

# TAKE ONE:

Charles O'Brien

## Is the chief on the take?



ADAM 12, million dollar PR for the LAPD. (Photo by MARK JONES)

Is Los Angeles Police Chief Ed Davis being paid off by the producers of 36 televised cop programs to be a walking-talking commercial for the Law & Order industry?

Before I go any further, please let me introduce myself. Like many Irish-Americans, my family has been into Law & Order for generations. Two of my great-uncles were Justices of the New York State Supreme Court; and I was an undercover agent for a Southern California police department. As a project evaluator I have studied the impact of large scale criminal justice programs concerned with heroin addiction and juvenile delinquency. More recently, I have been a lecturer in several California law enforcement training programs. My topic has been the white Middle-Class



CHIEF ED DAVIS

Culture and Social Change; my method of instruction has been total honesty.

My last police lecture was held at the Murieta Hot Springs resort. We talked till late at night, sometimes over poker and sometimes in hot baths under the stars. If I were giving a lecture series today I would talk about Chief Ed Davis being on the take.

In '73 no one believed we could get rid of President Nixon. In '75 no one believes we can get rid of Chief Davis; no one, that is, except those who do an honest day's work.

Imagine yourself a police officer sitting around a fancy resort and I'll give you for free what the police pay me \$200 a half day to do, expenses additional.

Like all industries the Law & Order industry must expand and grow. At the same time, the elimination of government-supported social services has served to eliminate the critics of the Law & Order industry.

In line with their Law and Order platform Nixon and Ford, from 1969 to the present, poured billions and billions of dollars a year into the Law & Order industry. With governmental funds flowing in from all directions it has become America's biggest growth industry.

Along with all big industry, the film industry came into the recession looking for ways to reduce risks and cut costs. To be safe they do the past; and interestingly, the past Depression is their focus. Television, a little closer to the influences of big business, focused for a variety of reasons on Law and Order.

With both the movie and television industries located in Hollywood, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) has become television's model police department. LAPD is consultant to big film projects and is assigned, instead of rent-a-cops, to every television and film production made in Los Angeles. The officers are paid by the production company but they wear their uniforms instead of a costume and drive to the film shooting in taxpayer-purchased police vehicles.

Policemen play policemen and reality gets stretched or condensed as required. Police catch crooks on television with the greatest of ease. Yet informers who account for 90% of felonious arrests (when there were no suspects at the scene of the crime) are never mentioned; nor are vice squad budgets. Drugs such as alcohol or drug company amphetamines are never discussed. Only something "scary" like heroin. Like the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the televised police always get their woman. However, it gets a little confusing for the real police: Is TV copying them or are they copying TV?

Their starting pay is \$1200 a month, more than a starting Ph.D. at Columbia University makes.

Understandably, many unemployed middle-class people now become law enforcement officers just for the money. To learn how to be a cop, they act like the television actors who are trying to act like cops; no one knows who is real or who is acting.

Being a cop is easy. All you have to do is to make two or three arrests per eight-hour shift. Each bust averages about three hours with the search, the arrest, collecting evidence, the booking and the reports. With any luck you can be off the streets for most of an eight-hour shift and out of the sights of some angry person who might want to kill a cop.

A cop can be off the streets for days if he makes a good bust. Lots of evidence helps make the bust stick and a little acting smooths things over. Acting, of course, is the key to a policeman's performance. He must convince the judge and/or jury or he will be back on the streets real fast. So the cops watch TV police programs for pointers. It is an in-house training program for Davis' men-in-blue.

People starting at \$1200 a month don't want to get shot at. They have too much to lose, too much money to spend.

Young people, marijuana and vice offenders, traditionally not considered safe prospects for arrest. A bust before lunch and one after keeps you off the streets for an eight-hour shift.

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Charles O'Brien, a former undercover police agent and teacher, is currently a free lance writer.

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# People's Arts

## Politics and art

### Sacramento draws the lines

Win Blevins

It was a discouraging debate...They spoke of objective good and bad in art, the vulgarity of popular taste..."

Editor's note: last week, Win Blevins outlined the "populist" proposals for arts legislation in California by the Joint Committee on the Arts. Blevins, as consultant to that Committee, had been one of the principal authors of those proposals. This week he discusses the controversy over the legislation, the reasons for its failure to pass the Legislature, and looks skeptically at the prospects for state action in the arts. Those interested in the problem may write to Senator Arlen Gregorio.

In Blevins, novelist and screen writer, formerly an entertainment reporter, is a novelist and screen writer.

**THE ARTS ORGANIZATIONS' SAY:** Despite our arguments and support from many small, unfiliated, disenfranchised arts institutions — the ones least likely to benefit from a program administered by the larger institutions — the Gregorio legislation was blocked in the first legislative committee it faced.

Witnesses against the legislation claimed our approach would make art subject to a sort of Nielsen ratings — whatever is most popular wins. "Popular" was clearly a pejorative term.

It was a discouraging debate. We spoke of the sovereignty of the individual in matters of his own spirit, of the principles of self-responsibility and self-determination, of the virtues of decentralization and even dictatorial qualities native to choice by "experts." They spoke of objective good and bad in art, the vulgarity of popular taste, and of trusting the people in the know. The exchange was filled with enmity and almost entirely unproductive.

The second objection we heard most often was related but not identical to the first: We should not "dictate" a set of programs for the state, it was said; we should appoint good people to run the program and leave the policies and mechanisms to them. In short, the organizations did not share our distrust of discretionary power; they thought that the nature of the arts program should be left to the intelligence and good will of the experts who run it. This was actually a disagreement of a political, not artistic, nature. The complaint came out as "You don't trust us." (We in fact admired and respected them as artists and artistic administrators; we were operating on political principle, not personalities.)

From this interchange I drew a couple of unpleasant conclusions.

The lesser conclusion was that the people who represent the arts institutions do not principally want

the state to address their economic problems. They want something more intangible, something symbolic — official recognition of their importance, enfranchisement.

The greater conclusion was that the state arts program was already far more deeply and dangerously embroiled in power brokerage than I realized. First, who was represented at our hearings? Not really the artistic community. I thought. Only one novelist (aside from myself) appeared at the hearings; and no poet or playwright. The visual artists were represented by fine men elected to office in official organizations; but those organizations are not necessarily representative of the majority of painters and sculptors; besides, the organizations had little clout, so what their representatives said didn't matter much. The problem was that the Venice poets and Mill County painters aren't organized — artists are naturally anarchistic and aren't organizable. So most of those individuals who struggle with making language and color and sound expressive just weren't there.

Who did get represented? Arts institutions that are conspicuous, prestigious, and powerful. They're easy to name: The institutions housed in Los Angeles' Music Center — the Center Theatre Group, the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Civic Light Opera; from San Francisco, the San Francisco Opera, the San Francisco Symphony, and the American Conservatory Theatre. The arts organizations that have the biggest budgets. And of course the actors' and musicians' unions. These people have the biggest chunks of time to express their points of

view, coverage in the newspapers, and the private consultations. They count. The hundreds of small organizations don't.

Consider for a moment the lines of power that stand behind just one of these gentlemen. Ernst Fleischmann is executive director (administrative, not artistic, head) of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. The orchestra's home is the Music Center, which was built by prime movers in local government and private philanthropy ten years ago. The principal force behind the creation of the Music Center was Dorothy Chandler, whose family runs the Los Angeles Times. The principal support of the orchestra and the Music Center is a large and effective fund-raising organization that gets donations from Los Angeles' wealthy families, another source of power.

I admire Dorothy Chandler's enterprise, energy, and generosity in getting the Music Center built. I wonder, though, if the Music Center is the best possible contribution to art in Los Angeles. I suspect that it addresses itself more to civic pride than to the artistic sensibility, and I suspect that its audience appeal is as much to the desire for a cultural Occasion as to the desire for a rich artistic experience. (Rich artistic experiences abide as congenially in converted warehouses as in architectural splendor.) Those tens of millions might have been used more productively to create or support 50 small theatre companies playing in modest houses. We would at least have more variety that way. What makes New York a great city for music is not so much the glamorous events at Lincoln Theatre as the astonishing variety and quality of smaller recitals and concerts.

When I started writing the report, I had a suspicion that the state's most conspicuous and powerful cultural institutions would tend to dominate the state's activities in the arts. After our experience, I am wholly convinced that they want to dominate, and they are unlikely to allow the passage of any legislation that does not focus power in their hands.

Some dangers are apparent: Brown insisted that he have the

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My worst fears, in fact, were realized in this comment by the Governor's staff arts advisor, Jacques Barzaghi: "What I particularly like about the bill," he said of the enabling legislation, "is the openness of it. All the possibilities are there. They (the Commissioners) are free to do whatever they wish."

Regrettably, we already have the first clue as to what that may mean. When the funds of the old California Arts Commission

power to appoint the Commissioners, the Executive Director and his/her two top aides; one wonders why the Governor must have such extensive discretionary power over the Council. But that is a trivial consideration when one realizes that the Council was given, in the legislation, no defined goals and no coherent program to administer — only a uselessly vague exhortation to support the arts. The door is open to arbitrariness, and to domination by whatever forces have the power to dominate.

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## Freedom's dance

### Tapping apart the chains

Richard C. Kagan

During slavery in America, slave masters always feared that their slaves would rebel and strike out for freedom. The slave masters outlawed literacy because knowing how to read and write increased the possibility of rebellion. But the masters could not rob the slaves of their voices and their legs. Blacks like Sojourner Truth travelled throughout the South singing gospels that appeared innocent. But, in fact, her songs contained secret messages which informed the slaves of stations along the Freedom Trail and other routes to freedom and safety.

The origins of tap dancing are also rooted in the eternal and universal reach for freedom and liberty. It first appeared in the mid-18th century during the great slave rebellions in South Carolina. There, in Soto in 1839, nearly 100 slaves killed their masters and "with colors displayed, and two drums beating" marched south with the intention of joining the Spanish in Florida. The white militia subdued them after a pitched battle. The legislature joined in the fray by banning the use of "beating drums" or any other African instrument or sound which might inflame or lead to rebellion. From this moment when the use of African musical instruments were made illegal, American black music and dance began.

In their search for new ways to express body movement and sound, now that they were stripped of drums, the slaves absorbed part of Irish culture — clog dancing. The use of wooden clogs to thump and jump was soon adopted by the slaves. Clogs were replaced by black rhythms. Other than the ritual dances of the American Indian, tap dancing, born out of oppression, was the first native American art dance, expressing romance, humor and bodily skill, and, most importantly, a means of communication.

Travelling slave tap dance entertainers developed a code. They would give messages to the audience which told about separated families, news from other areas, and general information. The messages were also political — news about a rebellion, a hanging, or the stops along the Freedom Trail.

After the emancipation of the slaves, the black dancer was outnumbered by the white entertainer and his activities in the South were curtailed. Nonetheless, there were still a large number of exceptionally gifted black tap dancers. The high standards were set just before the Civil War by William Henry Lanex whose stage name was Juba (from the African giouba). He was hailed enthusiastically in Europe and made his all-white American company famous. After the Civil War Pegleg Bates was the most extraordinary tap dancer because one leg was live and the other wooden.

Soon tap dancing was adopted by whites seeking profit and through the use of unfair employment practices in the movies and unfair script writers the black tap dancer began to play a limited role. Stripped of its political significance and its black fold heritage, tap dancing became a humorous side show or a filler during change of scene or pace. In the 1940's white actors like Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly made the tap dance their main material. Tap dancing in fact became associated with romance. The movie AN AMERICAN IN PARIS made tap dancing an expression of joy, courtship and playfulness.

When blacks appeared in the movies they played a secondary part. Tap dancing became a necessary element in the burlesque of vaudeville. There the black, or black-faced, tap dancer played the role of the clown. In movies, one of the greatest black Richard Kagan is a founder of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars. (Continued on Page 18)