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THE STATISTICAL BUREAU—A POLICE NECESSITY

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It has been somewhat a source of astonishment and chagrin to thinking people, in the last few years, that despite the general social and economic advance of the times, there has come a serious situation in the increase of anti-social acts by an increasing number of persons.

Naturally, as something of the seriousness of the situation has become apparent, attempts are being made in increasing number to study this thing, known as the "Crime Wave," with the thought of understanding the conditions which have brought such condition to pass and the effect upon the criminal of the measures taken to repress or punish him, as well as the determination of policies which would prevent a further extension of what we might call the criminal class.

Immediately we have been met with much the same situation that confronted business circles when the first attempts were made to discover the causes of the alternate periods of prosperity and depression affecting our economic life; that is the scarcity of homogeneous continuous series of data from which definite conclusions might be made and which might serve as a basis of constructive policy.

Particularly is this shown in the works of some of the earlier students of criminology who by taking isolated samples over short periods of time, without ability to secure data supporting a number of contentions from the same locality at the same time under equal conditions of government, advanced theories supported by their data.

The result has been that a great number of theories of criminology evolved under such conditions have been practically exploded and it has not yet been possible to completely supplant these theories with more tenable ones, for the necessary comprehensiveness of data has not yet been secured.

It is at this point the police department enters.

The police department is vitally concerned with the advancement of the theory of crime and study of criminals for it has been the tendency of the public upon viewing the increase of crime to immediately point the finger of derision at the police department and to look

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to that department for a remedy and its immediate and strenuous application, disregarding the fact that the principle function of a police department is to determine the identity and to effect the incarceration of those guilty of crime, leaving the further treatment of the individual to the judicial branch of the government under the laws provided by the electorate.

Confronted with this difficulty, the police department sought to justify itself by a show of facts which would demonstrate that wherever the deficiency lay, it was not in the failure of the police department to perform its function but was in the general social condition of the times, in the machinery provided for the care of delinquent persons and persons liable to become delinquent, and in the lack of sincerity on the part of those charged with the care of a delinquent after arrest. Much to its surprise, it found that it could not do so for there was not provided in police departments an organization designed to collect, present and interpret statistical data, through which the problems confronting the department, the effect of its efforts upon those problems and the results of extraneous forces might be demonstrated.

Therefore, the bureau of statistics becomes an important part of the record system of the police department. Its complete function is not yet thoroughly established. It appears, however, for several reasons that the police department will be required, in addition to defining its own situation, to supply more or less abstract data concerning the origins, activities and social conditions of criminals. The department is certain of continuity, for police work in some form will continue to be a necessity. In addition, the department handles the delinquency from the time of its first appearance in an overt act to the final disposition of the delinquent according to the process now prescribed by law.

That our thoughts in this matter have been of value, is shown in the organization of the Statistical Bureau of the Los Angeles Police Department, which will be used in this article to show the practical operation of a successful bureau.

In the matter of the operation of the department, the problem is very largely an internal one.

It is first necessary to construct a record system through which a comprehensive check may be had on all crimes occurring within its jurisdiction. It must be so designed that the completed data secured from the operation of the system will be entirely above suspicion in the matter of accuracy. Frankly, it must be as nearly as possible im-

pregnable against intentional or accidental error by members of the department and to charges of intentional error by those desiring to attack a department through its own statements.

After such system has been designed and placed in operation, it is further necessary to instil in the minds of the members of the department, both subordinate and superior, the conviction that the purpose of their particular department's statistical bureau is to present a true picture of the facts.

In the Los Angeles Police Department, the Statistical Bureau operates as a unit of the central Records Division, under the direct supervision of a trained statistician brought into the department for the sole purpose of directing that bureau. The Records Division is the depository for all reports of offenses, accidents, arrests, dispositions of cases and all other reports having more than divisional significance, including the reports made by divisional commanders to the administrative office. In fact, the only important exclusions from Records Division are the main booking blotter, the personnel files, the department correspondence file, the indexes of property taken from prisoners, and the files of the automotive division.

All reports which bear any information of value for the particular purpose, pass through the Statistical Bureau and are reduced to numerical code classifications which are then punched into tabulating cards of the type used by the United States Census Bureau, a separate card being made for each occurrence or person. From these cards compilations may be made by any classification desired.

These cards are carefully designed to bear the greatest possible amount of useful material, separate forms being used for crimes against the person or against property, automobile thefts, traffic accidents, reports of vice conditions, adult prisoners and for juveniles coming into contact with the police as offenders or as persons offended against. As an example of material contained on these cards we may cite the cards used for crimes against property. From these cards we are able to obtain not only the number of each class of crime committed in any given period, but also the number on any day at any hour of day in each separate police division. We may analyze the occupation of the victim, the type of property on or in which the offense was committed, the way in which entrance or approach was made, any instruments or weapons used, the most valuable or the apparently most characteristic object desired or taken by the perpetrator and any peculiarities shown in the commission of the crime. In addition we show the amount of loss, the value of the stolen prop-

erty recovered, whether or not arrests were made in the case and the police division that should be given credit for the favorable action.

The centralization of statistical compilation and the careful supervision of crime classification by the supervisor and members of the statistical bureau united to create a necessary feeling of confidence in all material released by this bureau, not only in the administrative office, but also in the department at large and in the minds of members of the press and others for whom the information is prepared.

If the picture discloses laxity in the manner of performance of duty, the executives of the department are given an opportunity to correct improper conditions and activities before a public statement is made. If it proves to their advantage that the work being done is the most nearly complete that can be accomplished under the conditions which exist, the department may defend itself against malicious criticism.

Our department has been as frank in going before the public with figures indicating inability to cope with a given situation as we have been in claiming credit for work well done and we find that such action is decidedly beneficial, for the public, hearing our admission of inadequacy, is just as willing to listen to our pleas for needed assistance.

Having reached the point where the department is able to show its own problems and work, we next attempt to compare a given department with some other department. Immediately there arises the barrier that the other department is operating under different conditions from those of the first department considered. This could be surmounted if the conditions themselves could be compared. However, even this is impossible for the definitions of a given crime (the most glaring example is burglary) includes a wide variety of acts in some jurisdictions and a very closely defined act under narrowly drawn conditions in another jurisdiction.

The statistics of arrest are open to the same criticism as those of crimes committed for the same definitions are used in both. Some cities attempt to carry their record of the disposition of the prisoner to the limit, that is to the final adjudication of guilt or innocence. Others are content if they show the "Station House" disposition of the prisoner which indicates only the fact that a formal complaint was made against the individual and that he was held for trial in the Superior or Criminal Court. They are quite content to leave the court disposition to be reported by the district or state's attorney or

even the court whose jurisdiction in most cases is not congruent with that of the police department.

We have found, to our sorrow, in a great number of cases that these other agencies, for probably very good reasons of their own, do not compile the results of their activities, creating an absolute void so far as a check upon prosecution is concerned.

In other cities self-constituted bodies have found it necessary to place observers in courts and in offices of county clerks in order to secure dispositions. Our own practice is to require disposition reports on our felony cases from the officer prosecuting the case. This serves a double purpose; it checks upon the officer and it provides us with the desired information. Misdemeanor dispositions are reported by members of the department acting as bailiffs in the Municipal Court.

In the discussion of the cost of policing the city, the attempt has been made to compare the per capita costs of a large number of cities. This has been practically an impossibility for the reason that various municipalities include somewhat divergent duties in the category of police work. Several cities carry their municipal dog pounds as a portion of their police department. Some other cities include emergency hospitals. Certain cities include their police signal and their traffic signal system in their police expense accounts, while others do not.

Experience has shown us that, except immediately after the United States census, population data are very difficult to secure and carry a very great suspicion of inaccuracy. This applies not only to the total population of the city but also to the racial and ancestral composition of that population.

The determination of the thickly and sparsely populated portions of the city according to any particular measure has been almost impossible.

However, these difficulties are not insurmountable although they will require a large amount of study before they can be eliminated. Even now a very prominent association of police executives, in conjunction with one of the greater social service philanthropies, has embarked on a phase of the problem. If the preliminary effort is attended by well merited success, their activities will doubtless be expanded.

With respect to the external material concerning the personal histories of the delinquents, there is much to be accomplished.

While the argument has been advanced that the natural functions of the police department do not include the gathering of such material, yet for the previously stated reasons of contact and constant operation, it seems proper that they should enter this field.

Again complications arise. In the first place, there seems to be no definite understanding among those who would study this crime problem from an abstract angle as to the content of the body of data to be secured. In the absence of a definite understanding, it is not to be wondered that a large amount of data compiled by police departments is futile. When they are apprised of the nature of the data desired concerning prisoners, the more progressive departments of the country will be only too glad to secure and compile the desired material.

The Los Angeles Police Department has endeavored to gather the most important facts concerning the prisoner which may be obtained without investigation by interrogating him. This naturally is confined to information regarding his birth place, descent, residence in the country and in the locality, age, social condition, citizenship and crime committed. About three and a half years ago we attempted to secure data on the education and economic status of our prisoners. The additional labor entailed, the probable error introduced by the fact that no investigation could be made as to the truth, and the absence of encouragement from outside agencies resulted in the abandonment of this feature after only one month.

The information regularly issued by the statistical bureau consists of a daily crime and accident summary in which crimes against property are analyzed as to class and shown by division or precinct of occurrence. Daily comparison is made of the number of crimes in each division in the current calendar month (to the date of the report) with the corresponding period in the previous month in the same month of the previous year, and between the elapsed portion of the present fiscal year and the corresponding portion of the previous fiscal year. Quarterly a report is issued to the department executives showing the work done on those crimes.

The annual report of the department issued by the statistical bureau contains all of the facts concerning crimes and criminals for the fiscal year and is designed to serve, not only as an index to the problems and the work of the department, but also as a reference book for those desiring information concerning the crime situation in this city, for abstract study rather than executive action.

The whole field of police statistics has, doubtless, been retarded by the attitude of the older type policeman and the use of police rather than statistically trained personnel in the average statistical bureau.

It is perhaps not strange that policemen in general have come to feel through comparative isolation from pleasant contact with the public that police work, and consequently any specialized phase of police work, is not properly performed unless performed by a policeman whose original training has been the patrol of a beat. He looks with suspicion and even with antagonism upon any civilian who deigns to believe that police records are amenable to the general rules of business records, rather than being characteristically police. The newer and more progressive policeman is coming to realize that those working and trained in other fields applicable to situations arising in police work may be not only of assistance but of great value to him.

The same has been true of the policeman and the social worker, though there the antagonism may be considered more thoroughly justified for the policeman has seen the so-called social worker as an impediment desiring the immediate release of those persons whom his strenuous efforts have placed in jail, for no more tangible reason than that they were unfortunately not responsible for their nefarious acts. The result has been to keep the trained social worker from being absorbed into the police department, at the same time that the police department has been in many instances attempting a social type of work without the advantage of trained workers.

This in turn has been reflected in the inability of the policeman to see the value of collecting statistical material of a sociological nature, characterizing it as an absolute waste of valuable time.

Despite the fact that the major portion of this discussion has concerned itself with the difficulties attendant upon the use of the police department as a statistical organization, it is not intended that a too pessimistic view should be adopted but merely that the difficulties should be faced squarely by the progressive spirits of the various interests concerned, to the end that the police department may serve to its fullest capacity both in the study of the crime problem and in direct action upon crime as it is experienced.