Can Policeman Make It As City Generalist?

By TIM RICHARD

In Philadelphia the people turned to a policeman named Rizzo for mayor, and in Cleveland they elected a policeman named Perk. Detroit elected a former assistant prosecutor, Sheriff Roman Gribbs, as its mayor.

In Milford the council promoted its police chief to city manager. In Farmington Township the voters threw out a veteran supervisor and picked Sgt. Earl Teeples from the police force as chief administrator.

Detroit has a former policeman named Van Antwerp on the council, and in Westland Sgt. Tom Taylor of the police force is making a bid for Wayne County commissioner.

"LOOKS LIKE we're heading toward a police state," chuckles Robert F. Deadman, 37, a man who has been Farmington's acting city manager since Feb. 1 and prior to that was director of public safety, a job in which he headed both police and fire programs.

To some extent, the Philadelphia and Cleveland elections represent a "law and order" kick on the part of voters. Yet it's undeniable that the public is looking to its specialists on the police force when it's seeking generalist leadership.

Earl Teeples, who had been around Farmington Township for years, who was a kind of father figure to many kids with problems and who has a reputation for listening to the problems of the average Joe, has one explanation:

"A policeman gets to know everyone in town, and to know the problems. And he also learns to spot phonies -- something that politicians can't always do."

BOB DEADMAN has an analytical answer. Today's policeman is a new breed from the policeman -- and chief -- of 10 or 15 years ago. He needs a lot of the generalist's education and managerial tools; hence, the transition from police chief to city manager or mayor isn't as pronounced as it was a generation back.

Although he looks like a gentle accountant, Deadman himself is a third generation policeman (his grandfather a rural sheriff, his father a Detroit officer), and he out - shot all the competition from the Oakland County Police Chief's Association in two different phases of a pistol contest.

A graduate of Detroit's Cooley High, Deadman joined the Farmington department as soon as he could, at age 21 in 1957; rose through the ranks (including a stint as juvenile officer) to director of public safety at the age of 31; and was asked to take a tryout as city manager when veteran professional John Dinan left to enter private business. Along the way, he studied at Oakland Community College.

BUT ABOUT the new breed of policeman ...

"In the past, the chief came up through the ranks. He had a high school education, maybe some specialized training -- a limited academic background. I don't think this is true today," said Deadman.

Not only are more police professionals getting associates, bachelors and masters degrees, Deadman points out, but the student of police administration takes many courses similar to the student of political science and public administration.

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The police chief of the past often didn't work on his own budget. Today's chief has to "dollarize" things; he has to think in terms of programs -- what they will cost (input) and what they will produce (output -- for example, the number of arrests or reduction in offenses).

"He is a budget administrator and has to think in terms of programs to be sold, and then justify them," Deadman goes on. "He no longer flies by the seat of his pants."

The police chief becomes a modern administrator in terms of equipment. "In the last 10 years, there has been a bigger influx of hardware in law enforcement than in the previous 50 years," says Deadman, citing computer technology, records processes, breathalyzers, and so on down a long list.

It adds up to a big operation in municipal government. In the City of Farmington, public safety has something like 40 per cent of the budget and 43 per cent of the staff.

BUT THE BIGGEST change of all, as Deadman sees it, has been in the way the policeman sees the public and the way the public sees him.

"Whenever there's trouble, the first man in front of the TV camera is the policeman," says Deadman. "We're coming out of our shell. We're being called on to handle problems that weren't like those of 15 years ago. And we're starting to tell the public we can't handle all the social ills, that you can't solve everything by passing a law..."

He cited the movement to pass ordinance restrictions on cats. There's more to the cat problem than putting a law on paper; it has to be enforced. The police chief must ask -- and then answer -- the questions: Can it be enforced? What will it cost? Is that worth it?

ONCE THE police chief, like the commander of a ship, was a figure of unquestioned authority. "Whoever thought of an officer questioning an order, or of an officer not answering a question from his supervisor?"

Yet today the policeman organizes something resembling trade unions and bargains.

The policeman himself finds his work under often critical review -- from the city fathers, from the courts, from pressure groups ranging from the NAACP to subdivision associations.

Authority today is questioned. Social thinkers call it "the revolution of rising expectations." Problems are more complex, the public more sophisticated in judging how officials respond to those problems. The old - fashioned law - and - order cop won't do in an increasing number of communities where people know their legal rights.

Deadman also points out that the police chief of today has more contact with politicians. Deadman himself, for example, as a department director was required to attend all Farmington City Council meetings. Out of that grew council's decision to give him a chance at city management.

The deal is that he can decide at any time he doesn't want the job and go back to being director of public safety, or the council can similarly decide it, and there will be no hard feelings.

CITY MANAGEMENT has its benefits and drawbacks, Deadman finds.

Take the matter of mistakes. A city manager makes a mistake and it costs the city money. A policeman makes a mistake and it not only costs money, but (as in the Detroit STRESS case) reputations are damaged, lives snuffed out, jobs lost.

On the other hand, he finds, a police chief can solve a problem within his department at no great expense and by his own authority. The city manager, however, finds the solutions to generalized city problems cost money and require the hiring of personnel. He must go to the council for approval. Meanwhile, the public raises all sorts of objections that the skilled professional never thought of, and these must be resolved.

"I haven't had a meeting yet that the council chamber isn't full and we're in the hot seat," says Deadman.

And so the trend seems to be, not so much that the public is looking to police professionals for civic leadership, but that policemen themselves are expanding their problem - solving and intellectual horizons.

Whether Bob Deadman becomes permanent city manager of Farmington is a personal and local matter. Whatever the mutual decision of himself and the council, he has found management a broadening experience.

MEETING WITH COUNCILMEN in Farmington is Robert Deadman (second from right), acting city manager. From left: Councilmen Ralph Yoder and Fred Seibert, Mayor W.V. Brotherton, Deadman and Councilman John Richardson. (Photo by Fran Evert)