

AN ECONOMIST & SUN/STOUFFVILLE TRIBUNE EXCLUSIVE: No offer to explain allegations given, former chief says

# Former police chief sounds off

*Bryan Cousineau ends 22 months of silence after alleged improprieties forced him to step down*

*The following is an open letter to the citizens of York Region, submitted to the Economist & Sun/Stouffville Tribune this week by former York Regional Police chief Bryan Cousineau.*

*Although Cousineau refused our offer to speak with a reporter or elaborate on the issues raised in his letter, we agreed to print the letter in the interests of our readers.*

*It should be noted that many of the unsubstantiated rumours Cousineau refers to in his letter were reported by Toronto daily newspapers, not by our newspapers.*

The past 22 months have been most difficult on my family, the police force and the community.

As you are aware, I requested a leave of absence in March 1997 because of the results of an internal audit that alleged improprieties on my part.

I agreed to the leave because, if not, I would have been suspended. Suspension to a police officer is almost like a termination.

This audit, and the allegations contained in it, were not brought to my attention, nor was I asked to explain any of it. I will refer to the comments by the auditors a little later.

The OPP commenced an investigation which lasted 11 months. I'm sure the OPP did a thorough examination of my career and personal life and left no stone unturned.

During their investigation, which was constantly referred to in this and other newspapers, it seemed there were a multitude of wrongs committed by me. The list included the importation of illegal immigrants, the interference by me of an investigation into the death of a local businessman, and the allegation that I had \$2 million in a Swiss bank account.

These allegations were very upsetting to me and my family. Obviously, they were false. I was not charged with anything in regards to those or many other allegations.

In July of last year, I entered a plea of guilty to two counts of breach of trust.

The first concerned me not reporting to the police services board that I had negotiated a loan and future employment after my retirement, the date of which had not been confirmed.

The second concerned me giving my force calling card number to members of my family. This number was given to them so they could contact me while I was away on police business.

When I was advised that this number had been used for other than force business, I ordered an internal audit by the chief financial officer, prior to the communication of any investigation.

He was directed to report to me the non-force-related calls and I repaid immediately the amount of money those calls represented.

The sentence given to me by Judge W.S. Gonnet was a conditional discharge, plus 100 hours of community service, along with 12 months of probation. I was not convicted of anything.

I tendered my retirement to the police services board because, quite frankly, my family and I had endured enough public scrutiny, innuendo and lies.

Throughout this ordeal, there were several quotes from police officers who did not wish to be identified. I ask you to draw your own conclusions as to why they did not want to be identified.

The audit of the force was the subject of many newspaper articles. The articles focused mainly on the following issues:

- Lack of manpower.
- Use of corporate credit cards.
- Misuse of petty cash regarding retirement gifts, books, supplies, etc.
- Training.
- Police computers.
- Promotion and hiring practices.
- Budget process.

It is interesting to note I have never been formally briefed on the entire contents of the audit, nor was I presented a copy of it, which is normal procedure, by the police procedure auditors.

I assumed the role of chief of police in November 1992 and, within four months, the NDP government of the day introduced the Social Contract. This legislation was designed to save the government money by reducing grants to municipalities.

Budgeting during this time was very difficult, to say the least. On one hand, I had the police services board and the region asking me to reduce the existing budget.

On the other hand, I had the police union urging me to increase the personnel of the force quite substantially.

During my tenure, I tried to place as many officers on the street as possible by drawing them from various units. It was a difficult process but, when faced with critical circumstances, I felt the officers in ancillary units would be better deployed on the street on a temporary basis.

The budget was always prepared after several meetings involving all senior officers. Ultimately, if a decision was required, then as chief of police I made it.

The audit focused on our mobile com-



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puters in the police cars and how they needed replacing — a fact I was well aware of.

It is strange there was no mention of a budget presentation made to the police services board in October 1996 outlining our concerns over the mobile data terminals.

A request for \$50,000 was made to bring in a consultant. The board wanted more precise figures for the May 1997 meeting. However, I commenced my leave in March.

I am also well aware of the comments of police union president Paul Bailey regarding the promotion process. This is the same process he was promoted under.

The hiring/promotion list was compiled by a panel of senior officers and presented to me. If we needed to promote to fill a vacancy, I was given a short list of officers who were all qualified and recommended for promotion.

Someone had to make the decision. The same was true for the full-time hiring process.

During my tenure as chief, I recommended 40 to 50 promotions to the professional standards bureau (Internal Affairs). I wonder if Mr. Bailey has met with these people face-to-face and challenged their qualifications or promotions? I think not.

During the Social Contract, some training had to be reduced. None of the reductions put any member of the force in danger. All mandatory and required training continued.

The Ontario Police College conducted courses at our training facilities and officers from other forces attended. I doubt the college would want to do this if they thought our training program was inadequate.

While I was chief, we constructed and

opened a new state-of-the-art training facility in our new 4 District Headquarters (Vaughan).

Training is important and I am of the opinion our training staff did, and are still doing, a commendable job.

Allegations were also levelled that money was used from the criminal investigation branch petty cash for other items, such as retirement tickets for officers from other forces, office supplies, model police cars, etc.

There is a large petty cash in headquarters under the control of the financial officer. This was kept in the event members of the force needed a substantial amount of cash (e.g. \$2,000 may be needed for a potential drug buy in order to apprehend a drug dealer or if officers had to travel for an investigation).

Articles were purchased through this petty cash and were always reconciled to the proper budget account. This is a common practice with any petty cash.

**I wish the new chief luck. Given the association's track record, he'll need it!**

A number of senior officers were issued credit cards. I assume the OPP investigators were satisfied that the cards were used properly by all senior officers, including myself.

At each board meeting, the police services board was given a detailed list of expenditures from the previous month. The invoice or reason for each expenditure was available, should they have required an explanation. In fact, it was common for board members to ask about those expenditures.

It seems strange to me that, after my leave of absence, the board managed to find funds for a number of purchases and programs. I wonder if this was a knee-jerk reaction by the board, in response to complaints by certain members of the police association?

It is also unfortunate that some members of the association feel they should manage the police force and not the chief or the board.

I wish the new chief luck. Given the association's track record, he'll need it.

These are just some of the issues I wanted to address. Space limitations prohibit me from more details.

While I was your chief, York Regional Police was compared to several other forces. We were the most economical to operate, we had the lowest incidents of crime in the GTA and we had a very enviable criminal clearance rate.

It is my opinion that the taxpayer was well served by the members of the force and it has been my privilege to have served you as chief of police.

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