and I can be reached at 487-7665 after 10:30 p.m.

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