

Welcome to Detroit, Mr. Murphy

Fifth Estate Collective

1970

“Patrick Murphy is no great shakes as Public Safety Director. He is a poor administrator; he is weak, and he has no rapport with his men.”

—Richard Judd, former aide to Sen. Wayne Morse on D.C. Affairs Committee, U.S. Senate

We wanted to take this opportunity to introduce you to Patrick V. Murphy, Detroit’s new Police Commissioner, one of the first major appointments of Mayor Roman “Sheriff” Gribbs. Murphy was chosen by Gribbs because he says he agrees with Murphy’s philosophy on law enforcement.

Murphy is a professional cop and has seen service with various police departments in the country. He was Deputy Inspector in New York City before and during the Harlem rebellion in 1964.

He moved on like the Lone Ranger to Washington, D.C. and became Director of Public Safety where he was during the 1968 rebellion that hit that city. It was at that time he perfected his tactic of saturation gassing of ghetto neighborhoods.

The legacy of this was visited upon marchers at Dupont Circle and the Justice Department demonstrations last Nov. 15.

Murphy’s incompetent racist policies and the actions of the police forces he commanded left people, especially blacks, with only one alternative: to rebel. In New York and Washington Murphy perpetuated a system of racial privilege and injustice that incited people to riot. Now Mr. Murphy has come to Detroit with a trail of burning cities behind him. How he will deal with the situation in this city is not yet clear.

There is a “police problem” as Murphy will admit. But who has the power to do something about this problem? The Police Commissioner doesn’t.

Ray Girardin and Johannes Spreen proved this. The day-to-day behavior and attitudes of police officers, especially white officers in the black colony, are controlled and molded by the Detroit Police Officers’ Association (DPOA).

The DPOA is a bargaining agent for the police and has the power to stop the Police Commissioner from instituting changes in the police department and from effectively prosecuting officers accused of brutality or other crimes.

It is with fellow DPOA members, not the police commissioner, that policemen spend their time. It is in DPOA meetings that officers are indoctrinated. In the past, the DPOA has consistently opposed criticism of the police and fought liberalization of the Department.

More importantly, the DPOA, like many urban police associations, is becoming an armed political party. Although political action is prohibited during on duty hours, the DPOA has flagrantly violated regulations.

The police set up precinct telephone lines to take complaints about Judge George Crockett during the “New Bethel crises,”; they have begun a political alliance with the Detroit Firefighters Association, and the Detroit Homeowners’ Association for the purpose of endorsing political candidates; they have engaged in petition campaigns to remove public officials from office, etc.

Detroit police are required to carry their weapons with them at all times, hence even their off duty political action is armed political action.

Carl Parsell, president of the DPOA, has not even once indicated that the DPOA will try to work with the new commissioner and has, in fact, stated that the department needs a good police administrator, not a liberal public relations man.

So, no matter how good a man Murphy might be, no matter how good his intentions are (and as shown by his experiences in New York and Washington, the results of his administration are certainly not good), the police department will not change and police-black community relations will not improve unless the DPOA is challenged.

But Murphy won't challenge the DPOA. Girardin couldn't. Spreen couldn't. Mayor Gribbs is a friend of the police and the police are friends of Roman Gribbs. Gribbs will not let "his man" challenge the police.

People who are concerned about the police actions during the 1967 rebellion and the New Bethel incident must realize that nothing can come of replacing one man at the head of a thoroughly racist police force.

What must be done is to provide black citizens with total control over the police in black communities now. The city must face up to its responsibility to remove a colonial, racist system which makes the violent deaths of civilians and policemen inevitable.

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