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OBSERVATIONS ON AMERICAN POLICE SYSTEMS

FREDERICK J. CRAWLEY¹

With a people whose frenzied aim is to produce 100 per cent efficiency in all things, it will be readily understood that efforts in that direction have been and are being made in the domain of policing. In my view these efforts will prove abortive till, firstly, *police and all branches of law enforcement are removed from local political control*, and secondly, till *police receive public support as in Britain*. The second of these cannot come without the first as I will endeavor to show hereafter; neither can the untiring efforts of zealous police chiefs, along other lines, be of any avail, if the first be preserved. Crime and kindred commissions are frequently established, but very little has resulted, since one cannot proceed far in the way of reform without affecting constitutional principles, such as the clashing with local political autonomy. It is, however, the view of certain police chiefs, whose opinions I value, that crime has become so serious and chronic, that cherished political shibboleths must eventually succumb to reform. I met only one chief of police in the United States who was in favor of a continuance of the present political control.

I cannot pretend to speak authoritatively as to the amount of crime. No one can. Statistics are not kept, or if kept, are not printed and circulated; this cannot be federally enforced as each state is sovereign. A powerful committee of the Interational Association of Chiefs of Police has been formed for the purpose of instituting a uniform system of criminal statistics. This committee will aim at getting Washington to advocate this to the states as a principle of mutual advantage, as was done in connection with the establishment of the central fingerprint bureau. Offenses are designated differently in almost every state, but the committee has suggested a sufficiently common nomenclature as a working basis. It is realized that accurate statistics are a prerequisite to properly directing public attention to crime conditions and possible reforms. Of course a certain "cooking" of crime returns may still be expected, but this would vanish with the disappearance of corrupt regimes.

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Politics and Criminal Justice

Judges, magistrates and district attorneys have little security of tenure, generally being elected or appointed only for the period their political party is in office. Again, mayors are elected for a period of two or four years; they have the power of appointment of the chief of police. It will thus be seen that all the foregoing are vitally interested in the continuance of their political regimes. It is freely contended that in order to get into office, and also to remain there, it is necessary to give license on the one hand and condone on the other. The public therefore feel that they are not always sure of getting a "square deal"; disruption ensues; the public as witnesses doubt the capacity of the police to protect them against the malevolence of gangsters—it is with reluctance, therefore, that culprits are identified and testified against; the whole fabric of the administration of justice is tottering in the large cities. Rightly or wrongly, those responsible for the enforcement of law are represented as stopping at nothing to prevent exposure of a regime, hence witnesses at any public enquiry are not sure who are their friends or foes.

A special Grand Jury Inquisition appointed through the efforts of the Chicago Bar Association, to conduct an inquiry into the alliance of politics and crime in Chicago, have just presented their report. That alliance was found to exist. The report stated that criminals had come to possess powerful public positions; elections had been held to the tune of **terrorists'** guns; political bosses and gangs of gunmen had seized **control** of whole wards during election contests; policemen had stood **idly** by while hoodlums worked at slugging, shooting, and kidnapping. In respect to police the report goes on to say "Under our present system our police department is a part of the political spoils, though said to be under civil service. Under each succeeding administration the chief and directing officers of our police department and detective bureau undergo a complete change. They are political appointments and to be disposed of at the hands of the incoming administration. If these be continued, we believe it will prevent forever the building up of an efficient and effective police organization. We urge and strongly recommend that our police department be taken out of politics."

From the foregoing it will be concluded that the Chicago police are pantomimic in their administration. Such is not my view. On the contrary, I would go so far as to say that I question if any police organization produces greater individual effort. The police are to be sympathized with; they are contending almost alone with all kinds of

violent combinations and trickery. It must be remembered that the government of the country rests on principles which are sufficiently idealistic to produce loyal service in the rank and file regardless of the laxity which the system develops in practice. Moreover, the average American policeman would be prepared to ascribe crime conditions to other factors (which will be alluded to later) than to a regime which comes natural to him from birth; particularly as this regime has produced and is still producing some of the ablest police officers in the world. The American policeman therefore gets on with his job and enters into unending conflict with an armed underworld which has organized itself 100 per cent in loyal conformity to the general 100 per cent slogan; the patrolman truly carries his life in his hands; fifteen members of the Chicago force have been killed during the first six months of 1928.

Police in Chicago

American city police organization would be extremely good if there were no subtleties of the political vampire interpenetrating it—interpenetrating also the administration of justice with its pressure, intimidation, delayed trials and crook lawyers. Nothing is spared in effort and money to stem the crime waves so long as the old edifices are preserved. In Chicago for instance, the city is divided into forty sections and on each of these for the full twenty-four hours daily, is a powerful eight cylinder car manned by crews of four detectives armed with revolvers, shot and machine guns, and bombs. Chicago police are indefatigable in their efforts to search out criminals; they even go to the extreme of arresting hundreds of suspects for the purpose of identification in "hold-up" cases; the arrests and identification parades take place three times weekly; for a Sunday's parade at which I was present the process of rounding up suspects was commenced on the preceding Friday. The procedure was either to release the suspects after the parade, or charge them with some light offense, such as vagrancy. It was informed that there are from one to two hundred "hold-ups" per week in Chicago, and about five hundred murders per year, but these statements must be taken with reserve. I inspected a telegraphic crime statement for one period of eight hours which showed one murder, one shooting, six "hold-ups." It is only right to say that most of the murders and crime generally are committed by colored people and foreigners.

Police in Detroit

I want it to be clearly understood as my opinion that neither the American police nor their organization as far as they have control of it, are in any sense blameworthy for crime conditions. It is also probably doubtful if Chicago differs from other large cities. Take Detroit for instance. Police Commissioner William P. Rutledge of that city is unquestionably one of the world's best police officers. He has devoted his life to policing. He is a most progressive and enlightened man and has been selected for chairman of the important Committee on Uniform Crime Records, referred to above. I inspected his headquarters which are probably the best to be found. The building cost one-half million pounds and is for police only, the courts, fire brigade, etc., being elsewhere. The interior departmental organization was superb. I freely concede that it reflected maximum efficiency in every way. I experienced a pleasure which I have never previously felt at observing such a perfectly functioning and elaborate organization ensconced in such palatial yet fittingly designed quarters. Linked up to the organization are four hundred motor cars and one hundred and fifty motorcycles, whilst the keenness and attention to duty, discipline and quiet and respectful demeanor of the personnel were on a par with any British force. Yet Commissioner Rutledge informed me that a couple of years ago, Detroit had two hundred and twenty-five murders, whilst for 1928 it is hoped that the number will be reduced to about one hundred and fifteen. It is clear that no police organization, however efficient, can stem the tide of crime, without public support and cooperation.

Attitude of the Public

What is the public attitude in all this? Up to the present it has been too occupied at making money. The point of view of the average member of the community has been, that although residing in a locality where crime is said to be prevalent, he has encountered none of it (in the country one can go to bed with the outer door open), and if he does he will take it in his stride and pay up, if compelled to; everything is reduced to chances, risks, calculations and percentages. Things have, however, reached such a pass that the citizen at last feels concerned and those who reflect the best American traditions, whose voices have erstwhile been silenced by successful rowdies, largely alien, are bestirring themselves. The country is too prosperous; basic American culture is in danger of being overthrown; the standard of sex morality is becoming lower, whilst the general laxity and freedom has en-

gendered a criminal sex boldness on the part of colored males which has become disturbing; the nonobservance of the country's laws, including those prohibiting intoxicants, is causing the gravest concern.

But the slumbering and temporarily overlaid American conscience, once aroused, could "clean up" the crime conditions in no time. A people which can develop sufficient capacity and idealism to impose prohibition on itself can do anything. Once the organizers set to work, the gangsters and "tin horn" politicians would be sent scurrying. When "big-business" speaks fully, its vast organizations are set in motion to attain the aim. Newspapers would first be told that it is no longer desirable to look for front page crime sensations expressly to carry the huge advertisement sheets. These newspapers are run for the half-educated or rather for those who have no conception of the philosophical or altruistic.

It is my view that the cheap value attaching to life and limb has some reference to the adventurous past, coupled to the psychology of a foreign riff-raff who think in terms of nothing else. It is clear that the taking of life does not react and shock the police mind as in Britain; even the arming of police (doubtless necessary at this stage) engenders greater force from the other camp, and vice versa; police, too, are coarsened in the process and sometimes prove more a public menace than protection.

As I have tried to convey above, I affirm that once the public feels that its police and law administration are freed from political jobbery and monkeying, and the police and court officials themselves feel it, thus everybody getting a "square deal," public cooperation and support stimulated by the leaders will be immediately forthcoming, but it is necessary to point out that there are other factors hereunder to which are ascribed the abnormal crime conditions. My answer is that they doubtless do in a measure, but they would nevertheless fall, crumpled up, before the righteous and practical indignation which I consider America capable of generating at any moment.

Influence of the Automobile

In a country where almost everyone has a motor car, where they of necessity are parked in all sorts of unsupervised places, where thousands of cars of identical make and appearance are to be encountered daily, a criminal has merely to take someone's car and drive off with it. He can change it for another at will, or drive it for any distance, even to destinations thousands of miles away, through scores

of states. Police are too busily engaged on traffic and other pressing duties to be able greatly to prevent such thefts.

Just contemplate what it means to supervise a large city midst a maze and whirl of traffic. There are thousands of obstructions to the view; the audacious criminal has a thousand chances in his favor to one against. Yet police really work wonders—they are as swift or even swifter than the criminal and immediately the latter is perceived, a grim gun duel ensues—a clear case of the “survival of the fittest.” The insurance companies are freely looked to, to make good the losses of motor cars, but the criminal, of course, supplied with such an instrument of mobility is clearly able to put it to untold uses in the domain of crime and make good his escape. Moreover, the policing outside the cities in the counties, is of purely British Colonial origin and type consisting of sheriffs, deputy sheriffs and village constables; the system worked well during the nineteenth century, because strangers entering rural areas were marked by the populace and could not get away; today the system is hopelessly out of date. Nine states have, however, recently formed their own state police forces, but there is bound to be a good deal of overlapping with the old order, and it is doubtful if these forces are of the quality of, say, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Canada has the same problems to contend with as the United States, but everyone there works to give the criminal short shrift. One could almost say that the criminal’s chance would fluctuate in accordance with the degree in which the administrative life of any Canadian city had become Americanized in methods of control. Probably the sanest form of police control observed was in Toronto. The chief constable was there appointed by the judge, the senior magistrate (both permanent officials), and the mayor (elected); I should expect policing to be well done in that city.

Influence of Mixed Nationalities

America has been termed the “Melting Pot” for all nationalities. There are millions of foreigners in the United States (and a goodly number in Canada) who are not yet absorbed or assimilated into the American race. America has developed a real and surprisingly intense nationality which is ever being kept alive by a constant display of the flag. Foreigners quickly react to patriotic American blandishments, but millions are, and remain for the time being, primitive types, although the American educational system welds marvelously the younger folk. The newly arrived can but locate themselves in those communities where their own language is spoken; from these localities

the criminally inclined in time emerge and are taken in hand and organized by the earlier arrivals. No great ability is required today to batten on the American public, for the country is bursting with wealth; the newly arrived criminal is intoxicated by the sight, also by his stimulated sense of freedom; he quickly discovers that by a little resoluteness, he can make a good living out of the shortcomings of the joy-seekers and careless; to become a dangerous criminal is only a matter of time. America possesses criminals of types and numbers of which we in Britain have no possible conception—cross-bred, misshapen, slimy and degenerate wolves. Although I have travelled much, it was difficult for me to realize that such types existed as those I saw at the New York and Chicago identification parades. The American police have such a difficult task that it is not fair to compare their results with ours. In Britain the arrest of, say, 75 per cent of our criminals is brought about by the public who will not allow vice and crime to exist and no shelter is given to the criminal. In America neither of these factors are to be found operating to any great degree in the foreign communities. Of course each force carries its quota of officers of the different races. Crime on the one hand and the indifference of the public on the other, have both been allowed to grow, so that a colossus has been created which is clearly out of control. Responsible police chiefs, however, tell me that the police and law-abiding sections of the public are capable of quickly reversing the position if the politicians would keep out of the way. Police also complain of the gross interference with sentences by prison parole boards.

Influence of Prohibition

This is a thorny subject. Still, it is freely asserted that it has given an impetus to crime and in that connection I must analyze it as far as I am able. Clearly there is a type of mind which if forbidden a thing will strive for it all the more, and obtain an additional thrill out of an excess which he or she may not otherwise have desired. This is aggravated by the maddening quality of some of the liquor and by the fact that there are today so many people in the states of both sexes and all ages who do not know what to do with their time and money, and are ever seeking how best to get a fresh "kick" out of life. One gets the impression that much of the hurry-scurrying for pleasure is due to the fact that a concourse of crude minds has suddenly discovered the ways and means of satisfying its coarse tastes. Many of the carousals unquestionably lead to great excess and moral

laxity; the participation of adolescents in all this is disturbing—the motor car, summer retreats, jazz parties, etc., provide avenues.

“Blind Pigs” (illegal drinking saloons) are to be easily found in most cities, whilst it can be said that anyone who wants to drink and has the money to pay the increased cost, can always be supplied with as much as desired through a “bootlegger.”

The increase in crime is by some ascribed largely to all this, but in my view wrongly, if speaking of first causes—admittedly the criminal can hardly be expected to be an abstainer from intoxicants, nor perhaps, from drugs.

The increase in crime can definitely be attributed to the other causes set out above and not to prohibition. I even affirm that prohibition, despite the fact that it is a travesty in certain places, must in its operation broadly throughout the country, have made for a diminution of crime as well as for a host of other social advantages. Most chiefs of police I met, were either non-committal or declared that prohibition had failed, whilst the only traveller I encountered who supported prohibition was a doctor, and his views may be regarded as suspect, seeing that he receives two dollars for every certificate he signs authorizing the purchase of intoxicants. Still, the measure (designated as the 18th amendment to the Constitution) is most unlikely to be repealed in its entirety, as it would require action by three-fourths of the states, and the anti-prohibitionists will always have the women to contend with.

There appears to be genuine ground for resentment in that the measure was passed when thousands of troops were at the War; secondly, the restrictions are said to be too severe, the permitted strength of light beer, for instance, being very low. The American saloon has always been a most iniquitous den, the keepers of which derived their power from swinging a string of votes for politicians. The saloon is unlikely to return, as in the event of change, the Ontario system would probably be followed which consists of the government distributing liquor in bottle under permit, from its own stores.

Thirty years ago I resided for twelve months in the United States. I knew the notorious quarters known as the Barbary Coast, San Francisco, also the Bowery, New York; such localities could not exist today; the saloon was the hub of all vice and crime and always would be if allowed in America; it is just as vicious wherever it may operate today in the guise of “blind pigs.” Bills are presented to Congress by the thousand; it is a difficult thing to get them made law, but a still more difficult thing to get some of them enforced. Of the many

enemies which lay in the path of the Prohibition Law, one—the local political caucus, the challenger of most laws—nearly brought about its downfall. A law might even start out under good auspices yet be soon purposely discredited by indifference on the part of the machinery for enforcement. Once again we see the pernicious effect resulting from the control of law enforcement, through the control of politically appointed officials. The Prohibition Law in some states never had a chance; the dice were loaded against it from the start, so that chaos ensuing, the public were unable to perceive any virtue in it. Had the central government been able to rely on its officials as in Britain, the rigid enforcement of the act would have been an accomplished fact.

Still, on reflection, that statement is problematical, because no one in Britain will pretend that the Betting Acts are satisfactorily enforced; of course the main one is old (1853) but, be that as it may, the chief reason for the absence of satisfactory enforcement—apart from the difficulties—is that a goodly section of the public is against the Acts, and that is what has happened in America in respect to the Prohibition Law; “the people won’t play,” as an American put it, meaning that if a people forming a nation won’t play at a game, there is nothing more to be done, short of duress.

There are, however, other complications. In order that local machinery shall be fully hitched up for the law’s enforcement, the state has to give countenance to the federal law by passing an enforcement act. Until this is passed, only the federal officers (equivalent to our customs and excise) can operate with full powers. In some of the states the passing of this act has been easy because certain of the less populous states have on their own account, gone “dry” years ago, but in other states anomalies have appeared; in New York, for instance, the enforcing act was passed, then repealed. The forces of opposition have not been slow to take advantage of any side winds which blew in their favor; the illicit drink traffic has produced great wealth for hordes of “bootleggers”—the whole situation has developed in certain areas, a ground most fertile for “grafting”—individual and party funds have tremendously benefited in consequence. In certain circles it is the custom for housewives to exchange recipes for making distilled alcohol.

Despite the accusations which are freely made against United States court procedure, I am bound to confess that in my view many are totally unwarranted. I visited courts of all degrees of importance in New York and was much struck by the high tone and thoroughly

businesslike atmosphere. It is probably a case of "Give a dog a bad name, etc." I was privileged to associate with certain judges and district attorneys, and was much impressed by their candor, courtesy and capacity.

Police Women

I have had some opportunity of studying the organization of women police, and am impressed by its structure; the duties allocated appear to be similar to those which occupied by women police department at Sunderland. The Washington department for organization and numbers would appear to be on a par with our Bristol City organization where women police have been specialized in for some while. The organization is very different to that in operation in London where women of the prison-wardress stamp are made to parade the streets in ugly and illfitting uniform and boots—the poor creatures present an unnatural appearance whilst engaged on the duty which they are physically incapable of performing; one would imagine that they had been reluctantly created in deference to war time clamoring, but that it was nevertheless intended to discredit them in the eyes of the public; the organization being still alive it has been necessary to prove that they have done something; this has been done. In Washington, police women are university graduates who have also specialized in some line of work which is considered appropriate for the office; all their work is performed in ordinary civilian dress. The department is under the chief of police and a bill is being presented for provision of the following strength: 1 director (assistant superintendent), 1 assistant director (captain), 1 case supervisor, 3 patrol supervisors, 61 constables. Space does not permit of the work being detailed, yet I beg to give assurance that in the report of the chief of police for the year ending June, 1928, the women police bureau is shown as having unquestionably justified itself; the amount and variety of their work is sufficiently striking to occasion surprise. Now, as to the need for such a department in Newcastle, it is simply a question of how the city would appraise this work and whether the people would be prepared to pay for it. Although police proper perform a large amount of domestic work nowadays, yet they primarily exist because they keep the peace and prevent felonies. Much of the work of women police must be along lines of social reclamation—that is probably the highest form of policing, but can it be paid for? A bad economic situation operates against finding money for such an organization as well as against being able to find situations for female offenders—it is

comparatively easy to run a social organization where work is plentiful. A case for the policewoman can be overwhelmingly made out; the work is simply not done in Newcastle. Wherever a policewomen's department be formed, the work should be systematized and the women at the head should have vision, be educated, constructive, and of stong but genial personalities; they should in return be granted a good status. If they are not such, they would become mere appanages of the Court and of stereotyped male officers.

Future of Law Enforcement in Britain

No one can deny that it is in accord with evolution to give maximum protection to prisoners and suspects. Take the position in England. If such protection has been given and the crime conditions have correspondingly occasioned no anxiety—although probably due to the fact that the Britisher has too high a sense of fair play to indulge in crime—then one must agree that everyone (police included) has ground for satisfaction. The means are justified by the end. There are some, however, who feel that the constable is not getting a fair crack of the whip today; it has become the custom in the press to pillory and bait him. He has no supernormal powers—he collects his prisoners when he sees them and when the public bring them to him or point them out. Those in high places who castigate police, have never caught a criminal, know nothing of the difficulties of doing so, nor of preparing evidence. The fact is that police today are helpless unless prisoners are arrested as stated above. A constable is empowered to arrest a person suspected of having committed a felony or who is about to commit one. Say what one may, *all* police initiative is prompted by these powers. Unless such a case is overwhelmingly made out, to determine it is a matter of pure speculation. In the realm of speculation there is a winner and a loser. It is clear that police cannot always be winners, consequently they must be supported when they are either winners or losers, providing they are found to be actuated by a sense of duty. This sense of duty must also be broadly interpreted, for it must be remembered that a constable has no time to consult law books like his castigators; the constable has to act at once or not at all. In short, therefore, *if police find that they are not supported when they honestly make a mistake, they may take good care never to risk making a mistake.* Should that happen the law enforcement fabric would crumble.

In every force the weight of policing is borne by less than 50 per cent of the strength. The remainder merely carry the uniform. It

must be understood that there is no way of making a policeman do his duty if he is not inclined. The bricklayer has to lay his bricks, the blacksmith makes his horseshoes and so forth, but all the policeman has to do is to look the part. To try to force a constable to work, one can conjecture the result; the same public which requires protection from the criminal would rise in wrath; not that the public would be moved by sympathy for the constable, but the forced action would be regarded as operating against the public. Thus everything operates to make the constable more secure in his indolence—the indolent constable is even regarded by the community as a splendid fellow whilst the energetic man is disliked; the latter has no inducement whatever to be energetic but simply is so in conformity with his nature. Police (meaning the energetic constable) must be supported, or if epidemics of crime occur it will be useless to appeal to police to strain themselves beyond what may fall into their arms. Take another frequent source of trouble: from the moment a man is detained on suspicion of having committed a serious offense, a war of wits ensues, only one can be the victor; it is no use blinking at it, people detained under suspicion are caught in that way and no other—but forces have operated and will continue to operate which make the suspect not only more and more the victor, but give him increasing rights for bringing action for illegal detention; each police authority must be prepared in future to shoulder this burden.

Britain is content; it is as she intended, since she knows that her children are not really criminal, but merely playful. One ought therefore to have no complaint except respectfully to give warning lest the pendulum swing so far against, that being unable to police, crime conditions may assume such dimensions that there would be difficulty in overtaking them, as in the United States, American forms of crime have manifested themselves in Britain lately.

Our attitude, of course, presupposes that an organization is sound. Realizing that the public really insists on keeping its policing in its own hands, we in Newcastle have created the decentralized system of policing through the police boxes, in order that the public may cooperate with us to the maximum degree.

In setting down these observations, it has been my aim to present a report along constructive lines. Our American friends are broad-minded, invite criticism and will readily recognize that in achieving my aim, my comparisons must needs savor of frankness. I am their debtor.