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A Case of Cop's Honor

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"It's an outrage," the man said. "Anybody who violates somebody else's constitutional rights should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law." "Amen!" thought a listener, who had heard a lot of talk around about America moving toward fascism. Amen to those thoughts and to the vigor and obvious sincerity with which they were expressed.

But the events which gave rise to the man's outburst of rage are not easily dismissed. It all started with living nightmares for the Herbert Gilotto and Don Askew families of Collinsville, Ill., on the night of April 23, 1973. That night, Mr. Gilotto, who is a boilermaker and who gets up for work at 5 a.m. retired early for the night with his wife. They were awakened by an unusual noise. Mr. Gilotto got up to see what it was. At the head of the stairs, he was met by an unkempt stranger with a gun. The stranger put the gun to Mr. Gilotto's head and said, "One more step, you ----- and you're dead." Mr. Gilotto then told his wife, "Honey, we're dead." "That's right, you -----," said the stranger, according to Mr. Gilotto's account. With that, the man threw Mr. Gilotto down on the bed and cuffed his hands behind him.

Then, indicating Mrs. Gilotto, he asked, "Who's this bitch?" "That's my wife," Mr. Gilotto replied. "Don't get smart with me," said the man, "or I'm going to kill you." Mrs. Gilotti, only partially clad, was thrown to the floor. She was thrown a sheet to cover herself. Soon the gunman and about 14 others similarly dressed began to tear the Gilotto house apart. They ripped clothes out of the closets, tore shelves off the walls, threw a TV set across the room, tossed the Gilotto's pets out of the house and threw their camera to the floor. Oh yes, they had broken down the doors to get into the house in the first place.

A little later that night, over at the Askews, just as the family was sitting down to a late supper, Mrs. Askew looked out a window and exclaimed that there was a man there. Not only was there a man at that window, but at every other window in the house, according to the Askews' account. Soon, men were trying to break down the door. One of them flashed a tiny badge which Mr. Askew couldn't identify. Then the men proceeded to break down both front and back doors. The house was soon swarming with men with guns who proceeded to give the Askews' house the same treatment that the Gilottos had received earlier.

It turns out that the intruders—who



Mr. and Mrs. Don Askew show the damaged door where, they say, federal agents broke in, only to find they had raided the wrong house.

had neither warrants nor court orders for their invasion—were federal narcotics agents operating with some local midwestern law enforcement people to protect people like you and me and the Askews and the Gilottos from the drug menace. They were looking for drugs. "You're gonna die if you don't tell us where the drugs are," one of them told Mr. Gilotto.

As it happened, both raids were based on mistaken tips. Neither family had anything to do with drugs. When the intruders learned of their mistake at the Gilotto household, Mr. Gilotto asked them why they had behaved as they had. For his troubles, he was told, "Boy, shut your mouth," and was thrown to the floor. The raiders left both homes without apology and went off into the night.

Well, like the man said at the beginning, it was an outrage. Actually, the man who said it was Myles Ambrose, Special Assistant Attorney General, Office of Drug Abuse Law Enforcement, whose program the raiders were ostensibly carrying out. "I've sent

investigators out there to check the whole thing out," Ambrose said in an interview, "and a grand jury is looking into it. I've issued orders on this kind of thing before and I'll issue some more. I've suspended the men who were involved and if the facts check out, somebody will be punished—and very hard."

Ambrose spoke bitterly. He has been in his job just a little over a year and he thinks his program has made some real headway in fighting the drug problem. His office has been responsible for 7,000 arrests since last June, 1,200 convictions, 5,000 grand jury subpoenas and has had 2,500 search warrants executed. Perhaps of even greater importance is Mr. Am-



Special Assistant Atty. Gen. Myles Ambrose ordered an investigation.

brose's belief that the program has been responsible for energizing the drug enforcement efforts of a large number of state and local law enforcement agencies around the country. "We're breaking our backs around here," Mr. Ambrose said, "and a few knuckleheads go off on a toot of their own and call all law enforcement into disrepute."

There is anger in the conversation as the caller presses Ambrose on the constitutional questions. "I've issued orders," Mr. Ambrose says, "and I'll issue some more. These guys are not supposed to take a step without a lawyer's advice. Anybody who doesn't hew to the line will get it. What more," he asks his caller heatedly, "would you have me do?"

The caller throws up Mr. Gilotto's final observation, "They acted like German Gestapos. If they were representatives of the federal government, we're all in trouble."

"Look here," Mr. Ambrose continues, "My grandfather was an Irish cop in New York all his life. He wasn't talkative like me. When I took over as the Director of the Waterfront Commission of New York Harbor they gave me a fancy badge—big and shiny. My grandfather was about 81 and was sick. I went up and saw him and told him about the job. 'Did they give you a badge?' the old man asked me. Yeah, grandpa, they did. 'Show it to me,' he said, so I showed it to him. He looked at it for a while and then looked at me for a long time, then he said, 'keep it shiny.'"

"Got it?" Ambrose asked. Got it, Mr. Ambrose. What happened to the Gilottos and the Askews was terrible. Somebody—or quite a few somebodies—will be punished—providing the facts are as the Gilottos and the Askews have related them—for what happened in those two houses because it is almost impossible to doubt that Ambrose believes in the Constitution. One of the big protections against fascism is cop's honor. The more shiny badges there are around, the better off we all are.