

# WELFARE — IR AT ITS BEST

By Brian Kelly, AFP Welfare Adviser

“NOT only are the physical and emotional well-being of workers an issue of humanitarian concern, but they have a significant legal and economic impact upon the employer. Adverse working conditions can have a detrimental effect upon the employee's morale, job satisfaction, attendance and attrition. Ultimately productivity can be affected. When this occurs it becomes costly to the organisation.’ (FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, July 80 p.22.)

“In the application of the above statement, police forces do not differ from commercial organisations. Authorities on personnel management have long recognised that people are our organisation's most valuable resource and police administrators have begun to recognise their responsibility to preserve and maintain a healthy, stable and productive work force by providing the necessary services. Continuous attention needs to be given to education, training, job opportunities, making wages attractive and providing adequate benefits for employees. To ignore worker needs invites poor morale, lower efficiency and in a police service this causes a drop in effectiveness leading to an unnecessary waste of finance and experienced personnel.”

The above appears in the opening of The AFP Welfare Scheme — Administrative circular No 175.

An interesting aspect of the AFP Welfare Scheme, conceived within the AFP and submitted to the Policy Committee (now the Policy Advisory Committee) at the beginning of 1981 is that in spite of two reviews, it exists five years later in the form in which it was originally proposed. It would not be correct to say that the concept was original, in that New Zealand, Victoria and South Australia Police had each appointed Welfare Officers some years previously.

Those forces, however, had been in existence for many years with long established command, operational and administrative procedures which was not the case with the AFP. Just hatched and still tottering on its newly-found feet, viewed by many within its ranks, as a bastard of questionable parentage, it had community, national and international responsibilities. Little precedence exist-



• Welfare Adviser Brian Kelly. . . “Industrial Democracy may well prove to be the most effective and significant policy adopted by the AFP in the 1980s.”

ed to guide those charged with the responsibility of developing its newly acquired operational role, together with the necessary administrative procedures to support its primary functions.

On that basis, the AFP Welfare Scheme is original in that it was required to provide an effective service in circumstances experienced by no other police force in Australia. Why then has it survived for five years without any obvious need or pressure to otherwise alter the arrangements?

Perhaps the answer to this question is to be found in an understanding of ‘industrial democracy’, a term which has become fashionable to use in recent years. In 1980 it was not in common use, certainly in police circles, but presumably if asked, most people would have been able to give a ‘common sense’ answer to the question. That is exactly what it is, a common sense approach to employer/employee — or in terms sometimes favoured by the trade union movement, boss/worker — relationships.

Although the decision to implement a form of welfare support for the AFP was taken shortly after its formation in October 1979, no terms of reference existed, nor was any clearly definable path obvious. One supposes that it would not have been difficult to have had an appropriate officer write up the requirement, have it approved and subsequently employ someone to implement the plan.

Fortunately this did not occur. What did happen was that a concerted effort was made to locate any member or employee who had at any time expressed an interest, written or otherwise, in police welfare. In addition, approaches were made to people outside the AFP who were thought likely to make a contribution.

As a result, 24 people assembled at the AFP College, Barton in August 1980.

The group ranged down in rank from Chief Superintendent and included ten non Commissioned members. In addition to representatives from the Associations (there were two at the time) there was some professional input from civilian sources.

At this meeting, much of the first day was spent listing the problems that the participants thought should be considered as welfare matters with each being recorded on the blackboard. The remainder of that day and the evening was spent identifying those matters which could properly be considered as part of the welfare function, as opposed to those such as industrial issues falling within the area of responsibility of the Associations or those affecting specific areas of management.

The following day was devoted to considering alternative methods of welfare support and the possible mechanisms for implementation. It is important to note that all participants had equal opportunity of input.

Following the meeting, a draft scheme was written up and forwarded to each participant to ensure that the wording used reflected the decisions taken at the meeting. Following minor amendments, the draft document was approved in principle by the Assistant Commissioner (Personnel) before being sent to each Division (including what are now Regions) and to each Branch of the Association for comment.

By December the document was ready for presentation to the Commissioner and was subsequently approved by the Policy Committee in January 1981. During this whole process the proposal remained virtually unaltered and still remains so in 1986. That is, of course, not to say that perhaps the time is approaching when the AFP Welfare Scheme could stand critical analysis, given the development of the AFP, particularly over the past two years.

It is a fair statement, however, to say that the process of identifying the welfare requirements and developing the staff organisation within the manpower and financial limitations given, was a classical example of industrial democracy in operation. It conforms with the philosophy expressed in the words of the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Mr Willis, when during a speech in Melbourne on 17 August 1984 he said: “The essence of industrial democracy is the right of employees to influence decisions affecting their working lives”.

The present government has a strong commitment to the implementation of industrial democracy and has provided guidelines on the establishment and operation of consultative processes between

management and staff associations in the Australian Government workforce. As a result, this new found term has become in the minds of many synonymous with the formal consultative processes between management and staff association, which recent legislation requires to be implemented.

This would be a very narrow view of the industrial democracy process indeed. It is far more than that; it is a style of management which incorporates some of the more important principles of leadership. This might best be described by quoting from the final report of Disc International on the subject:

"All people interviewed identified to varying degrees a dilemma in the AFP, ie given that all ranks want to participate in decisions that affect them, how can this occur in a command oriented organisation? The two basic styles of managing, democratic and autocratic, generally represent the range of choice. In an organisation driven by command authority this choice is often left to individual officers to exercise a personal style most acceptable to them as individuals. Thus, whilst operational necessity can demand non participation directives (ie autocratic), 'managers' can create opportunities to move forwards a democratic (ie participative) style consistent with their needs. Usually individuals can adjust comfortably to an autocratic environment given benign exercise of authority by a leader with a participative style. Indeed such leadership tends to become the model for expectation." (Final report of Disc International Pty Ltd on Development of Mechanisms for Communication and Consultation between the AFP Command structure and Staff Association. Feb 1986.)

The key to the success of any industrial democratic process is the spirit in which it is approached by each and all of those involved. All the well-meaning legislation in the world, devoted to the improvement of the quality of work life of employees, the efficiency of management and the productivity of their combined work effort, will be of little value, without an enlightened and balanced approach by those responsible.

Without this there is the grave risk that the whole process will prove counter productive. Any person with a knowledge of the trade union movement will have no difficulty providing evidence of those managements who provide lip service to a required process, which has resulted in a degree of cynicism among employees and a resultant damage to employer/employee relationships far in excess of that which the process was designed to improve. This is the very last thing the AFP needs at this early stage of its development.

There is a well known theory in personnel management practice referred to as theory x and theory y. The x theory is referred to as the carrot and stick approach also sometimes known as the 'jackass fallacy'. It assumes that people are jackasses who have to be tempted or pushed in order to function, because they will not use their initiative, good judgment and potential to get things done. The x theory is based on the concept that the majority of people do not like work and that the carrot and stick approach is needed to motivate them. It also assumes that a person would rather be told what to do than to think for himself.

Another premise of theory x is that employees must either be coerced, controlled, directed, threatened or 'kicked up the Khyber' to get them to contribute to organisational goals. All this, of course, is a fallacy in that it is contrary to most modern principles of good management and leadership.



I KNOW THAT'S NOT WHERE THE CARROT GOES BUT IT CERTAINLY MOTIVATES THE JACKASS!!

Theory y is in complete contrast, in that it assumes that people do not dislike work and having chosen to work for an organisation and given the opportunity, they will exercise self direction and self control in the service of objectives to which the organisation is committed. Inherent in theory y is that participation in the decision making process provides the employee with a sense of responsibility for the outcome.

In comparing theory x and theory y the former is based on authority and fear, whilst in theory y, given the right set of circumstances, people will not try to avoid responsibility, but will seek to acquire it, resulting in considerable individual satisfaction together with a sense of responsibility and belonging. When employees have the impression that management values their opinions and cares about them, effectiveness reaches and remains at a high level.

One of the biggest problems facing the AFP in the personnel area is the loss of

manpower and manhours through stress-related illness. The reasons for this are many, varied and complex and beyond the scope of this article to discuss. However, one would find little argument from those who have been closely associated with those members whose careers have been brought to something less than a satisfactory end for this reason who would disagree with the statement that a significant proportion of those retired on invalidity grounds were lost to the service because of deficiencies in management skills within the AFP.

There will be few readers of this article who are not able to relate theory x to a practical example of manpower or man-hour loss in the AFP at some time.

There is a saying sometimes heard among police officers during comment on the pecking order of the police organisation, that faeces run down hill and that the person on the bottom feels that he or she is too often on the receiving end. Human nature being what it is perhaps it is too much to expect, but it would be nice to contemplate that future generations of police had never heard of the term.

If all those involved in the development of the industrial democracy process in the AFP apply themselves seriously to the task, there will be a certain and significant reduction in the current manpower loss. In addition a substantial increase in productivity can be expected, together with a sense of cohesiveness within the force. This of course can not be expected to occur overnight, as of possibly greater importance than the formal process for the establishment of mechanisms for communication and consultation with the police association will be the need to insert the philosophy of industrial democracy into the training of all those who have a supervisory or managerial role.

The process of industrial democracy viewed in its broadest sense, developed with intelligence and pursued with vigour, in the long term may well prove to be the most effective and significant policy adopted by the AFP in the 1980s. The growth from theory to practice, from seed to maturity, will be a lengthy one and not without its difficulties. The breaking down of many of those attitudes and beliefs inherent in a largely traditional command oriented organisation is going to need a degree of lateral thinking beyond the wildest dreams of many.

When this goal is achieved, however, it will be the most significant contribution to the welfare, ie the well-being, of every member of the AFP and its employees in the foreseeable future, to say nothing of the degree of efficiency that might be possible.