



SAN DIEGO COPS MAKE PAY DAY MAY DAY CALL

San Diego Police officers cried Pay Day May Day last week when their pleas for more cops and competitive pay got the cold shoulder from San Diego's City Manager and City Council during this year's contract negotiations between the city and its four employee labor unions.

When the San Diego City Council imposed on San Diego's police officers a dreadfully inadequate one-year contract after their union turned down offers similar to the pay increases in contracts happily signed onto by the other three unions, the Council announced a de facto endorsement of the dumbest public policy idea since rent control: Parity.

Like rent control, an idea based on the "fairness" principle that dictates anyone, despite life circumstances and personal career choices, should be able to live anywhere, parity among all labor unions means all work in the public sector deserves the same pay considerations.

In fact, not all employment is the same, and in spite of this city council's revisionist socialist delusions, the free market still operates everywhere else, with a vengeance.

When contract negotiations with the police broke down last week, the council imposed a one-year deal on the cops that showed senior trained officers the door, a door more rightfully reserved for the Machiavellian Alex Spanos and his Chargers who inexplicably still has the Mayor and Council's ear.

In doing so, the City offered little in spirit or deed that would encourage experienced officers to stay in San Diego when better salaries and benefits beckon almost everywhere, turning San Diego into California's Police Academy.

Not only does the city pay San Diego's officers between 8 to 12 percent less than their counterparts in California's ten largest cities, but also the city maintains a force of less than 1.7 officers per 1000 residents, compared with 2.8 in San Francisco and 2.5 in Los Angeles.

And, despite years of promises from a succession of Mayors to expand the police force, this ratio has remained constant. Not many realize that as few as three police patrol the triangular area between Del Mar, Carmel Valley and La Jolla during the scary hours between midnight and 7:00AM

Throughout the last ten years, San Diego's police took on expanded duties when the department adopted the very effective but labor-intensive community policing philosophy that promotes police-community partnerships and proactive problem solving strategies by putting cops on your block, literally.

In the Carmel Valley and Del Mar Heights area, police officers regularly attend community planning group and

Town Council meetings, hang out with families at recreation centers and turn up at neighborhood schools. This approach has radically transformed relationships between citizens and the police and vastly improved crime-fighting effectiveness—but the pull on officer time and patience is steep.

Community policing should mean more cops, but not in San Diego, a town where public officials gloat over a relatively low crime rate but who cannot carve enough resources out of a \$2.1 billion budget to keep the folks who make that happen from leaving town.

Already, an increasing number of police are accepting better offers elsewhere, and fewer recruits are signing up. This month, the San Diego Police Academy did not fill its freshman class, with only thirty-four new recruits reporting in out of a possible fifty. Training a police officer costs about \$100,000—losing twenty, as it appears we will this year, is like flushing \$2 million down our aging sewers.

The Police Officers Association, which represents officers in contract negotiations, might have expected a modicum of advocacy from a few City Council members who without question would be doing something else for a living without their help during election time. Apparently, memories are short and selective downtown, or the advocacy ability slim.

Or, is it possible that when several of those then-candidates endorsed the idea of pay and benefit parity between employee labor unions when sucking up to other unions for election time endorsements, they meant it?

Certainly, municipal governments are facing tough budgetary times with the Governor threatening to capture back even more revenues to balance the state budget. And, San Diego always hovers on the brink because of California's distorted tax distribution system that only returns 17 cents per property tax dollar.

The San Diego City Council and the City Manager deserve kudos for running a relatively lean and mean government ship in the face of the state tax rip-off. But, balancing a budget on the back of arguably the city's most important employees, is poor public policy in anyone's book.

Telegraphing that their work presents no more risk, requires no more decision making skill, or requires no more training than say, one of those highly regarded upper management folks in the Park and Recreation Department, is the poorest of signals to a demoralized police force whose families must suffer under the dismal contract the City Council imposed on them.

In tight budgetary times, city government has to make tough decisions. Thankfully, the cop on the street has more ability to do that than the San Diego City Council.