

DOUBTS PERSIST as to how the administration feels about blacks. Not about blues. For the past few days, the President has been conducting a public love affair with the police.

But the ostentatious show of White House support is likely to have adverse effects on the quality of law enforcement. For the President's rhetoric tilts the wrong way a crucial fight about police practice which is now being fought in most cities.

Mr. Nixon began wrapping himself in blue after the killing of two patrolmen in New York a fortnight ago. At that time, police officials from around the country were invited to meet at the White House with the President, J. Edgar Hoover, and Attorney General John Mitchell.

On his visit to West Point over Memorial Day, Mr. Nixon moved a bit further. He stopped to chat with a police officer and told him: "This attempt to beat down the military and law enforcement is all part of the same package. Anyone who is basically part of the peace forces, as you are, is subject to criticism, much of it unjustified."

THREE DAYS LATER, at his most recent news conference, Mr. Nixon backed to the hilt the mass arrests made by the Washington police force at the time of the May Day Vietnam protest. So sweeping was the President's support for mass arrest that he laid himself open to questioning of rare acuity by James Deakin of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. He wanted to know, if the police had done such a good job, why so many of those apprehended were being released on grounds that "they weren't properly arrested."

No doubt the identification with the police at this time is good politics. Now that he is climbing down from past positions to deal with Soviet Russia and Communist China, the President may feel that a little whiff of law and order is neces-

sary to hold his right-wing constituency in line.

But what the President gains in public standing, he is likely to lose in law enforcement. For that cause depends on the outcome of the battle over the role of the police which is now going forward in most major cities.

In New York, for example, Police Commissioner Patrick Murphy has been cooperating with a committee of the state legislature working to expose the close ties that bind the metropolitan police to the traffickers in hard drugs. That investigation has been resisted by most of the police brass.

The wave of sympathy for the police set in motion by the recent killings has already caused the investigation to be adjourned until next fall. Some of those prepared to testify now fear that the investigation will be completely sidetracked — hence, a few recent leaks to the press.

IN CHICAGO, a special grand jury working under a leading criminal lawyer has instituted an inquiry into the December 1969 police raid which led to the killing of two Black Panthers and the wounding of four others. Newspaper accounts indicated that the grand jury was working on indictments of several figures, including police chief James Conlisk and state's attorney Edward Hanrahan, close to Mayor Richard J. Daley. But now the grand jury inquiry has been stayed by a judge from the mayor's old neighborhood and law firm, and his ruling is up for review in the state supreme court.

In Dallas, Cincinnati, Kansas City, and other smaller towns, progressive police chiefs are trying to move beyond mechanization and computerization to establish a force that has a genuine rapport with local neighborhoods and local needs. But their efforts are being resisted by old-line police officials backed by police unions and large sections of the public.

In these circumstances, Mr. Nixon's blanket endorsement of the police is not just an innocuous bit of pol-

iticking. It is an act of intervention by the highest American official in a closely fought struggle between the good guys and the bad guys of the law enforcement community.

By indiscriminate endorsement of the police, by asserting that most criticism is unjustified and that the military and the police are part of "the same package," Mr. Nixon helps those who seek to keep the police as they are — a special institution, above common-sensical scrutiny and not truly subject to change or even control. He works against the good guys who seek, over very heavy odds, to improve police practice.

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President in Blue