

Police Advisory Board

D. & C. JAN 13 1968

Not Needed

The reclothing in its original powers of Rochester's Police Advisory Board is, we believe, an unfortunate development, likely to do much more harm than good.

It's true that the ruling of the Appellate Division, Fourth Department, is not irreversible. The Locust Club, if it chooses, could appeal the decision, and presumably restraints could again be placed on the board pending the outcome.

This might be a desirable course. The issue has lain quiet since the 1965 ruling, and now is no time to revive it. The police are in the middle of an important recruiting campaign and a fresh controversy could only harm their efforts.

But if there is no appeal and no temporary restraints, City Council, which created the board and backed the appeal to the Appellate Division, will have no choice but to face this sensitive problem squarely and quickly—squarely because it's the city's baby, and quickly because the community can't afford a drawn-out battle.

And when it comes to a decision, the case for abolishing the board seems overwhelming. The principal original objection to it still holds true. No matter how it's sliced, a review board of civilians places the police force under the kind of scrutiny that inhibits its operation and weakens its morale.

But there's more to it now than this. Many things have changed since the board was set up in 1963.

For one thing, violence on the streets, here and around the nation, has increased over the last four years to the point where only the police stand between us and anarchy at times, and to the point also where the public is demanding much tougher law enforcement. To expect the police to discharge

this heavy and dangerous responsibility and at the same time to handcuff them with a review board is unrealistic, contradictory, and unfair.

For another thing, the climate of relations between the police and the Negro community—and this is what the review board is all about — has, from all the evidence, improved considerably in Rochester in recent years. This seems true in spite of the 1964 riot and lesser disturbances since. It's almost as if the police, at the same time that they've become a thinner and more crucial first line, have also become more the symbol of authority and less the distrusted instrument of it.

At any rate, the charge of police brutality has been heard much less often. Complaints to the police have dropped. First under Public Safety Commissioner Harper Sibley Jr. and now under Commissioner Mark H. Tuohy Jr., the police, led by Chief William M. Lombard, have made determined and conscientious efforts both to improve the understanding and attitude of minority groups and to instruct police officers in the art of good human relations.

Today, the police make more friends out in the community and the community has found the Public Safety Building increasingly accessible. The way in which police officials and minority group representatives worked together in last year's disturbances tells its own story.

Rochester, we believe, does not need a review board to assure justice to individual citizens with complaints. There is already sufficient recourse—in the Police Bureau's own office of internal inspections, in the Grand Jury system, in the courts, in the FBI, and in the public safety commissioner's enlightened policies. But the best assurance of all is in the everyday conduct of police.