

How'd YOU Like to be the Policeman?

Editorial, *Johnson City Staff News*, Monday March, 15, 1926
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How would you like to be the man to whom is entrusted the job of safeguarding your property and your person not only during the day but also through the long night hours? And not only you, but all you neighbors and their families and everyone else in your block? Some job, eh. Heavy responsibility and little appreciation. Thousands of things done every week of which the public is not aware – and hundreds of illegal or dangerous, or unsanitary or immoral happenings prevented knowledge of which never reach you. Then multiply that by every residential and business block in Johnson City and you will appreciate the task which confronts the department of Public Safety, or the Police Department.

This editorial is not a “wail” for sympathy for the police department; nor is it a plea for indulgence. It is prompted solely by reason of the fact that we believe a great many of our citizens do not appreciate the problems confronting the police department and consequently are prone to criticize a bit too freely.

The Police Department is composed of the patrolmen themselves; their squad and desk officers; the plain clothes men, and the head of the department, or Chief of Police. On the Chief, or any chief, be he who he may, rests the responsibility for the successful conduct of his department. If a crime wave develops, the chief gets the blame. If a raid fails, the chief gets the blame. If a major crime is committed and the offender is not promptly arrested, the chief gets the blame. If traffic problems are not solved, the chief gets the blame. If accidents occur, the chief gets the blame.

Did you ever consider the other side of the picture? How each of you as individuals, must share his responsibility? How each of you is shouldered with responsibility as a citizen?

Think on these few things.

You complain of traffic conditions and insist upon traffic laws. The city officials make them and then the police department must enforce them. What happens? The next day you or your wife or your son or your daughter violates a traffic law and is arrested or cited. What do you do? Do you say, “You deserved arrest for violating the law and aggravating a situation which is already bad? NO! Not once in a hundred times. Instead you clamor for

the scalp of the officer who dared arrest a member of your family. You take the attitude that the law was made for others, but that you are immune. You criticize and you growl and you inspire others to scoff at the laws. Are you doing right?

Again, a crime is committed. You immediately set up a clamor for the arrest of the guilty parties. Perhaps you have knowledge (be it ever so small or circumstantial – or be it important) which would be of great value to the police department in bringing the offender to justice. Do you get in touch with the department and report your knowledge? No! You cry, “Oh I don’t want to get mixed up in it. Let the “cops” do it – that’s what they’re there for!” Are they superhuman who can accomplish great tasks without knowledge? Think again.

And then day by day, you cry for enforcement of the prohibition laws. “It’s the great need of the country – prohibition enforcement. Let us have honest officers and efficient heads of departments.” Having delivered this well known bromide, you button up your coat with a satisfied smile and go home and take a drink out of the private stock delivered to you the night before by your pet bootlegger. **Yes you do. Hundreds of you. Men who are supposed to be the best citizens of Johnson City. Men who attend church every Sunday morning and who frequently enter church with a brown taste in their mouths from the effects of the night before.** Oh, the editor knows that many citizens will rise up and state that he is absolutely wrong. But friend reader – it so happens we are NOT WRONG. And it so happens that hundreds of you will read this, or have it laughingly called to your attention with accompanying “wise cracks,” will know that we are now wrong, because it’s YOU we are hitting. And some of you know just to show your opinions of anyone who questions your actions, will turn from the perusal of this editorial and take another drink. But that’s neither here nor there. The point is this – how can you expect the police department to enforce the prohibition laws when you yourselves are daily violators? A few days ago in conversation with a member of the governing board of Johnson City the remark was made that the worst and most demoralizing violators of the law in this city were the so-called “better class.” **The official refused to believe the statement until certain things were called to his attention. When an official takes this attitude, what can you expect of the average citizen? Yet in the face of all this, the police chief is blamed if bootlegging continues.**

Another thing to think about. **Raids are arranged. Naturally in making these arrangements some information must be given.** It reaches the ears of the men who are supposed to have the best interests of the city at heart. **Some then, perchance, are the financial backers of the**

bootlegger scheduled to be raided. Others are regular customers and fear for their source of supply. **Result – the raid is tipped off and the evidence disappears.** And the Chief gets the blame. This has happened many times. So we suggest you think some more.

And when the good people of this city take into consideration the fact that last year 5,000 arrests and citations were made by the police department of Johnson City another thing becomes apparent. A friend or relative of yours so conducts himself or herself as to merit arrest and is arrested. Did you ever see anyone who frankly admitted they got what they deserved? Yes, now and then we do see them, but we would say – that out of 5,000 at least 4,000 protested their innocence. They had to do so or get into far more serious trouble. Perhaps Federal Violations were involved – perhaps it was a matter which would break up a family if aired in police court. So they plead their innocence, post their bond, forfeit it and then go to their friends and complain and their friends go to city officials and complain and the police department and particularly the chief, whoever he may be, gets the blame. Oh, yes indeed this happens time and time again.

Is it any wonder then, that the policeman and his chief become discouraged: They who so richly deserve the support and encouragement of the citizens for their day in and day out work of protecting lives and property and morals. Who must risk their lives when necessary. Who are duty bound to go where duty calls them. Who are assured that they have the support of the citizens and then find it empty promises. Who are criticized if they do not make arrests. Who are tempted from every angle to close their eyes. Who deserve the heartfelt support and instead get mostly knocks. Do you wonder that they become dissatisfied and disgusted?

Give the policeman and his chief a square deal. Give them a chance. Boost, don't knock! You pay their salaries to do certain things. Grant to them an opportunity to do their duty and stop interfering. If you have knowledge of value to the police department, it is your duty as a citizen to turn it over to them. But keep your hands off their work. We have entirely too many officials meddling into the work of the police department. Too many fingers spoil the pie. Too many nosing into what's going on makes too many possible leaks. **No one is above suspicion, Mr. Citizen and Mr. Official.** You may be in the mud and mire somewhat yourself. Anyhow the police department can trust no one but its own head. And he is responsible to the governing body of the city for the conduct of his department. If he doesn't make good – they'll get a new chief. If an officer fails in the performance of his duty, a new officer will replace him. But be fair and honest enough to given them an opportunity to make good.

If a man complains to you of false arrest or persecution, tell him that the courts are available. Don't knock the department. If you do you may have occasion the next day to call on it for help and you would be rather embarrassed, what?

Put yourself in the policeman's place and play the game as you would then want it played.

- C.E.K

