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THE BRITISH POLICE

O. W. Wilson

O. W. Wilson, Professor of Police Administration, University of California, Berkeley, is one of the nation's leading authorities on progressive police methods and organization. Prior to his present faculty appointment Professor Wilson had had extensive police experience which culminated with his appointment as Chief of Police at Wichita, Kansas. During the war he spent a year in England in close association with top British police officials and served as Chief of Public Safety with the Military Government in Region III Italy and in Germany until 1947. The present article, which was prepared for the 1948 California Peace Officer's Convention, describes the basic organization of the British police system contrasting it with a composite of our own systems.—EDITOR.

The people in England enjoy the best police service in the world! The best police service is not necessarily the most efficient in terms of low crime and accident rates and of high rates of clearance by arrest, of stolen property recovered, and of convictions. These factors must be evaluated in terms of disregard of the human rights guaranteed to Americans by the first ten amendments of their Constitution and to the British by their Bill of Rights after which the U. S. constitutional amendments were patterned.

POLICE EFFICIENCY VS. QUALITY OF SERVICE

Totalitarian countries may provide more efficient police service, but restrictions on harmless movement, action, conduct, speech, and thought, and requirements of registering and reporting changes of residence to the police are too high a price to pay for slightly lower crime rates. The sacrifice of security of the people in their persons, houses, papers, and effects against unreasonable searches and seizures; of their protection against double jeopardy, self-incrimination, deprivation of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; of their right of trial by jury; of their protection against excessive bail and fines, and cruel and unusual punishment; and of the guarantee to each citizen of equal protection of the laws is exorbitant compensation for a slight increase in the recovery of property, in clearance by arrest, and in convictions.

A police service that gains its efficiency through powers granted to the police (considered extraordinary by British and American citizens alike) which enable them to enact regulations that have the force of law; to adjudicate cases, assessing fines and imprisonment on guilty persons; to imprison persons for indefinite and protracted periods without judicial hearing; and to search homes without warrants, is not the best service. The

best service is rendered in a system that conceives the police to be servants of the people, not their masters, by policemen who recognize their true relationship to the people and who provide maximum security with minimum inconvenience and restriction, and give assistance to the public in ten thousand different ways.

The truest index of the quality of police service is found in the reaction of the individual citizen to the police. Citizens in every walk of life and at every social level in England have a high regard for their police; the individual constable is admired as a man and esteemed as a policeman. This regard becomes apparent when the police are attacked: The British crowd does not applaud a criminal beating a policeman, but springs to the support of the constable; the court does not permit the defense to deliver tirades impugning the integrity of the testifying constable; the press aligns itself on the side of law enforcement. And high honors are paid to leading police officials; half a dozen still in service have been knighted.

PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE THE BRITISH POLICE

A study of the British police in action reveals that the esteem in which they are held is not an accident or the result of tradition. The English police were once viewed with suspicion and distrust; their present popularity has been fairly earned by the police themselves through adherence to three principles: (a) The primary police purpose is service to the people, not their control; (b) integrity and fairness are essential in all relations with citizens, and (c) the police must have a scrupulous regard for the inalienable rights of every citizen.

British justice (and American justice, too, since it had its origin in British judicial institutions and proceedings) seems based on the principle that it is better that 99 guilty persons should be freed than that one innocent person should be unjustly punished. The consequent miscarriages of justice sometimes prove galling to the inexperienced policeman, but maturity persuades him of the wisdom of a judicial system that hinders somewhat the most efficient operation but stands as a foundation stone for the best police service.

BRITISH CONTRIBUTIONS TO POLICE EFFICIENCY

Although the British police are not the most efficient in the world, they have made important contributions that have increased the efficiency of police throughout the world. England's first and perhaps greatest contribution to the police field was Sir Robert Peel's vision of a police force composed of men engaged

in the service as a life-long career, organized and uniformed in a non-military manner, answerable only to local authority and yet shielded from undue interference by local politicians. Since then the British police have contributed the Henry fingerprint system, the Battley single fingerprint system, and the system of identifying criminals by their *Modus Operandi*.

COMPARISON OF BRITISH AND AMERICAN POLICE

The statement that the British police service is the best in the world includes the American police in its comparison. Justice to the American police demands a word of explanation. The British service is uniformly good and consequently has the best average, whereas the American service, devoid as it is of uniformity, contains a wider divergence between the best and the poorest than is found in any other country. In consequence the American average is below the British average; but there are in the United States some police forces that provide a better quality of service than the best in England.

That the American and British police have many characteristics in common is not surprising; they have a common origin in institutions that were transplanted from England to America, and America has drawn heavily on British police experience by adopting, in addition to the contributions mentioned above, British methods of organizing, operating, and administering their forces. Under these circumstances, why is British police service superior to that provided by the American police?

A critical examination of the differences found in the British and American police services may provide an explanation of British superiority and may point the way to possible improvements in American police service. While the British and American police systems have much in common, they are in strong contrast in some important respects. In spite of the common origin of British and American institutions, inevitable differences have developed; modifications in both countries have taken divergent courses because of differences in culture, tradition, conditions of life, form of government, and other factors that determine the character of their respective milieus.

A comparison of the police services of the two countries permits valid conclusions only when they are drawn in the light of differences known or found to exist between factors that affect these services. Divergences are apparent in the size, density of population, traditions, institutions, and characteristics of the people of the two countries. Other less apparent differences may be equally important.

The differences between the operation of American and British police forces, described below, are interesting but do not seem particularly significant; the general superiority of British service is probably derived from more fundamental differences than these.

Military Courtesy. The visiting American is immediately impressed by the apparent insistence on military courtesy in an organization that at and since its inception has been emphatically characterized as non-military. Consideration of this characteristic leads to the conclusion that it prevails in its present degree with less insistence from the leaders than would be needed in America to produce equal results because of, first, the large proportion of British police who have had active military service, and second, British class-consciousness which prompts those in the lower class to assume a more subservient attitude toward recognized leaders. The fact remains, however, that British police leadership does emphasize military courtesy.

Formality of Procedure. Prescribed formal procedures for dealing with offenders are followed faithfully by the British police. The formal and somewhat stilted notice or information given orally to the traffic violator, the caution administered to the person against whom it has been decided to prefer charges, and the judge-like demeanor assumed by the British police on the occasion of charging the defendant coupled with the court-like formality of the procedure are in sharp contrast to the informal and usually unconsidered approach to the traffic offender, interrogation of suspects, and booking of prisoners by American police.

Friendly Public Relations. The unfailing pleasantness of the British constable, invariably reflected in those he comes in contact with, is not absent in American forces but is in sharp contrast to the stiff, formal, military-like demeanor of many of the continental police to which their citizens so frequently react with obsequious timidity often amounting to actual fear. The British police, who know that it is their duty to serve the people, show in their demeanor, facial expressions, and voice that they enjoy doing so. The public repays them many-fold in good will.

Limited Mechanization. The British police are not so completely motorized nor so "gadget-minded" as the American police. This may be accounted for by factors other than a failure of British leaders to recognize the merits of more complete mechanization. The relatively higher cost of motor equipment and gasoline and the lower cost of manpower alters the point at which the substitution of motorized patrol for foot patrol is

economically justified. England is less mechanized than America in terms of all mechanical devices including the automobile, and British youth, in consequence, has fewer opportunities to develop mechanical skills through association and use. On the other hand, the bicycle, a popular transportation device for all ages and sexes in England, is used quite extensively by the police, whereas in America its police use is negligible. Acceptance of the use of police radio has been slower and the use of the typewriter less extensive among the British police, and in all of England no force has a punch card tabulator, although the Home Office uses this equipment to compile police and crime statistics.

Police Records. The British police use records in their operations more extensively but appear to make less administrative use of them than do the best American forces. British constables serving as clerks index with pen and ink and search their files with painstaking care. Astounding results are obtained. During the first four months of 1947 the Modus Operandi index in New Scotland Yard made possible the positive identification of the criminal in 47% of searches made for crimes committed within their jurisdiction and in 41% of searches made for other forces. In 1946, 33% of the searches of the West Riding M. O. index resulted in positive identifications. During the first four months of 1947 Glasgow made positive identifications in 42% of searches on local crimes, in 68% of searches for Scottish boroughs and counties, and in 52% of searches for English forces. Let it be understood that by positive identification is meant just that; the term is not to be confused with suggestions or possible identifications. In each case the guilt of the criminal was established as it is by the American police when they take credit for the clearance of a case by arrest. In contrast to these figures, no American police department has produced statistics to document varied claims as to the effectiveness of their M. O. systems. The British statistics are truly astounding.

Local Control. Control by local authorities is an important characteristic of both the British and American police that implements and makes meaningful the principle that "the police are the servants of the people." Without local control, this principle would lose much of its significance.

Top Control. No effort has been made to nationalize the American police, and while this country has experimented extensively with state control of its municipal police, control has been returned to local authorities in nearly all. In England,

however, there is superimposed over the police and local authorities an influence that falls somewhat short of actual control, although in practical results it amounts to substantially that. It is exercised by the Home Office, which is the British equivalent of the U. S. Department of Interior.

Since the pattern of British police organization and operation is so nearly like that in America, the source of the superiority of British service must be sought elsewhere. An examination of the top control exercised by the Home Office may explain the superiority and may offer suggestions for improvement to the American police.

HOME OFFICE POLICE STAFF

The Home Office police staff consists principally of an Under-Secretary in Charge of Police Affairs with a radio engineer and staff of radio technicians. Four crown-appointed Inspectors of His Majesty's Constabulary, who invariably have the respect of all Chief Constables by reason of years of outstanding police service, are quartered in the Home Office and work closely with the Under-Secretary.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TOP CONTROL

Home Office authority over the police springs from a provision in British law for grants-in-aid to local authorities amounting to one half of the cost of their police operations, conditioned upon the maintenance of suitable standards of performance. While this condition might warrant the injection of Home Office rule in police affairs, British appreciation of the importance of local control has served to check the expansion of Home Office guidance. The control, therefore, is not absolute; any local authority may spurn it at will, although to do so might prove expensive to the local taxpayers. The Home Office does not have authority to give orders to local authorities nor to the police; it does not direct police operations; it does not administer police affairs. In a word, it is not operational.

Home Office activities in the police field are limited to ascertaining compliance with the conditions of the grant-in-aid, to furnishing advice and assistance to the police and local authorities on request, and to stimulating the local police as individual forces and as a group to attack and solve their own problems. In order to facilitate their work and the cooperative efforts of the local police, the Home Office has divided England into seven areas or districts. Services in addition to advice rendered by

the Home Office to the police may be classed under four heads: laboratory, radio, training, and statistical.

Laboratory Services. In spite of the popularization and stimulation of scientific crime detection methods by Sherlock Holmes, the British police were slow in their adoption. The Home Office became convinced of the need for crime laboratories and was also of the opinion that expert testimony would bear greater weight if the criminalists were independent of the police and thus, in a sense, unprejudiced scientists concerned only with the determination of facts by scientific methods. At the conclusion of the recent war, therefore, the Home Office, in close cooperation with the police, established a crime laboratory in each of the seven administrative districts to serve all police forces in England. The Home Office, therefore, actually operates seven crime laboratories.

Even the smallest force in England now has available superior laboratory facilities. The quality of the laboratory service is enhanced by the practice of employing one highly skilled expert in two or three of the more highly specialized fields, such as handwriting and pathology, each on the staff of a different laboratory but to serve other laboratories as well in the field of his specialty. With these exceptions, each laboratory serves the forces within its district. The use of the facilities is stimulated by the assignment to each laboratory for liaison of a police officer usually from the largest force in the area. This officer coordinates the needs of the several forces, serves as a go-between for the laboratory and the police, promotes the training of local forces in the use of physical evidence and in techniques relating to the search for, recording, collecting, preserving, and transporting of evidence, and otherwise stimulates the use of the laboratory facilities by the local forces. In consequence, the British police are now making a more general use of physical evidence in the solution of crimes and the conviction of criminals than the police of any other country.

Radio Service. The British police were slow in the adoption of police radio. Long after most medium size American departments had radio communication with patrol cars, the Metropolitan Police of London were using radiotelegraphy under the mistaken notion that conditions in the area made the use of radiotelephony impossible. When the Home Office became convinced of the utility and practicality of police radio, instead of relying on its gradual adoption by the various local authorities, a slow process that might require years to complete, the Home Office purchased the necessary equipment which it furnishes to the

individual forces at a nominal rental, thus relieving local authorities of both halves of the purchase price. When radio equipment or some component part fails, the Home Office replaces, repairs, and places it in stock for the future use of some other force.

The provision of radio equipment would be a step toward the administration of the police forces of England by the Home Office were it not that it has no authority to require the local authorities to use its equipment. Again it must be noted, however, the line delineating lack of authority is rather vaguely drawn; if the local police do not use the Home Office equipment they must buy their own, the Home Office paying one half in the event the purchase meets their approval.

The Home Office radio expert selected amplitude modulation as the equipment to be used in spite of protests from one or two police leaders. The Chief Constable of one of the largest county forces persuaded his local authorities of the merits of frequency modulation and installed this equipment independently of the Home Office arrangement. The Home Office approved the purchase, and the National Government paid one half the cost as a part of the usual grant-in-aid.

This example illustrates both the advantages and the dangers of the Home Office supervision. Almost over night the British police were radio-ized in contrast to what would have been a relatively slow adoption by local authorities. The Home Office could, by refusing to approve independent purchases, dictate the kind of equipment the police would be required to use. Demonstrated here, as well as in other instances, is the wisdom of Home Office policy that permits the local police freedom of action so long as it does not seriously impair the quality of their service. Local forces have been permitted and urged to experiment in equipment and procedure, and in consequence the British police have not been straight-jacketed into uniform mediocrity as have so many forces with a centralized control.

Training. The British police as a whole are more thoroughly trained than the American police. Heretofore, training has been the responsibility of the individual force, and each has provided recruit and in-service training of a comparatively high order. The London Metropolitan Police has been especially progressive, and the facilities of their training school, Peel House, have been available to the provincial forces. Hendon College was a pre-war experiment to provide intensive high-level training to young and promising constables, to be followed by promotions to command positions in the Metropolitan force.

Several of the graduates are now Chief Constables of county and borough forces at younger-than-ordinary ages.

At the end of the last war the Home Office recognized that the police were confronted with an unprecedented recruit training task in consequence of appointments to fill the thousands of vacancies that had accumulated during the war years. A national training program was launched to meet this need. A recruit training center was established in each of the seven administrative districts to which each local force was invited to send new recruits as well as those recently appointed who had been deprived of formal training. Whether this experiment will lead to the establishment of permanent national recruit training schools and whether the program will be extended to provide in-service training as well remains to be seen. The important point is that the Home Office was able to raise the level of recruit training to a uniformly high standard for all of England much more quickly than would have been possible by exhorting local authorities to such action.

Police and Crime Statistics. Individual forces in England, as in America, prepare their own monthly and annual reports, but, in addition, they forward to the Home Office each month tabulating cards on which pertinent data are recorded by pencil. The Home Office punches the recorded data into the card and by the use of mechanical tabulating equipment prepares statistical data of interest to the police somewhat comparable to the Uniform Crime Report Bulletins published by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. New Scotland Yard serves as the British clearing house for fingerprints.

Police Conferences. The Chief Constables in each of the seven districts plan and manage monthly conferences under the leadership of a chairman and secretary annually elected from their group. The meeting place rotates among the largest police headquarters in the area. The conferences are usually held in the morning with a carefully prepared and previously circulated agenda composed of questions submitted by the Chief Constables arising from current problems. The meetings convene promptly; the items on the agenda are not labored over but are handled with business-like dispatch; adjournment comes promptly in time for lunch.

An Inspector of His Majesty's Constabulary is usually in attendance at these conferences more as an observer and adviser than as a participant; his opinion is sometimes solicited; sometimes he injects it without invitation, but never in a "this-closes-the-business" way. Frequently, the secretary is instructed to

obtain a ruling or opinion from the Home Office regarding a point under discussion, sometimes at the suggestion of the Inspector, more frequently at the instigation of a Chief Constable or at the direction of the chair.

Committees. Committees composed of leading Chief Constables are appointed by the Home Office as the need arises to assist in the formulation of policies and procedures. An Home Office representative (frequently the Under-Secretary himself) usually serves as committee secretary and is thus in a position to guide the direction of the inquiry and the recommendations. A committee may labor for several years preparing its final report which is sometimes published in book form for the use of all forces. Since the result is the combined work of recognized leaders, Chief Constables almost invariably accept the findings. The committee device thus promotes the uniform acceptance of superior procedures.

Inspections. The greatest assistance provided the local police by the Home Office is through the annual inspection made of each force to assure compliance with the conditions of the grant-in-aid. The thorough-going, somewhat formal inspection, participated in by the local authority (the standing joint committee for county forces; the watch committee for borough forces), is a memorable event for all participants. It is taken as seriously as though the Chief-of-Staff were inspecting troops. In addition to a physical inspection of quarters, equipment, and personnel, the force is interrogated by the Inspector, whose skill and knowledge of police operations are demonstrated by the ease and speed with which he puts his finger on some hidden weakness and by the manner in which he discusses it at length with the assembled members.

The occasion of the inspection also affords the Inspector an opportunity to clarify the nature of desirable relationships between the local authority and the Chief Constable, and to resolve any differences that may be developing between them. The members of the local police authority in England stand in strong contrast to the aggressive, sophisticated, frequently antagonistic, and sometimes belligerent members of the police boards or commissions of some American cities who usually consider themselves experts in all matters relating to police operations and administration. The members of the British police authority appear to be from a lower class in society than the Inspector and Chief Constable, and they seem to be unduly aware of that fact; their manner seems almost obsequious; it seems inconceivable that they would take a stand against the

Home Office representative; they seem prepared to follow whatever suggestions he has to offer. Tea served to the Inspector and the local authority by the Chief Constable and his command group affords an opportunity for the Inspector to visit with the members of the local authority and to drop informal suggestions on current problems confronting them.

The favorable position of the Chief Constable is quite apparent; he is protected from the disagreeable forms of pressure exerted by so many police boards and commissions and by their individual members in America. If a member of his authority proves difficult by interfering with the Chief Constable's prerogatives or by preventing the grant of funds for needed improvements or new equipment, relief usually follows a discussion of the matter by the Inspector with the member or his chairman.

Promotions and Dismissals. The Chief Constable's tenure is nearly secure; a local authority would not undertake his removal without a discussion with the Home Office, and would not be likely to act over Home Office protest, since such action might result in cancellation of the grant-in-aid. The mantle of Home Office protection spreads over the constable as well; one dismissed by his Chief may appeal to the Home Office for redress. The Chief Constable, aware of this possibility, is certain of this ground before acting, and consequently the dismissal is practically invariably upheld.

The Inspector also aids the local authority in difficult personnel matters. If the Chief Constable has been guilty of poor judgment, the Inspector may persuade him to resign, thus relieving the local authority of a disagreeable task; in the event the Chief Constable does not fit into the local situation, assistance may be rendered to effect his appointment to some other force.

The appointment of the Chief Constable is also protected from local pressures; the Home Office participates to a limited degree in the selection of those whose names appear on the "short list" for final selection. This assures that a Chief Constable will not be selected whose appointment is not approved by the Home Office, although the Home Office does not actually participate in the selection.

The local authority may promote a member of the force to Chief Constable, but almost invariably the selection has been from the outside, vacancies being announced in police publications and applications being accepted from anywhere in the island. In the past, army officers without previous police expe-

rience were frequently appointed Chief Constable, especially of county forces. Some of the outstanding police leaders in England today served as Army Officers during the First World War and received appointments as Chief Constable on their return from the service. Only one such appointment was made at the end of the recent war, and the trend is clearly in the direction of selecting Chief Constables from the ranks of the police profession. The experiment of Hendon College has made this practice more feasible than it would otherwise have been.

While promotions to supervisory and command positions beneath the Chief Constable are nearly always made from the ranks of the local force, if the organization lacks material for promotion, the promotional examination may be thrown open to the members of all forces.

Residence is not a requirement for a recruit in any force; many give preference to applicants from outside their jurisdiction in the belief that they will then start their service totally devoid of entangling alliances.

Informal Advice. The Chief Constable may seek the informal opinion and advice of the Inspector during the inspection and at other times, or of the Home Office Under-Secretary. In the event the Chief Constable contemplates some major action, such as a shift of key personnel, the purchase of expensive equipment, the remodeling of old and the design of new buildings, he usually discusses the proposal with the Home Office in order to obtain the advice of a more experienced head. He thus makes certain that he is not proceeding contrary to Home Office policy and assures himself and his authority that the proposal will meet Home Office approval for a grant-in-aid.

REGIONAL POLICE PLAN

Heretofore no community in England of less than 6,000 population could have an independent police force but was served by the County Constabulary. Plans developed during the war based on the need for specialized equipment and personnel will result in the consolidation of the smaller forces so that none with fewer than fifty members will remain independent. This is a step toward greater efficiency; it also is a step away from local control.

DANGERS OF HOME OFFICE CONTROL

The two principal risks of Home Office control seem to be: (a) That it may stifle the initiative of individual Chief Constables; ideas for improvement of the service would then orig-

inate only in the Home Office and not in the field, and (b) that it may destroy effective local control, thus impairing application of the principle that "the police are the servants of the people." While there seems no likelihood of these disadvantages developing under the direction and policies of present Home Office personnel, they remain as hazards which may become real dangers under less enlightened leadership.

ADVANTAGES OF HOME OFFICE CONTROL

The advantages derived by the British police from Home Office control are praiseworthy:

1. Assurance of suitable standards in recruitment, training, discipline, equipment, and operation.
2. Protection of the police from undesirable local political pressures.
3. Speedy adoption by all forces of superior procedures.
4. Disregard of residence requirements in recruitment and in the selection of Chief Constables.

ADVANTAGES TO THE U. S. POLICE OF SUITABLE TOP CONTROL

Citizens of the United States have two principal concerns in reference to their police: (1) That the quality of service should be improved to narrow the present wide gap between the poorest and the best, and (2) that conditions that promote a centralized control on a National basis should be eliminated so that the American police may never become an instrument of oppression in the hands of political opportunists.

That the quality of police service might be improved by the adoption of a system of state control somewhat comparable to the British top control seems likely. The four advantages listed above could thus be gained for the American police, and efficiency thereby enhanced. The need for improvement is apparent to all informed persons; if the need is not met by state and local authorities, the vacuum may be filled, perhaps in an informal way, by the Federal government.

The centrally controlled forces of the principal enemy countries were an essential part of these police-states; without the protection afforded by their police, the dictators could not have remained in power. This truth is evidenced today by the Soviet N.K.V.D. A central control, even though it be informal, presents a focal point that may be seized and used by political extremists. An examination of the control presently exerted by the Home Office and contemplation of the possible perversion of that con-

trol under less desirable circumstances illustrates the possibility of a police force in a democracy being converted into an instrument of tyranny. And in this day of bureaucracies, there is an ever present danger that a void not filled by state and local authorities will be filled by Federal authorities with consequent control over local police by a national agency.

A top control of American municipal police in each of the forty-eight states, patterned after and no more complete than that provided by the Home Office, is worthy of consideration. If properly designed, suitably staffed, and wisely administered, this state control would assure improvement of the quality of police service and would strengthen rather than jeopardize local control.