

Sewell: Spend less for cops, more for youth

By John Sewell

Did you hear the story about the cop who made \$140,000 last year? He's a constable with the Toronto police force and that was his take-home pay. Or maybe the Toronto cop who made \$102,000 not working a single day last year? He was on leave because he had been charged with extortion, obstructing justice and other things, which meant he was not permitted to work but he still got paid. And there are lots of other stories like that on the Toronto police force.

As Chief Bill Blair reported to the Toronto Police Services Board on March 27, 769 cops and other senior employees were paid salaries that exceeded \$100,000. About 150 of those were in senior management categories with large pay rates (like the chief, at \$270,000, or a staff sergeant at \$102,000.) But 622 were lowly constables or detectives who had racked up enough overtime to increase their standard salary by 50% or 75% or 120%. It means that almost 15% of all cops in Toronto take home more than \$100,000 a year— and that doesn't include any "duty pay" they make working as traffic guards for construction firms (that's required by law) or at fancy parties or wherever. It is very difficult to think of any other large organization, public or private, where 15% of employees make such immense salaries.

One might hope that the Toronto Police Services Board will take the appropriate action to control this situation, but that's an unrealistic hope. In 2006 the number of cops taking home more than \$100,000 was 705, a jump from 279 the year before, and the board did nothing. They might talk about better control of overtime costs, but it would be foolish to see them trying to make serious changes as they are in the middle of negotiating with the Toronto Police Association for a new 3-year contract. The association wants more money, not less. The big question is when we as city residents will recognize that we can't afford this kind of police service any more. Currently, with an annual budget of almost \$800 million, police services eat up almost 30% of the propertytax revenue generated in Toronto. This winter city council could not afford to keep the outdoor ice rinks operating, and needed a \$300,000 grant from MasterCard for the rinks to remain. That sum is equal to what was earned by one constable and one detective in the \$140,000 range.

It is common knowledge that in many American cities municipal councils have very limited money to spend on recreation and other human services because the costs of fire and police services eat up so much of the budget. Our police force has expanded by some 300 officers in the past two years, and now we have these extravagant salaries that we are paying. We are well on the way to following the lead of those U.S. cities. It is time to rethink how policing is done and what we want from it. The data is clear: the average police officer in Toronto makes eight arrests a year, of which one involves a crime of violence. On average a cop responds to one call for service for every shift that s/he works—that's right, one call for service per shift. The cost of supporting this kind of service is such that we cut out the real programs that reduce crime, particularly programs for youth.

There's a new book out by Irvin Waller, a criminology professor at the University of Ottawa, titled *Less Law, More Order*. He shows that helping youth get well trained is more effective in containing crime than hiring more police. Addressing social causes of crime is a far better way to spend money than on more police officers. So when will we learn? Will the \$100,000- plus salary disclosure at the Toronto police be a wake-up call for decision-makers this time around?

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