

# Five-bullet mystery of policeman's death

*Duncan Campbell writes from Hong Kong:* The Royal Hong Kong Police have suffered a serious setback after a coroner's jury refused last week to return a verdict of suicide on a former police inspector. The inspector, John MacLennan, was found dead in his flat early in January, shot five times with a police .38 Colt revolver. Officially, until the coroner's jury returned an open verdict, his death was 'suicide'. MacLennan's death is a savage reminder of the style of operation of the notoriously corrupt Hong Kong police. At the centre of the affair is a police campaign against homosexuality; MacLennan was about to be arrested, it was said, by a Special Investigation Unit, which hunted down homosexuals. But the police campaign is more a means of stabilising police power in the colony, than an actual piece of law enforcement. In this enterprise, the police have collaborated with the Triad, criminal syndicates procuring youths, and have thus ensnared several government officials in compromising circumstances. One of the victims of this conspiracy is an effeminate former judge of the colony, who left Hong Kong with considerable speed in 1979, after he fell out with the police.

The police venture had two objectives: first to pursue minor offenders against Hong Kong's oppressive sexual laws; and second to render more highly placed officials liable to pressure - from the police. Those who complied were secure. One person who did not give in to this racket was an English lawyer, Howard Lindsay. As a result, he was put on trial for homosexual offences last year.

The dead police inspector, on the other hand, was probably not a homosexual at all. He *had* been the victim of a homosexual frame-up attempt two years before, which had failed. Nevertheless, he was sacked from the police force, and only reinstated after a personal intervention from the Governor, which followed considerable lobbying on his behalf. The most likely motive for MacLennan's murder would have been the knowledge he acquired of the whole conspiracy during his service with the local Special Branch. He had been involved in a number of investigations of homosexuals in government service as security risks.

MacLennan's body was discovered during the day by a party from the Special Investigation Unit who had gone to arrest him, it was said in court. A suicide note and a revolver were discovered. According to the police evidence, the flat was completely sealed when they entered, every door and window being locked. On this basis, two police pathologists and an outside expert vouched that MacLennan must have killed himself.

The original story released by the police was rather different from the carefully constructed version presented in court. MacLennan was originally said to have been discovered by his maid and there was no mention of multiple shots. However, information about the five shots was leaked, and in consequence last week's elaborate construction had to be mounted.

A string of police witnesses swear that they identified MacLennan's handwriting on a suicide note. They may have been right. No-one, however, commented on the extraordinary wording of the note, which does not sound like the phraseology or style of a native English speaker about to shoot himself: 'Please, please tell my family that this was an accident and I was a good police officer'.