

What City's Cops Think-- In-Depth Poll

By Paul Avery

A confidential poll of San Francisco's policemen shows they have strong — often heated — opinions about such controversial subjects as race relations, marijuana, payola, capital punishment, judges, newspapers, prostitution, and the right to strike.

Their innermost feelings about these and other topics were revealed yesterday in a survey taken and made public by the San Francisco Police Officers Association.

It is the first in-depth study of policemen ever undertaken in the United States, said Alessandro Baccari, advertising firm executive, who coordinated the opinion poll for the association and compiled the results.

REPORT

These are contained in a 155-page report which is laden with not only dry statistics but often crackling comments from officers moved to answer more than just "yes" or "no."

The poll was taken, said association president Sergeant Gerald D'Arcy, to determine — "precisely" — what San Francisco police officers feel about their department, each other, the public, and particular issues of current concern.

"Probed and often criticized by various bodies and

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groups — from hard-core dissidents to the Mayor's Committee on Crime — this study provides for the first time in the history of the department an opportunity for its officers to speak individually and collectively about themselves," the report states.

Mayor Joseph L. Alioto said the new survey, coupled with other reports on the department, "provides an excellent foundation for further upgrading the department."

QUESTIONS

The survey contains 210 questions. It was mailed to the homes of approximately 1920 officers, from the ranks of patrolman through captain, in late June, with request it be completed and returned by last July 2.

Completed forms were returned by 1258 (65.5 per cent) — a figure not as high as had been hoped for but higher than similar opinion surveys taken of other groups, the association has been told by pollsters.

About 40 members of a splinter group known as Officers for Justice, composed mostly of blacks refused to participate in the study.

Their questionnaires were returned in a bundle to the association with the comment that Officers for Justice "felt the response of its members would be 'swallowed up' when placed with all the other responses," the report states.

Complete police question and answer survey on Page 6.

There were but a few surprises to come out of the study.

Not surprising, considering six officers including Sergeant John Young, have been slain in the line of duty in the past 12 months, is that 85 per cent of the responding officers believe "defiance of the law and the police" is on the increase.

A young officer — described as "under 30 years of age" — in answering that question was moved to comment "people today in the city known that if they hurt a policeman they can get away with it. In fact, become heroes. This is one issue that could get this department unified to strike."

DIVIDED

(Accompanying comments of officers were broken down into two categories, over and under 30 years of age; but no officer was specifically identified as the returned questionnaires were anonymous.) As it stands now, the force is well-divided on the strike question. Sixty per cent of the officers stated they don't believe policemen "should have the constitutional right to strike," while 30 per cent believed it is their right. Ten per cent did not give a position.

While it was not surprising to learn the vast majority—90 per cent — are against legalization of marijuana, it was news that 5 per cent of San Francisco's policemen favor legal grass, although most of these commented it should be controlled by laws such as those regulating liquor.

The question "do you believe legalized prostitution (licensed brothels) would benefit the community as a whole?" drew this response: 70 per cent said "no," 10 per cent said "yes," and 20 per cent expressed no opinion.

MEDIA

Nobody ducked answering "do you have confidence in the reporting of police matters by the news media?"

A whopping 95 per cent replied "no." And 70 per cent went on to say they felt newspapers were the least objective of the media, when compared to television and radio.

An officer under 30 years said "there has been an increase of injurious newspaper accounts of police, or comments by irresponsible journalists, who by innuendos or implications tend to degrade our image or our efforts. In the past no administrators have publicly countered these elements."

(Some officers, in questions about their association, the report says, criticized their own publication, the

Note-Book, stating they felt "it did not always present both sides of an issue.")

The policemen responded 100 per cent "yes" when asked if the department should have a public information officer to work with the media.

CRITICISM

Local judges, the U.S. Supreme Court and prosecutors also come in for considerable criticism.

Ninety per cent feel judges demonstrate "unwarranted leniency" in meting out sentences to convicted offenders and that the U.S. Supreme Court has rendered recent decisions that "have made the suppression of crime more difficult."

And 80 per cent said they consider the district attorney's office "too lenient in its prosecution" of both misdemeanor and felony offenses.

That "capital punishment is a deterrent to crimes of violence" is believed by 90 per cent of the city's policemen.

Some of their comments in these areas:

"Soft punishment draws criminals. San Francisco is known as a soft touch area. Felons get minimal punishment, if any. Misdemeanors get almost nothing," said an "over 30."

"The courts seem to favor the criminal. They are more concerned with the rights of the suspect than the fact a crime has been committed or an injury sustained by the victim of the crime," an "under 30" remarked.

DEPARTMENT

But the officers were also quick to criticize the department itself.

One of the major complaints was "political patronage" — 85 per cent believe it does now or has in the past existed within the department.

On departmental race issues, 85 per cent feel there is no internal discrimination against minority group officers and that it is not any more difficult for such officers to work in San Francisco because of their color.

The Police-Community Relations Unit was taken to task. Seventy per cent of the responding officers feel its efforts are unnecessary and 80 per cent believe it has been ineffective.