

J. C. M. P.

8 April, 1978.

# 119 forced to retire in graft purge

The Government yesterday served compulsory retirement orders on 118 police officers and one customs inspector in a move to clear up the backlog of corruption inquiries outstanding since the amnesty was declared last November.

There were cases under investigation at the time of the amnesty and so were not covered by it.

It is one of the largest numbers dealt with under Colonial Regulation 55 in recent times in any colonial territory.

At the same time the Government announced that 20 police officers, four former police officers and two customs inspectors were served with summonses to appear in court next Monday and Tuesday on charges of conspiracy.

Details of the cases were not disclosed, but it is thought at least some are in connection with the so-called Yaumati fruit market conspiracy which has been under investigation for more than a year.

A further 38 police officers and one customs inspector, who were not covered by the amnesty, have been informed that no action is to be taken against them.

A further 12 police officers are still being investigated in pre-amnesty cases by the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

Government sources indicated yesterday that it resorted to the mass use of

Colonial Regulation 55 because it believed it was in the public interest as well as the interests of those concerned to bring about a speedy end to the protracted inquiries.

Dealing with the 196 men by judicial or disciplinary procedures would have taken an estimated two to four years.

There had been calls from the public and the Junior Police Officers Association for early action.

The 119 men, who were served with letters from the Secretary for the Civil Service yesterday morning, were placed immediately on pre-retirement leave and will cease to be members of the public service when their leave entitlement is exhausted.

They will be granted the pensions or gratuities they have earned by their service. They will also be allowed to remain in any Government quarter for up to six months, subject to the payment of rent.

Government sources indicated that although the Government need not have granted them full retirement benefits, it decided to do so in fairness to the officers, who had virtually no chance of appeal.

It is understood the highest-ranking officer involved is a probationary sub-inspector.

All the officers are Chinese and are believed to have had 10 to 20 years service in the force. None of the men has previously faced prosecution and none is a member of the Junior Police Officers Association Executive Committee.

It is understood that the Government is not planning to disclose the names of those concerned, nor is it required to gazette them under Colonial Regulations.

Government sources were at pains to stress yesterday that the action was taken with every consideration for the interests of the men and the police force.

The regulation itself states that "an officer holds office subject to the pleasure of the Crown, and the pleasure of the Crown that he should no longer hold it may be signified through the Secretary of State, in which case no special formalities are required."

Government sources stressed that "if you use this regulation you are under an obligation to be very careful indeed."

Action has to be taken through the Secretary of State in London and Government sources indicated that the first steps were taken toward the end of last year.

Each case was considered

(Cont'd on Page 26, Col. 6)

## 119 forced to retire

(Cont'd from Page 1)

not only by the Attorney-General and the Secretary of the Civil Service but by the legal advisers of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

And in each case it was the Secretary of State who authorised the action.

As for redress open to those compulsorily retired, it is understood that they can petition the Queen to request the Secretary of State to change his opinion.

"But as the Secretary of State has already considered the case, the prospects of getting a favourable response are not very great," said a source.

Another course may be for an application to the courts for an injunction, but sources feel the regulations do not permit much scope for variation of the order for compulsory retirement.

Under the regulation the Government is not obliged to give the reason for the order, and it has not done so in this case.

It has resorted to its use about 24 or 25 times since the war (though only once in the term of Sir Murray MacLehose), and no reasons were ever given. It has also been used in other colonial territories.

What makes yesterday's action noteworthy, however, is the numbers involved. Officials were unable to recall a similar occasion in recent colonial history when so many were retired at the same time.

It is understood that the men had been questioned by the ICAC and that insufficient evidence had been found to justify prosecution, in the view of the Attorney-General.

The Government is understood to have acted because it was concerned about further prolonged inquiries which could lead to discontent in the force and a deterioration in morale.

As it is, the Government believes morale in the force better today than at the time

of the amnesty, and the action taken yesterday is seen as a "great opportunity for the force to show its discipline."

"The great benefit is that it clears something out of the way that could be hanging over the force for years."

A Government statement issued yesterday said that Colonial Regulation 55 had been used sparingly in the past and would continue to be so used in the future.

There were no plans for its further use, and it is understood that the Attorney-General is not planning to prosecute the 119 men who have been retired.

However, a source pointed out, it is conceivable that if "something so heinous" emerges in the future, the Attorney-General may feel it

would be necessary to launch a prosecution.

It was stated yesterday that the Commissioner of the ICAC, Mr Jack Cater, had approved the step.

Government sources were yesterday questioned about reports in the British weekly journal, The Economist, that the Commissioner of Police, Mr Brian Slevin, would retire at the end of this year.

They said that previously Mr Slevin had indicated that five years "was about right" for the term of a police commissioner, and that that period ends this year.

But there has been no firm indication as to when Mr Slevin would retire and the identity of his successor is a "hypothetical question."