

# Cops and comrades so



*ALL TOGETHER NOW... the visitors with some of their hosts lined up in front of the Danish Police School.*

**It was with some apprehension that a mixed bag of 20 South Africans left on an Idasa visit to Denmark on November 8 to learn about the Danish policing system and to see the workings of a police force within a democracy. ETIENNE MARAIS was among them.**

**I**T WAS a group of strangers with past antagonisms still uppermost in their minds who fell into two camps – each with a degree of scepticism and mistrust about the other.

The group included “cops and comrades” – community leaders from the ANC, IFP and SACP, human rights activists and police officers from the Internal Stability Unit, regional dispute resolution committees, police training centres and “homeland” police forces. Also represented were Popcru and the Idasa

negotiating with the Ministry of Law and Order and the SA Police. Karsten Petersen, deputy commissioner of the Danish Police had come to South Africa to get a sense of our problems.

The make-up of the group and the aim of the tour made it quite unique – indeed historic. It signalled a change in the once pro-sanctions stance of Denmark towards a proactive policy which will no doubt set the pace for other foreign donors in the field of peace and security.

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# Danish police...and po

policing and that in South Africa. As Captain Nic Pretorius said early on in the tour: "Most of the things we've seen in Danish policing are the same as our system in the South African police." But Jackson Mthembu of the ANC was expressing the view of many of the group when he responded that "policing in Denmark is very different to the form of policing which we, as the people who have been policed, have experienced in our country".

By the end of the tour there seemed to be broad agreement that while the principles underlying many of the systems and procedures were indeed similar, the actual implementation and end results were different in many instances.

The police felt that the references to incidents and experiences of the past were unfair and unnecessary, while the human rights people felt that these should be openly admitted. But the differences between police and community were not the major factor on the tour, because of the growing agreement among everybody about certain issues, and because of the fact that differences in approach and opinion quite clearly cut across all those present.

The briefing for the national commissioner of the Danish police and his staff was an event to remember. Almost all the speakers presented views which were markedly antagonistic (and which must have given our hosts a real sense of the complexity of our country). Yet minutes later the group was mixing informally in the most jovial of moods! The differences

seems to be the main function of government and when order breaks down, care takes priority over punishment as a solution. The police are thus encouraged to act in concert with a network of other social agencies.

Training of the police is very highly prioritised with the emphasis being on a three-year probation period rather than the first period of basic training. Training places a big emphasis on self-awareness and awareness of the dangers of corruption and poor interpersonal skills.

## *'Perhaps most foreign to our police was the central role of police unions'*

The approach to the police should not be that different from the society they serve, thus military drill and formal protocol in relation to rank appears to be absent. Then there is the complete independence of forensic scientists – they are attached to universities and have an equal relationship with prosecutors and defence lawyers.

Perhaps most foreign to our police was the central role of police unions, both in representing police and as key participants in many management structures. Most of the police we met were open about the party to which they belonged, although when guessing that someone was a socialist – he would

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