

Police Error Seen In Protest Arrests

By Carl Bernstein
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The District government's chief prosecutor asserted yesterday that police arrested many demonstrators in last week's "Chicago Seven" protests here without any evidence that they broke the law.

Even in cases where arrests might have been supported by evidence, police used incorrect booking procedures

that have forced the government to dismiss charges against the protesters, Assistant Corporation Counsel Robert N. Campbell said.

Campbell commented on the arrests after a high-ranking Washington police official complained to him yesterday that too many charges against the protesters were being dismissed.

Earlier this week the corporation counsel's office dropped all charges against the first 39 persons to appear at pretrial hearings following their arrest in last week's protests against the "Chicago Seven" conspiracy trial.

Yesterday, as Deputy Police Chief Owen W. Davis and Insp. Raymond S. Pyles attended pretrial hearings, Campbell's office sent five cases to court for trial and dismissed charges against another 10 persons.

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Insp. Pyles, the police department's liaison officer to the courts, acknowledged yesterday that police used the wrong booking procedure in "most of the cases" in which hearings have been held.

More than 250 persons were arrested in demonstrations near George Washington University Thursday and on the Mall Saturday. Additional hearings are scheduled next week.

Pyles, who confirmed that he complained to Campbell that too many charges were being dropped, denied the prosecutor's assertion that some arrests were made without evidence of violations.

"The cases were not weak to begin with," the inspector told a reporter. "They were all good cases in the first place. Some of them just weren't handled right by the arresting officer."

Pyles said arresting officers should have filled out the department's "field arrest forms"—used in mass arrest situations—before turning over suspects to transport officers. Instead, he said, the arresting officers simply told paddy wagon drivers to take suspects away and book them on a particular charge.

The inspector said Police Chief Jerry V. Wilson has ordered an investigation to determine why the correct procedures were not observed.

According to Campbell, police arrested many persons who are attempting to move away from police as some protesters fought with officers during demonstrations last Thursday and Saturday.

"Many of them were caught up in the web and were trying to move on when they were arrested," Campbell said.

"In the large majority of cases," the prosecutor added, "the man listed by police as the arresting officer did not in fact make the arrests; he was the transport officer who drove the suspects to the cell-blocks."

As a result, Campbell said, most policemen showing up in his office to testify against suspects did not observe any violations of the law.

"How do the police expect me to prosecute a case if they bring the wrong officers in here?" Campbell asked. "The cases are just no damn good."

According to Campbell, Pyles came to him yesterday morning and said, "If we get

only 15 to 20 convictions out of almost 200 cases it won't look good."

The prosecutor told a reporter that Pyles told him Chief Wilson "is concerned about these cases"—at which point Campbell agreed to a request that the inspector and Deputy Chief Davis be permitted to attend the hearings.

Pyles confirmed the substance of his conversation with Campbell, adding that he was in "no way trying to influence" the outcome of the hearings.

"My job is to see that the police are supported," Pyles said. "The men (on the force) feel that too many charges are being dropped."

Assistant Corporation Counsel Thomas A. Johnson, who is Campbell's principal assistant, told a reporter the "police are trying desperately to justify themselves (in the arrests made last week) and make it look like this is the prosecutor's fault."

Johnson said most of the dismissed charges were for parading without a permit and failure to move on. He said there was doubt in his mind that demonstrators were given an opportunity to move on before being arrested and that there were "serious questions" whether last week's activities legally constituted a "parade."

In some cases, Johnson said, "it would appear that some students on the (George Washington University) campus were doing nothing and got arrested."

Other suspects charged with throwing missiles "apparently were not the ones doing the throwing," Johnson added.

Among the persons whose charges were dismissed yesterday was Terry Becker, an editor of the Quicksilver Times, an underground newspaper, who was charged with violating a police line.

Capt. Earl Drescher, the officer who arrested Becker, testified at a hearing that he did not observe Becker carrying proper press credentials issued by the metropolitan police department.

[Two Washington Post reporters, Carl Bernstein and Paul Valentine, testified that they heard Drescher say, "We don't recognize the Quicksilver." Bernstein said he saw Drescher inspecting a metropolitan police press pass worn around Becker's neck. Drescher said he told Becker, "We don't recognize the Quicksilver pass," a reference to another press card carried by Quicksilver staff members.]