

Pistol-happy Pig Re-instated

Joe Check

1969

Sgt. Gerald Biscup is one of the police officers who was involved in the Veteran Memorial incident on November 2. The Detroit Police Officers' Wives Association (DPOWA) was holding a dance in the Veterans Memorial that night and many police officers and their wives were in attendance.

Sgt. Biscup's wife is the president of the DPOWA. He was in attendance.

On another floor of the same building there was a church dance, this one attended by many black young people. Slightly after midnight, as both dances were breaking up, some of the white police officers from the DPOWA dance met and engaged in dialogue with some young men from the other dance.

Grady Stallworth and Jimmy Evans, two young black men who had briefly attended the church dance, were threatened by a police officer with a pistol. At this point they decided that the dialogue had ended and began running from the Veterans Memorial Building towards the Detroit River, the man with the pistol in close pursuit. They have identified him as Sgt. Gerald Biscup.

A short time later Greg Carter, another young black man, was threatened by a man with a pistol while he sat in his car after leaving the dance. He has identified the man as Sgt. Gerald Biscup.

As a result of the public pressure aroused by the Veterans Memorial incident, Biscup was brought before a police trial board. The Trial Board is the internal disciplinary apparatus of the Detroit Police Department.

The Detroit Police manual states that: "All hearings of charges shall be before a trial board consisting of the commissioner or deputy commissioner who shall be chairman of the board; the chief of detectives...; and such other executive officer who may be designated by the commissioner..."

"The board shall pass judgment upon the charges considering the acts, conduct, or omissions of the members being tried. If the charges are sustained, the accused may be dismissed from the department or subjected to such penalty as the board may prescribe."

Historically, trial boards find police officers guilty only as a response to great public anger, and even then the officers are discharged with offenses that have nothing to do with the main issue. This was the case with Sgt. Biscup.

In March of this year the trial board found him guilty of neglect of duty, making a false statement or report, and failure to report a known violation of city law, all charges which avoided the real issue and reduced him to the rank of patrolman.

Approximately two weeks ago the Ad Hoc Action Group received reports that Biscup had been reinstated personally by Mayor Cavanagh. They began an investigation which found that this information was correct.

Cavanagh recently reinstated Biscup with full back pay because, according to one of Cavanagh's aides, "the facts in this case did not substantiate the charges brought against him." Cavanagh's secret reversal of the trial board decision reveals the inadequacy of the whole Trial Board mechanism.

Neither the trial board nor the mayor have dealt with the real issue, Biscup's threatening of three citizens with a gun. The whole affair is being conducted on a level which refuses to deal with the case as it really is, which is the real indictment of both the trial board and the mayor.

Biscup, as a policeman, had a built-in insurance policy in threatening a citizen with his pistol because he was brought to trial not because he acted wrongly, but because he acted wrongly at a time and place which gave the media no option but to cover the story and expose the case to public opinion. If he had threatened, beat or even shot three black young men on a Saturday night on 12th Street he hardly would have had to face a trial board.

He was exonerated before being brought before the trial board, because the charges he was made to face left out completely his real involvement in the incident.

Therefore the mayor's reversal of the trial board decision amounts to a whitewash of a whitewash, and indicates clearly the need for direct community control over the trial of police officers for offenses against the community.

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Fifth Estate #86, August 21-September 3, 1969

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