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BRITAIN'S POLICE IN WAR

Sir Philip Game

(The author, Sir Philip Game, has had strategic opportunity to view the impact of war on crime and policing and to direct police efforts in preserving the peace during one of the most critical periods in world history. As head of one of the world's largest police departments—that of Metropolitan London—and one which has been faced with the holocaust of total war, his observations on the scope and direction of problems facing the police in wartime and the possible direction of enforcement difficulties after the war are of exceptional and timely interest. He brings to bear the fruits of long experience in world affairs. He served in the British Army in World War I, when he was awarded the distinguished Service Order. Commanded the R.A.F. in India, 1922-23 and was Air Member for Personnel on the Air Council, 1923-28. Retired in 1929 when Air Vice Marshal, and became Governor of New South Wales, Australia, 1930-35. Since 1935 he has served as Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis.—EDITOR.)

How war would affect each one of us as individuals, the policeman just as much as anyone else, we in Britain could only guess. But looking forward beforehand it seemed probable that the war work of British Police Forces in their corporate capacity would remain within the wide limits set at all times by the protection of life and property and the maintenance of public order. This is what has happened and any changes that have taken place have been relative rather than absolute.

The bases of Britain's police organization to meet the conditions of war were twofold. We had to aim first and foremost at a flexible organization which, while it would provide for concentration on war work, to the exclusion if necessary of ordinary duties, would equally facilitate the performance of those duties during periods of comparative quiet. Secondly flexibility demanded a wide delegation of responsibility. Local officers had each in his own sphere to consider all the many and various problems which might arise

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in localities as dissimilar as Manchester, centre of the industrial North, and Margate, popular sea-side resort, and to lay their plans on the basis of heavily damaged communications and consequent lack of higher control.

In addition, the police had to make contact and arrange co-operation with the various Civil Defense Services, some of which, like the Wardens Service, were new ventures altogether, and to get a clear picture of where reports should and should not (to avoid congestion) be sent, to whom sufferers and enquirers should be directed, how wide an area must be evacuated for many diverse types of time bomb, how to obtain assistance quickly from the various public utility services and so on almost ad infinitum.

A good deal is asked of the ordinary British police officer in peace time. He is expected to be not only a man of resource, courtesy, self-reliance and courage, but also a walking encyclopedia of miscellaneous information. But war imposes new restrictions, set out and defined in numerous and lengthy Acts, Orders and Regulations, and each creates new offenses. There seemed therefore a real danger of the police officer getting bogged in a morass of complicated instructions. But it was difficult to keep the number down, for modern life, especially in large cities, is so highly developed and organized that any serious disturbance of it gives rise to a great variety of complications and the police, who are relied upon to straighten out many of the resulting difficulties need to have a vast amount of information—whether in their heads or ready to hand—to enable them to take the right action or give the right advice.

When heavy bombing started it created entirely new situations for the ordinary citizen as well, who often found himself suddenly faced with a state of affairs—ranging from acute tragedy to mere inconvenience—against which he had been able to make little provision in advance. Looking for help he naturally turned to the familiar police officer who, while the newly formed Civil Defense Forces were finding their feet, which they did surprisingly quickly, lent a ready hand as needed without worrying whose job it was on paper.

Another temporary effect of the war on police was a reduction in numbers of regular men on long engagements. Some police officers were reservists of the Armed Forces and were called up automatically on mobilization. Many others volunteered at the earliest opportunity. But there could be practically no new intake owing to general liability to military service, while the normal wastage due to sickness, accident and death would continue to deplete police strength. The acceptance of volunteers for military service had therefore to be controlled and, even when the control was lightened, was confined to specified categories. Large numbers of police volunteered for these categories which included the Navy, parachute

units flying duties. For the latter alone some 4,000 regular officers have been accepted out of a total strength of under 70,000, of which only those under 32 were eligible to volunteer. This figure compares favorably with that for any other occupation. During the early years of the war regular police apart from these volunteers were not called up for the Armed Forces, but as the demands for man-power for the Fighting Services increased this reservation was progressively removed and all fit men under 30 were eventually transferred.

To meet the prospective wastage from all causes on the outbreak of war, large numbers of men were asked to accept the liability to be enrolled as auxiliary police constables on mobilization and to fit themselves for this by undergoing a short course of training in peace in police duties connected with the protection of life and the maintenance of public order. The response was excellent and the services of these men and of the old established Special Constabulary have proved of the greatest value, not only in connection with air raids, but also, as time gave them experience, in nearly every branch of police work. These Auxiliaries like the Regulars have gradually been transferred in increasingly large numbers from police work to the Armed Forces and essential industries.

From the point of view of crime the war has made but little change. The annual sum of indictable crimes has varied but little from pre-war years, and what variation has occurred has been mainly downwards. The great bulk of crime in Britain consists of burglary, house and shop breakings and stealing of all kinds, and the first three taken together show a small increase. It is to be feared that the fact that the increase has not been greater is less likely to be due to any access of honesty than to longer hours of work, higher wages and lack of opportunity. A noticeable feature is that over 50 per cent of detected crimes of the four classes above are committed by persons under 21. This was a feature of pre-war years, but the percentage has risen during the war, due no doubt to children and young persons under 17 having more freedom from parental control now that their parents are all working and to their not being at work themselves.

Work, restricted traveling facilities, the blackout, the remarkably good behavior of the mass or troops, British, Dominion, Colonial and Allied, congregated in Britain—the wonderful spirit with which the air raids have been met by everyone and everywhere, and a completely united and nation-wide determination to win the war have all combined to make the maintenance of public order a far simpler task for Britain's police than in days of greater individual freedom and less unity of purpose.

The same causes, especially the facing of difficulties and dangers together, have accentuated the good feeling between the public and

the police which has always been a feature of British life and this it may be hoped will probably prove to be the most permanent effect of the war on the police system.

So far we have been looking back with experience as our guide. Looking forward is more difficult and we have to rely on conjecture. What then may Britain expect in the post-war years, and what changes and development appear likely? We can perhaps discount the growing pains and teething troubles incidental to the change over from a war to a peace footing. They will probably keep our police forces, all reduced in strength, busy; but we are considering more permanent developments, not temporary and passing adjustments in our system of policing.

War does not create new problems. Even within its own technique it is not the principles of strategy which have to be reviewed but their application. What war does is to focus general attention on problems recognized hitherto by the few as urgent, but relegated by the many to some more convenient future. War stimulates thought—questions existing theories, beliefs and organizations—and increases the tempo of social change and technical development.

In considering, therefore, the possible effects of this world war on police science (for policing is a science) it may be wise to begin by asking ourselves what tendencies towards change and development were already discernible before war came upon us. Their causes are probably to be sought for in the evolution of an altered social outlook and in technical advances, especially in communication, transport and education.

The British police system has from the remotest times been based on the responsibility of every citizen for the maintenance of law and order. In early days when Britain was an agricultural community the Saxon institutions of Frankpledge and Hue and Cry carried this principle to its logical conclusion, and it was only when the coming of the Industrial Revolution introduced a profound change in social conditions that this direct and simple system failed to meet the needs of the times. After much trial and error, more argument and a period of increasing social disorder, the modern police were created by Peel. And they were organized pre-eminently to deal with the twin evils rampant at the time of violence and robbery, both encouraged by cheap drink. These crimes took place in the ill-lighted or unlighted streets and alleys and the system of beats and patrols was the natural outcome. In the last 30 years or so, both violence and drink have decreased to such an extent that violent crime is now a very small proportion indeed of the whole and drink a very minor cause of crime compared with a hundred years ago. Yet fundamentally there have been few changes in the methods of maintaining law and order so successfully evolved by Peel. As in the case of

strategy, Peel's principles are as sound as ever; it is in their application that an overhaul, if any, is needed.

Modern statistical methods give a very good picture of the geographical distribution of the commonest forms of crime and a fairly good indication of the hours of the day or night during which the majority of them are committed. Crime prevention can therefore be organized on a more flexible and scientific basis and the available man power can be applied as, when and where it is wanted in better accord with the actual needs. Motor transport and rapid communications favor this. Two of the unchanging principles of military science are the need of being strong at the decisive point and the use of reserves, and these can now be applied to crime prevention.

But what types of crime are Britain's post-war police most likely to be called upon to prevent? Can we expect any major changes in this respect?

If we achieve a greater measure of social security, may we not look for a diminution of the types of crime which are so largely the result of poverty and want?

If we achieve as well the improvements in education, which are being so urgently demanded and sought, may we not also hope for less crime due to ignorance, futility and false values in our outlook on life?

But there is another class of crime more subtle and more difficult to deal with than the robbery and violence of Peel's day or the house and shop breaking and petty thieving of all kinds which is so rife at present. It is not a new phenomenon but has always confronted those charged with law enforcement with perhaps their most difficult problem. A broad definition of it is the exploitation of the community for private gain and it would include such crimes as blackmail, fraud, forgery, share-pushing, embezzlement and the confidence trick. More and more in recent years has public opinion come to regard this as the vilest type of crime and the demand for its suppression will inevitably grow and, as always, will be difficult to meet. These crimes cannot be prevented by the vigilance of the uniformed police officer in the streets. In the great majority of cases they can only be dealt with and discouraged by subsequent detection.

Apart from what is usually accepted as crime, police after the war will certainly be faced once again and probably to a greater extent than before, with the almost impossible task of trying to reduce the annual butcher's bill on our roads. Perhaps the greatest difficulty in dealing with road accidents is that they are not, except to a very limited extent, caused by criminal behavior but simply by over confidence, carelessness, and want of thought and, in the case of the pedestrian, just sheer forgetfulness.

Viewing the problem as a whole we may then, perhaps, expect the following tendencies to manifest themselves in post-war police work.

First the need for a more flexible system than the somewhat rigid one of beat and patrol, which in the attempt to be strong ran the danger of being weak everywhere. For a greater concentration, for instance, of uniformed police in the built-up areas, both business and residential, at the dangerous hours, to deal with housebreaking and shopbreaking, offset by a smaller number of men, equipped with motor transport, in the sparsely populated districts which were the haunt of highwayman and footpad in earlier days.

Second, an increase in the detective side to cope with exploitation, criminal or semi-criminal, in all its forms.

And third, a return to at least pre-war activity in connection with the control of traffic and the prevention of road accidents.

Finally, and most important, successful police work will more and more need the ready co-operation and assistance of the public. The British citizen, in spite of his insistence on personal liberty, recognizes that this is possible only so long as public order is maintained. He is, therefore, neither inclined to break the peace himself, nor to stand idly by and see others do so, and a British crowd well handled seldom gives the police trouble, however worked up its feelings may be. But the corollary of the cult of personal liberty is a distaste for interfering in other people's business and this, combined no doubt with an easily understood dislike of hanging about a police court even as a witness, very seriously restricts the assistance the public give the police in their fight with crime.

It is the same with road accidents, but the position is even worse because the toll of the roads has completely failed to touch the public conscience in spite of much propaganda.

But the assistance of the public is more and more needed. The professional criminal of today is no longer the Bill Sykes type of violent ruffian. The police today are up against brain rather than brawn, and the criminal has most, if not all, the facilities of transport and communication they have themselves. To defeat him the police need above everything information, and that quickly.

This applies to crime prevention equally with detection. The uniformed policeman in the street cannot be everywhere, but nowadays he can be anywhere in a very few minutes, provided he gets the information on which to act. Again, however inspired the detective, he must have something to go upon. As he says himself, detective work is "10 per cent inspiration and 90 per cent perspiration" and the perspiration is largely the result of following up lines of inquiry suggested by information.

Even now facilities for giving information to the police are

widely available with very little trouble to the informant, and the development of the wireless telephone during the war is likely to make communication even more easy. It is to be hoped the public will learn to use the facilities provided to their full extent, for, however widely and on whatever lines police science may develop, capture redhanded is the exception and information the far more common starting point of success. Perhaps the closer touch between Police and public engendered by the war will help the latter to see the need for their assistance and encourage them to give it in full measure.

What of the Policeman himself—the man who does the work? The outstanding feature of his job is its individual character. Whatever the supervision provided, the police officer works alone for some 59 minutes out of every 60, and the efficiency and success of the machine depends almost entirely on his loyalty and self-discipline, initiative, resourcefulness, knowledge of the law and, perhaps even more, of human nature. This has always been and will always be so. It is a great deal to ask of any man, especially of one peculiarly exposed to temptation, and it is futile to expect it of a man who is discontented with his lot.

In post-war years, therefore, the policeman's conditions of service must not only keep pace with but move in advance of a general rise in the standard of life. This will not be easy and needs a deal of careful thought, for though the policeman cannot altogether dispense with brawn, brainy criminals postulate brainy police and the better educated the recruit accepted for police service, the more he will look for a real career with prospects of advancement for himself and of a sound education and good start in life for his children.

The advancement for himself is the real difficulty. In a police force it is the constables who cover the ground and it has hitherto been accepted that large numbers are needed to do so thoroughly, especially in cities constantly expanding in size and population. But additional constables do not necessarily entail additional Sergeants still less increases in the higher ranks. The promotion curve in the police service is consequently flat and is likely to become more so rather than improve unless changes in methods of policing reduce the need for numbers in the lowest rank. But change must be found if the right type of recruit for the police service is to be attracted and his keenness and interest maintained.

Napoleon said that an Army of asses led by a lion would always defeat an Army of lions led by an ass, but however true this may have been of an Army in his days, it would be very dangerous to accept it as true of a police force today.