

CHAPTER V

Agitations by Police Personnel

I. Introduction

1.1. Background: The two previous chapters portray in some detail the working and living conditions of police personnel. From what has been stated there, it should be clear that these conditions are far from satisfactory. If this is so, what has been the impact of this situation on police morale and discipline? This question is sought to be answered in this chapter.

The year 1979 saw a turmoil of unparalleled proportions in the Indian Police forces. In a majority of States, policemen went berserk and committed acts of indiscipline and violence which shocked even the normally placid members of society. It looked as if years of training and discipline had been totally lost on all subordinate policemen. This dismaying development led to a flurry of writeups in leading newspapers which attempted to find out what exactly triggered off policemen even in States such as Tamil Nadu and Manarashtra which boast of unblemished traditions. It is appropriate to undertake a clinical examination of the developments of 1979 in the Indian police forces, as they offer many lessons to those entrusted with the responsibility for formulating and administering personnel policies for policemen. Here, the experience of Forces abroad, particularly the U.K. and U.S.A., is quite relevant.

II. History of Police Agitations

2.1. Agitations in the United Kingdom: Perhaps the first police agitation known to us was in 1872. This was in the London Metropolitan Police where trouble arose following a series of clandestine meetings and demonstrations by policemen demanding a pay increase. On this occasion, one heard for the first time, highly militant language from policemen. Although the Commissioner quickly reacted by conceding an increase in pay, the secret confabulations of police leaders did not end. This led to the dismissal of their organizers, denial of work to 180 men and the imprisonment of three ring leaders. About hundred policemen were dismissed but were later reinstated, although on a lower pay. In retrospect, the most significant aspect of the agitation was that the strike was more to press for a 'right to confer than for a rise in wages'.¹ The second strike in the Metropolitan Police was in 1890 when 39 men were dismissed. None of them was, however, reinstated.

The economic difficulties resulting from the First World War (1914-18) caused considerable anguish to British policemen. In particular, the rising costs of essential commodities greatly eroded the wage advantage over other working classes that they had enjoyed prior to the War. The working conditions had also hardened and policemen were witnesses to strikes by various sections in public and private

¹ Critchley, p.167.

sectors. Compounded by the non-availability of a right to confer, these factors cumulatively brought policemen to the verge of an emotional explosion. Their grievances had been receiving, since 1913, active encouragement from the hands of a rebellious and dynamic young Inspector Syme of the Metropolitan Police, who had floated a clandestine Union that was publishing strongly-worded pamphlets on the working and living conditions of policemen. This Union (which was yet to be officially recognised) refused to countenance the efforts made by the Home Secretary in 1918 to consider the issue of better wages. It held the position that only a right to collective bargaining could be the starting point of any attempt to improve policemen's conditions. Even while a review of the issues involved was in progress, a policeman was dismissed for his Union activities. The result was a threat of strike unless the three-fold demand of a generous increase in pay, reinstatement of the dismissed policeman and unqualified recognition of the police Union was conceded. On August 30, 1918, six thousand men of the Metropolitan Police went on a strike and this soon gathered momentum. The Prime Minister intervened with an offer of a substantial pay rise, reinstatement of the dismissed policeman and consideration of a suitable representative machinery after the war years. An explosive situation was thereby defused.

The government appointed a committee headed by Lord Desborough in March 1919. The Police Act passed by Parliament

later that year conceded the establishment of a Police Federation and the Police Council as a consultative body. The Act prohibited policemen from joining trade-unions and also made it a criminal offence to induce a policeman to strike. The unrecognised Union's call for a strike in protest against this provision was heeded by only a section of the London Police and ruthless action by the government swiftly contained the agitation.²

The effectiveness with which the Desborough formula has been working in England is evidenced by the fact that there has been no major unrest in the U.K. police forces since 1919. The Police Federation and the Police Council have provided a fairly good forum for the airing of grievances by subordinate policemen.

2.2. Agitations in the United States of America: The first instance of police unrest on record in the U.S.A. was the one which took place in Ithica, New York, in 1889. The proposal of the New York Mayor to impose a small wage-cut led to resentment and the abstention from work by five policemen. Their action led to a prompt reversal of the Mayor's decision.

In 1918, the Cincinnati Police witnessed a strike by 450 policemen in protest against the dismissal of four

² Critchley, p.189 and Cyril D.Robinson, "Deradicalization of the Policeman", Crime and Delinquency, Vol.24, No.2 (April 1978), p.143.

of their colleagues who took part in a meeting. Only after the authorities offered to revoke the dismissal did the striking policemen come back to work.

Perhaps the most momentous agitation by U.S. policemen was that in Boston in 1919. Initially, the demand was only for a salary increase and better working conditions. Subsequently, however, the controversy veered around the clamour for a police Union that would affiliate itself with the American Federation of Labour. The Police Commissioner's refusal to concede this demand and his action in suspending 19 policemen for involvement in trade-unionism triggered off a strike on September 8, 1919. The city witnessed unprecedented rioting and looting which resulted in the loss of four lives and the theft/damage of property worth nearly one million dollars. It was only the assistance of the militia and loyal policemen which re-established order in about four days. About 1100 striking policemen were axed and a large-scale recruitment of new personnel resorted to.³

Although, since then, U.S. police forces have not witnessed any strike action on the same scale, there have been, from time to time, stoppages of work and other demonstrations. For instance, in 1971 January, there was a five-day strike in the New York City Police. This agitation did not snowball because detectives refused to join and the extreme winter was not conducive to public protests.

³ National Police Academy, Working Paper on Police Unrest, (Hyderabad, November 1980), p.4.

In July 1975, policemen of Albuquerque (New Mexico) struck work as a result of 'internal departmental tension' that had arisen because "the men on the Force perceived that no one cared about them or appreciated the work they did. There were complaints that patrolmen had no voice in management and that no one would listen to them."⁴ The significant aspect of this ten-day strike was that, unlike in Boston during 1919, there was no violence, looting or rioting.

In August 1975, 90% of San Francisco policemen struck work over the refusal of the department to grant a pay increase. Although the strike ended within four days, the wage dispute was described as "a classic case-study in public sector labour relations, replete with errors in judgment, political machinations, bombastic rhetoric, some violence, and exaggerated behaviour on the part of the involved parties."⁵

Oklahoma was another U.S. City which witnessed police unrest in 1975. In October, the decision of the authorities to replace the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) with the Teamsters' Union as the Department's collective bargaining agent provoked trouble. Coupled with the City's

⁴ Richard M. Ayres, "Case Studies of Police Strikes in Two Cities", Journal of Police Science and Administration, Vol.5, No.1 (1977), p.19.

⁵ William J. Bopp, et.al., "Case studies of Police Strikes in two Cities", Journal of Police Science and Administration, Vol.5, No.1 (1977), p.32.

reluctance to concede a 10% wage increase as recommended by the Arbiter, this led to work slowdown and later, a strike by more than 90% of the city police force. A compromise of a 9% wage increase brought the policemen back to work.

In July 1976, Detroit policemen resorted to mass sick-reporting to back up their demands.

In September 1976, there was trouble again in New York City Police. Demonstrations were held protesting against deferred wage increases and new work schedules. While a considerable number of off-duty police officers picketed Police Stations in the City, another group damaged garbage cans and exploded fire-crackers in public. This agitation gave evidence of the 'bread and butter trade unionism' that had come to grip American police forces.⁶

2.3.1. Agitations in India: About the first direct action by policemen on record in India was the one which took place in Bihar in September 1942. In tune with the nationalist fervour which dominated the country at this time, Bihar policemen rose in revolt to protest against the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi. Their hunger-strike was followed by a strike to press for a charter of 18 demands that had been prepared by the Revolutionary Policemen's Association formed in July 1942. The Army was called in to crush the agitation at the end of which 34 policemen were arrested and dismissed.

A hunger-strike by Allahabad policemen to protest against reduced rations and a similar action by Delhi policemen

⁶ Cyril D. Robinson, p.148.

demanding better conditions of service were reported in 1946. Neither agitation was prolonged, due mainly to the ruthless action of the authorities.

In 1946, the Malabar Special Police of the ^MMadras Presidency struck work in resentment against the appalling conditions of service. The Army had to be called in to put down the rebellion in a Force which had earlier established high traditions of training and discipline. That this was a major agitation would be evident from the fact that, at the end of it, 926 policemen were discharged. In March 1947, the Bihar Policemen waged a major battle for a betterment of service conditions. In particular, they were pressing for an end to ill-treatment meted out to subordinate policemen by superior officers. The Army was called in. It opened fire several times leading to the death of four policemen. It was only the personal intervention of Mahatma Gandhi that led to the withdrawal of the strike.

The first instance of direct action by the Police in Free India was reported from Madras State (now Tamil Nadu) in January 1953 when policemen demanded an immediate amelioration of their conditions of service. This agitation was sponsored by a recognised Association which was promptly declared illegal. With the help of the Army, the government quelled the agitation. 183 policemen were arrested.

The action (February 1955) of Calcutta City Policemen in walking out of an examination hall to protest against the stiffness of a question paper in a departmental test and

the hunger strike (November 1957) by policemen in Lucknow expressing resentment against bad treatment by their superiors gave further indication that police forces in the country were far from in a state of good morale.

For the next ten years there was no direct action of any significance by policemen in the country, although there were grounds to believe that there was widespread discontent over conditions of service.

In March 1967, Delhi policemen under the banner of a 'Non-Gazetted Karmachari Union', raised various demands such as allotment of houses, fixed working hours, etc. Their agitation which took the form of public demonstrations, refusal to collect their pay, a 'satyagraha' before the Home Minister's house and fiery speeches, prompted the authorities to move in the Border Security Force. 800 policemen were arrested and 40 policemen dismissed.

In July 1969, West Bengal saw an uprising by Constables who were infuriated by the murder of one of their colleagues by a political worker. A procession which carried the body of the deceased entered the Legislative Assembly and demanded stern action against the culprits.

2.3.2. Mutiny of the P.A.C. in Uttar Pradesh (1973): 1973 saw an unprecedented revolt of grave proportions by the Provincial Armed Constabulary (P.A.C.) in the State of Uttar Pradesh. It all started with the formation of a Police Parishad in March 1973 by 7 Constables and Head Constables to succeed a dormant Non-Gazetted Police Officers' Association

which had been formed in 1926 and given official recognition. The Inspector-General's directive to the office-bearers of the Parishad to merge themselves with the recognised Association went unheeded. Acts of indiscipline and insubordination, obviously under the inspiration of the Parishad office-bearers, started coming in from various districts. The Inspector-General's declaration that the Parishad was an illegal body led to a series of incidents and the circulation of a booklet by the Parishad which contained serious allegations of corruption against higher officers. Meetings called by Commandants of P.A.C. Battalions and by District Superintendents of Police to enrol members to the officially recognised Associations were either ignored or disturbed. The Parishad simultaneously stepped up its activities. It engineered various acts of indiscipline much to the embarrassment of senior officers. Perhaps the most serious of these was the refusal of policemen to take part in a parade held preparatory to the Prime Minister's visit to the State. In another incident, a group of armed policemen indulged in slogan-shouting against their Commandants and Company Commanders.

According to one account, the disciplinary action taken initially against delinquents was neither quick nor firm. This gave rise to the popular impression that even graver acts of indiscipline would not invite stern proceedings. A further dialogue between the Inspector-General and the Parishad leaders indicated that unless the latter's

minimum demand of a separate Association for Constables and Head Constables was conceded, there would be no peace. This was unacceptable to the government which considered that it could not placate an illegal body and ignore its highly objectionable activities. It explored the possibility of bringing sense to a large number of misguided policemen in the State. In this direction, the Inspector-General announced a series of welfare measures involving considerable expenditure. This did not yield the desired result.

The situation became worse following a link-up between agitating policemen and university students which resulted in a serious law and order situation. The State Government, in consultation with the Centre, thereafter decided that the best course open to it was to disarm all police units and entrust control of the armouries either to the Army or the para-military forces of the Centre. The Army's operations led to violent incidents and stiff resistance by the armed policemen. 13 Army 'jawans' were killed and 43 wounded while 22 Armed policemen were killed and 56 injured. Fortunately, except in three centres, the reaction of civil policemen to the incidents was mild. Here and there one witnessed a hunger-strike in sympathy with the killed personnel. Attempts by political parties to whip up public opinion did not succeed. More than 1100 police personnel, including permanent office-bearers of the Parishad, and a few civilians, were arrested and cases filed against them. 277 men were dismissed and 363 discharged. Quite a few

changes in the leadership of the P.A.C. Battalions were also effected so as to infuse greater confidence in the Armed Police leadership.

Looking back, the Uttar Pradesh Armed Police revolt reminded one of the 1857 Army uprising. It succeeded only in destabilising relations between the leaders of the police force and their men. While there were no immediate major repercussions to the Uttar Pradesh incidents elsewhere in the country, they were not without significance judging from the turn of events since then.

2.3.3.1. Since 1977: The Bihar Police witnessed a phase of unrest in 1977 when the Armed Policemen there went on a hunger-strike (August) to protest against the rude behaviour of a senior officer. In September, an alleged assault of a policeman by a legislator led to a hunger-strike by policemen in Dhanbad.

In September 1977, Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) policemen went on a hunger strike and refused to perform their regular duties to condemn the arrest of one of their colleagues on what they considered to be politically motivated grounds.

2.3.3.2. The 1979 Revolt: 1979 may be looked upon for several years to come as the most tumultuous year in the history of the Indian Police. It witnessed long phases of agitation in various Central and State Police forces. These were of such magnitude that they produced instant reactions from political leaders. Initially, there appeared to be no concert among the leaders of police subordinates belonging to the various

Forces. However, later in the year, one could perceive inter-State links that lent considerable strength to the movement whose major objective was to bring about better working and living conditions.

The initial momentum was provided by policemen in Patiala (Punjab) who were visibly annoyed over two incidents. On April 15, 1979, a Constable on duty was allegedly assaulted by the drunken relative and friends of a Legislative Assembly Member. In the other incident, on May 6, a Constable on traffic duty was slapped by a local legislator because the former allegedly did not offer him due courtesies. On May 9, 200 Patiala policemen in uniform organized a slogan-shouting procession condemning these two incidents. Taking the cue from them, policemen elsewhere in the State jumped into the fray and passions were aroused very soon. Policemen of the neighbouring States of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh were also quick to express their sympathy. The Punjab Government ordered the dismissal of 45 Constables and it discharged 196 probationary Constables. 594 policemen were arrested during the eleven-day agitation which subsided only after the Punjab Government agreed to a series of ameliorative measures.

The Punjab Police agitation and the Punjab Government's prompt announcement of a number of concessions gave ideas to policemen both in Central Forces and in other States. There were demonstrations of various kinds which pressed for

many concessions. A few of the prominent instances of direct action are chronicled in Appendix V.

2.3.3.3. The Stir in Tamil Nadu Police (1979): (i) The Researcher is intimately connected with the Tamil Nadu Police where he occupies a senior position. He had the opportunity to watch from close quarters the police agitation in that State as it unfolded itself during 1979. It is necessary to record here that the Tamil Nadu Police (originally known as the Madras Police) celebrated its Centenary in 1959. It has thus, a rich and hoary tradition, the envy of many Forces in India and even abroad. A well-drafted departmental code and a high calibre of personnel at all levels have enabled the Police in this State to give a good account of itself in many crises. Welfare of subordinate policemen has always received top priority and successive governments have been generous in this regard. Officer-subordinate relationship had always been considered good. Hence, the events of 1979 came as a major shock to every one in the State.

(ii) Trouble in the Tamil Nadu Police stemmed from the action (February 1979) of Nainardass, a Sub-Inspector of Ramanathapuram East District, in bringing out a pamphlet issued by a so-called "Tamil Nadu Police Non-Gazetted Government Personnel Association" and which highlighted some of the major grievances of police subordinates. This found circulation among a few policemen in the districts. Nairardass was suspended from service for his misconduct but later taken back after being advised by the Inspector-General to desist from such acts.

(iii) On June 1, the Chief Minister announced a scheme which provided for the constitution of three separate Associations for police personnel in the State, one for Deputy Superintendents and above not belonging to the Indian Police Service, one for Inspectors including Deputy Inspectors, Sub-Inspectors and Assistant Sub-Inspectors and one for the Constabulary. Without awaiting formal government orders on the subject, Nainardass announced June 6) at Madras, the formation of a Tamil Nadu Police Subordinates Association (encompassing both Inspectors and the Constabulary) for which he sought recognition. The government, however, refused it. Simultaneously, the Department, going by the government orders issued in June, allowed the formation of three separate Associations for three categories of personnel mentioned above. The unrecognised Association's efforts in the High Court to seek a reversal of the government's decision not to accord recognition to it, did not succeed. In October, the Inspector-General, after observing the procedure prescribed by the Police Forces (Restriction of Rights) Rules made under the Police Forces (Restriction of Rights) Act 1966, accorded recognition to the three Associations that had been formed in July as per the procedure prescribed by the government. The Inspector-General's action was the signal for trouble engineered all over the State by the unrecognised rebel Association which claimed to represent both Inspector-level officers and the Constabulary.

(iv) From October 15 onwards, the State witnessed unprecedented acts of indiscipline by policemen which took the following form:

- a. abstention from duty;
- b. en masse sick reporting;
- c. desertion from guard duty;
- d. preventing loyal men from going to duty;
- e. abuse and assault of colleagues and officers;
- f. open exhortation to strike;
- g. interference with wireless transmission and use of foul language against senior officers over wireless;
- h. resort to hunger strike;
- i. stoning buses carrying officers and Central security forces and deflating tyres of police vehicles;
- j. associating with trade-union leaders; and
- k. meeting leaders of Opposition political parties and canvassing their support.

Normal police work in a majority of Police Stations, particularly in the Districts, was seriously disrupted and the public put to a lot of inconvenience. But the agitation which started on 15-10-79 petered out by 6-11-79, due mainly to the firm posture of the government and the extreme loyalty displayed by middle-level officers who stuck to their posts bravely in spite of grave provocation from erring members of the Constabulary. A survey indicated that about 12,000 out of a Force strength of 44,850 took part in the agitation.

About 3000 personnel were arrested and nearly 400 cases registered against them. A total of 798 police personnel were dismissed from service. (As a measure of goodwill, the government ultimately chose to reinstate all of them.)

2.3.3.4. Government Response to the 1979 Police Unrest:

As a reaction to the series of police agitations that were witnessed in 1979, both the Central and State governments displayed extreme concern over the working conditions of policemen. An index of this anxiety was the meeting of Chief Ministers convened by the Government of India at Delhi on June 6. A 7-point programme was formulated at this meeting. The measures which emanated from this conference did not, however, bring immediate peace. Looking at it nearly three years afterwards, one may have to say that it is still an uneasy calm that prevails in most of the Forces in the country. This rather bleak estimate is supported by the many instances of unrest and indiscipline that have been witnessed since then. A few of these are catalogued in Appendix VI.

III. Conclusions

3.1. Lessons for Police Leadership: The above detailed account of agitations is a stern warning against complacency on the part of police personnel managers. Police subordinates are normally a disciplined lot. They are however liable to be aroused if they find that their working or living conditions

have become intolerable and their reasonable demands for improvement of such conditions go unheeded or are only partially met. Generally speaking, agitations have come about on one or more of the following issues:

- i. wage increase;
- ii. reduction of hours of work;
- iii. poor treatment of subordinate personnel by their superiors;
- and
- iv. recognition of Unions.

These constitute a wide spectrum of personnel policy, and police leaders will have to necessarily give continual attention to it if they are to have peace within Forces.

A close study of the agitations in India reveals that police managers are still baffled by subordinate militancy. A clear-cut strategy on how to deal with the problem is yet to be evolved by many Forces. As a result, adhocism dominates their approach. This is evident from the panic with which employee demands are met in the midst of a crisis-situation and also the excessive use of force to put down agitations by police personnel. This Researcher does not assert that adhocism can be wholly avoided. But it is his stand that a fairly sensible strategy can be worked out in this area. This should help to fulfil, at least partially, employee aspirations, as also provide a line of action to police leaders whenever they are confronted with a situation where personnel are intransigent and unreasonable even after their reasonable demands have been conceded. This

Researcher firmly believes that a judicious use of some of the modern Management concepts and techniques would greatly assist every police force to formulate such a strategy. It is this belief that induces him to delineate a few such concepts in Part B of this thesis.

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SUMMARY

Agitations by police personnel for a better deal are neither a new phenomenon nor are they peculiar to India. Both the U.K. and U.S. Police witnessed direct action by their men even during the last century. Subsequently also the two countries have been subjected to pressure tactics by policemen. Noteworthy are the London Metropolitan Police strike of 1918 and that of the Boston Police in 1919, both of which considerably shook public confidence in a body that was meant to be their protector. Starting from 1942, the Indian Police has also gone through the ordeal of police strikes. The 1973 mutiny by the Provincial Armed Constabulary in Uttar Pradesh and the 1979 countrywide stir by men belonging to both State and Central Forces are watersheds which are a constant reminder to police leaders that they cannot take their personnel for granted. Surprisingly however there is considerable adhocism in dealing with police agitations. The need of the hour is a viable strategy that would help police personnel managers to tackle employee demands and pressure tactics without panic. This is difficult to evolve. The task may be rendered a little simpler if only police leaders can persuade themselves to make a judicious use of a few of the modern Management concepts and techniques.