

Knapp Hearings:

The Honest Cops Are Finally Getting Sore

The Knapp Commission inquiry into police corruption ended last week in an atmosphere filled with explosive political overtones.

The final hearing Monday focused on Jay Kriegel and, through him, on the issue of whether Mayor Lindsay (who will announce his candidacy for the Democratic Presidential nomination on Tuesday) and top officials of his administration had ignored charges of widespread police corruption for three years. The political tinderbox was ignited by the fact that Jay Kriegel appeared to be in conflict with Jay Kriegel.

A key aide of the Mayor and liaison man with the Police Department, Mr. Kriegel had testified in executive session last summer that he had briefed the Mayor on charges of widespread corruption brought to him by Sergeant David Durk and Detective Frank Serpico. He said that he had informed the Mayor that the two officers were disturbed because the Police Department appeared to be ignoring their charges.

In Monday's public session, Mr. Kriegel insisted that his recollection had been refreshed after checking with the Mayor. He now said that he had reported only generalities, not specifics. He now denied that he had told the Mayor that Sergeant Durk and Detective Serpico had not been able to get action from their superiors. He had been "handcuffed," Mr. Kriegel now testified, because the officers had not wanted their identities disclosed. Another witness last week, former Police Commissioner Howard Leary, said later that he was at "a total loss" as to why he had received no information from top city officials.

In the supercharged atmosphere of Presidential politics, this switch in the



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Had the Lindsay Administration monkeyed around with the issue of police corruption and failed to take it seriously? Last week Jay Kriegel, a top Lindsay aide, indicated he hadn't heard it that way; the Mayor said he hadn't seen it that way. Former Police Commissioner Howard Leary failed to speak out on the issue —because he hadn't been told about it.

Kriegel testimony touched off fireworks. Councilman Matthew Troy, Queens Democratic leader, supporter of the Presidential candidacy of Senator George McGovern, and political foe of the Mayor, demanded that District Attorney Frank S. Hogan study the Knapp transcripts to determine whether high Lindsay administration officials were guilty "of perjury, malfeasance and/or misfeasance." Mr. Hogan's office replied that all of the transcripts of the Knapp hearings were being studied for any violations of law.

Mayor Lindsay snapped back at his critics Wednesday in some of the angriest language he has ever used. In a remark that seemed obviously aimed at Councilman Troy, he denounced the "petty piranhas of the political marketplace" who, he said, had consistently opposed his efforts to establish civilian control over the Police Department and to reform it.

Earlier, the Mayor had admitted it

was obvious the department had "dropped the ball" in 1967 by failing to investigate the Durk-Serpico charges promptly, but he insisted that this had not been through any reluctance to recognize an ugly truth — only apparently through a bureaucratic snafu.

Will the Knapp hearings and their disclosures of year-long foot-dragging, for whatever reason, hurt the Mayor politically? Perhaps not. Mr. Kriegel in his closing statement Monday indicated the line the Lindsay Administration will take:

Corruption has been endemic in the department for decades, but Mr. Lindsay is the first Mayor in the city's history to appoint an independent civilian body like the Knapp Commission to get at the truth. Furthermore, according to Whitman Knapp, the commission chairman, Mayor Lindsay imposed no conditions, he gave the probers a free hand.

Presidential politics aside, has the

Knapp Commission accomplished anything with regard to police corruption?

United States Attorney Whitney North Seymour Jr., of the Southern District of New York, senses what he calls "a new wind blowing in the Police Department." Alfred J. Scotti, chief assistant to District Attorney Hogan and head of Mr. Hogan's Rackets Bureau, sees "signs of a turnaround in the attitude of the department." The hearings, he said, brought home to honest policemen for the first time how badly they had been hurt by their dishonest brothers and "these honest cops are beginning to turn in the others with a vengeance."

Ralph Salerno, nationally recognized crime consultant, agrees: "The immediate reaction of a lot of cops was to be angry at the Knapp Commission, but after two weeks that started to change and many of them started to be angry at the crooked policemen who were giving everybody a

bad name. And that is something that never happened before."

Representative Charles W. Rangel, the Congressman from Harlem, thinks that the Knapp hearings have had a great impact among "powerless people" who "never saw this type of aggressive action taken before. The Knapp Commission seems to give them hope for the first time that there is someone who will stand up against it to do something about it." As a result, Mr. Rangel says, "I'm hopeful we can reach the point where the community will go to the police and turn in the drug pusher. No one believes that you can go to any cop and do that, and it's a shame."

Many other observers, however, citing the temptations endemic to the job, were skeptical that corruption in the Police Department would very soon be a thing of the past.

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