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PROGRESS IN POLICE ADMINISTRATION

O. W. Wilson

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A completely objective appraisal of progress in police administration in the U.S. during the past 100 years is not possible. Changes in police administration do not represent progress except as they have increased police effectiveness in the accomplishment of their purpose. Since this country is a democracy, "effectiveness in the accomplishment of the police purpose" means more than the repression of criminal activity and the apprehension and conviction of criminals. The American police purpose may be defined as the protection of life, liberty, and property, and the assurance of a peaceful, convenient and pleasant life for all persons in accordance with law by preventive means.

Failures in the accomplishment of the police purpose invariably make some law-abiding person's life less satisfactory. Progress, therefore, may be measured in part by public satisfaction with police service. But public opinion is fickle; it is sometimes quickly changed by relatively unimportant incidents. A more objective and constant measure of the value of changes in police administration is needed. Crime and accident rates and the proportion of crimes cleared by arrest and of stolen property recovered give some evidence of accomplishment by individual police forces, but incomplete statistics and lack of uniformity in their compilation make impossible an accurate appraisal of police progress during the past hundred years. Analysis of the most reliable police records seems to indicate an increase in the crime rate in the last 50 years, a conclusion that appears to be substantiated by penal statistics.

Even though crime and accident statistics had been uniformly and accurately compiled, the apparent police success or failure reflected in them would not be an accurate measure of police progress. This is so

because the inventions and social changes of the past decades have imposed many new tasks on the police, have added to the complexity of their old problems, and appear in some instances to have promoted criminal behavior. Police administration today is one of the most difficult tasks confronting government at all levels. The accomplishment of the police purpose 100 years ago was simple as compared to the task now confronting the police.

THE MODERN POLICE TASK

Police progress must be appraised in the setting of modern police problems. A brief review of the changes that have complicated the police task will make this apparent.

During the past hundred years, the population of this country has grown rapidly and has become more and more concentrated in urban areas. Population density apparently promotes criminal behavior. This, together with the rapid growth and urbanization of the population, has made more difficult the assurance of a peaceful, convenient, and pleasant life. In consequence the police have had forced upon them many new tasks designed to accomplish their purpose.

Improvements in transportation (especially the automobile and a nation-wide network of good roads) have provided the population with a mobility that has complicated the repression and successful investigation of crime. These improvements have also fostered a migrant class which lacks the community roots that provide a desirable control for those who lead more settled lives. Automobiles have otherwise added to the police burdens: they have stimulated and facilitated the commission of certain types of crime, and the regulation of their movement and parking is a task, unknown 100 years ago, that today occupies as much as 25 percent of police effort in some communities.

Improvements in communications are also leaving their mark on modern society; whether for good or bad is not agreed by all. The radio, television, and a glut of comic books, all devoting a disproportionate share of their attention to crime, must affect their audience; perhaps only future events will prove whether their influence promotes or retards the accomplishment of the police purpose. Modern communications are used in both organized and unorganized crimes; police efforts towards their repression are made correspondingly difficult.

Improvements in transportation and communication facilities have likewise affected the rural police problem. These devices have, in a sense, moved some of the crime-inducing influences of the city to the farm. In consequence, the lag of rural crime behind urban crime has

been shortened; just as urban crime has increased, so has rural crime, but at a faster rate.

The improved lot of those in the lower income brackets has enabled the purchase of automobiles, radios, television sets, comic books, and liquor, and has provided an increased leisure time in which to enjoy these commodities. The social-welfare concept and the application of early delinquency-prevention theories have provided compulsory education beyond the mental capacity of some as well as group recreation activities and other government-provided facilities not in existence 100 years ago. It is not intended to imply that these conditions and services result in more harm than good. It is clearly apparent, however, that many of them have increased the burdens of the police.

Modern concepts of police responsibility have also imposed some new tasks on the police and have increased the proportion of police effort directed at others. Police administrators are devoting increasing attention to the problem of the juvenile delinquent; special divisions charged with the control of juvenile crime and some form of treatment of the problem child, while unknown fifty years ago, are commonplace in police departments today. A recognition by both the police and the public of the relationship between vice and organized crime with its concomitant corruption and acts of terrorism has resulted in an increasing proportion of police effort directed at their repression. A recognition of the need for public support has also resulted in the direction of police effort into new channels: informing the public, organizing the community, and improving their public relations are tasks that are recognized today by progressive police administrators as essential to the effective accomplishment of their purpose.

In the setting of their modern tasks, are the police today accomplishing their purpose of protecting life, liberty, and property and assuring a peaceful, convenient, and pleasant life to all law-abiding persons as effectively as they did 100 years ago? In other words, are the police holding their own? An affirmative answer would be proof of police progress. A negative answer, however, does not prove lack of progress; the police may have progressed in effectiveness but not at the rate of their added burdens.

The changed conditions mentioned above, and some others, have resulted in changes in police organization, procedure, and philosophy of service. These changes, in most instances, represent progress in the sense that had they not been made the quality of police service would be greatly inferior today. In some instances, however, an "improved" technique designed to facilitate the accomplishment of a specific pur-

pose has retarded the achievement of other objectives made possible by the "old" technique. "Progress," therefore, has not invariably been an unmixed blessing.

THE POLICE SYSTEM

The police system in this country 100 years ago was not simple; nor was it completely adequate to meet the needs of the time. The multiplicity of local police agencies with overlapping jurisdictions and duplications of responsibility was a system poorly adapted to deal with local crime. It was even more ineffective in coping with crime whose ramifications extended beyond the local jurisdiction. Its ineffectiveness was aggravated by the wide expanse of territory and the independence of the several states.

As police problems increased in number and complexity with changing social conditions and as the nature, volume, and severity of crimes fluctuated from time to time, efforts to increase the effectiveness of the police in dealing with them included attempts to improve the police system. These efforts were principally directed at providing new police agencies to meet specific needs. Little attention was given to the elimination of a system that had proved unsatisfactory, to removing from an agency a law enforcement responsibility that it was discharging indifferently well or not at all, or to consolidating any of the existing agencies among themselves or into a newly created agency. The system has consequently grown more complex; overlapping jurisdictions and duplication of responsibilities have been increased instead of diminished. These results are apparent at all levels of government: national, state, and local.

NATIONAL

Five of the nine Federal police agencies were born during the past 100 years. Although of the nine, five are in one department (Treasury), they remain unconsolidated, and their efforts are poorly coordinated.

The increase in the number of Federal police agencies is only one manifestation of the increased activity in law enforcement at the national level. Federal laws have been enacted that have substantially increased the scope of Federal law enforcement. These laws of necessity have been restricted to matters over which the Federal government was granted authority by the Constitution: the power to impose taxes; to regulate interstate and foreign commerce; to make laws on naturalization and bankruptcy; to coin money; to establish a postal system; to

exercise exclusive jurisdiction over areas and places owned by the U. S. government; and to suppress counterfeiting, piracies, maritime offenses, and treason.

Many of the Federal laws, and especially those enacted during the past two decades, have been directed at offenses that have interstate ramifications. In this way the Federal police agencies (notably the FBI) have been able to assist local authorities in dealing with their crime problems. The Federal agencies have also provided law enforcement assistance to local police in crimes not having interstate ramifications but involving violations of other Federal laws. This is especially true of the Narcotic Bureau, Alcohol Tax Unit, U. S. S. S., Immigration Service, and Postal Inspectors. Federal police agencies (notably the FBI) have provided a variety of other services to state and local enforcement agencies: crime statistics, identification and crime laboratory services, and assistance in training.

No serious effort has been made to nationalize U. S. police service or to extend the authority of Federal law or its enforcement agencies beyond the restrictions imposed by the U. S. Constitution. Neither does it seem likely that such effort will be made in the future. The existence of highly centralized police systems in the principal enemy totalitarian countries in the past decade serves as a warning to those who would exchange American freedom for increased police effectiveness.

STATE

The states have attempted to patch up weaknesses in their system of local police by creating new agencies to meet special needs. The needs have evolved from changed social conditions, from failure in law enforcement on the part of existing agencies, and from the desire to provide certain central services to assist local agencies with police problems. All of the state agencies concerned with crime and safety have developed in the past 100 years, except the Texas Rangers which was created in 1835.

The need for an enforcement arm of the state first became apparent when some local police agencies demonstrated indifference in the enforcement of vice laws. Labor disturbances created a similar need. Without some form of police under their control, governors charged with the enforcement of the laws of their states had no instrument of enforcement except the state militia. For example, the Governor of Indiana found it necessary to call out the militia to enforce a statute

prohibiting race track gambling. The use of the militia in dealing with labor disturbances was at one time quite common in many states.

The failure of the county sheriff to provide an effective patrol in rural areas added to the need for a state police. The advent of the automobile and the phenomenal growth of the highway system created a need for a police agency to enforce regulations governing their use, principally in the interest of safety. There is no state today that does not have a uniformed police engaged in some form of patrol. Approximately a quarter of them, however, restrict the authority of their police to the enforcement of laws regulating the operation of motor vehicles and the use of highways. The state police agencies generally restrict their operations to unincorporated areas as a matter of policy although some such restrictions are imposed on them by statute in some states.

The provision of central services to local police has developed principally during the past 50 years. A system of criminal identification by fingerprints, adopted by the American police shortly after the turn of the century, made apparent the need for a central clearing house; many states created identification bureaus to meet this need. Some bureaus also served as clearing houses of information regarding crime as well as criminals and had the responsibility of compiling state-wide crime statistics. In more recent years an increasing number of states are providing crime laboratory services to local police. Many states that have not given general law-enforcement authority to their state police have investigators to assist local police in the investigation of more serious crimes (usually only on request). The investigators are assigned to bureaus created for this special purpose in some states; in others they have been assigned to existing identification or other bureaus. Many states today also provide some form of training for the local police.

The states have been reluctant to deprive existing agencies of their law enforcement duties even when new agencies are created to perform them. They have also failed to provide effective machinery to discover and deal with law enforcement agencies that are derelict in their duty. A system has not yet been developed to assure suitable standards of local police performance by means of a reward for acceptable accomplishment or penalty for failure, implemented by periodic inspections. The system of grants to local police authorities conditioned on the maintenance of acceptable standards that has apparently worked effectively in Great Britain for nearly 100 years has not been tried in this country.

A noteworthy but futile effort was made by many states to control

local police forces through state appointed administrators. During the last half of the last century most large cities were thus placed under state control. Inevitably conflict between the state and local authorities led to the virtual abandonment of the plan. Today such control is exercised in only four cities of more than 250,000 population and less than a dozen smaller sized cities; six of these have populations of less than 25,000; only one has a population of more than 100,000.

Many states have strengthened their offensive against criminals who take advantage of the poor interstate coordination of law enforcement efforts by legislation and inter-state compacts enabling reciprocal action. Noteworthy advantages thus gained include fresh pursuit across state lines, simplification of extradition of criminals and rendition of witnesses, and the supervision of out-of-state parolees and probationers.

LOCAL

Urban law enforcement has been recognized in this country as a responsibility of local communities. More than 90 percent of them have populations under 50,000. Although some state police forces are authorized to serve incorporated areas on a contract basis, few towns have availed themselves of this opportunity. Practically all incorporated communities, and some unincorporated areas as well, have their own police forces. Park police and special district police that operate independently of the regular force have been created in some cities.

Although there have been isolated instances of groups of communities banding together informally to provide some central services to all, this has consisted principally of a large city making its identification, records, laboratory, communications, training, and some other facilities available to its satellites. Consolidation of police forces in metropolitan areas and in other adjoining communities has not been undertaken. In consequence, the principal responsibility for urban law enforcement rests on completely independent forces, all but a few hundred of which are of such small size as to make efficient operation impossible.

The characteristics of the small police forces charged with this responsibility account for much of the inefficiency of the American police. Their small size makes it impractical to provide suitable training, equipment, and technical services for their members. Police salaries are nearly always lower than those in the larger forces. In consequence, the small town police officer is usually not well qualified for police service in spite of the fact that the performance of police tasks in a small com-

munity is more difficult than in a large city where the individual officer enjoys the counsel of ever-present supervisors and the ever-ready assistance of specialists and a large and well equipped force.

Rural law enforcement presents an equally disturbing picture. State police forces are inadequate in strength to provide the desired level of service; with some notable exceptions the sheriff has failed to provide satisfactory police service for rural areas. Some few exceptional counties have created county police forces, usually but not always under the direction of the sheriff. To further complicate the situation, county prosecutors frequently have a staff of investigators to participate with other police agencies in the investigation of serious crimes.

TECHNIQUES

The American police have been quick to adapt to their needs many of the inventions and developments in other fields. They have developed techniques for detecting deception through the use of drugs and mechanical devices that record physiological reactions to questions. They adopted the motor vehicle, radio, telegraph, telephone, teletype, sound and visual recording devices, mechanical tabulating and other modern office equipment, and an almost unlimited array of laboratory instruments. The American police have the well-earned reputation of being "gadget minded."

The mechanization of patrol during the past three decades has perhaps been the most revolutionary change in police operations. The relatively low cost of radio-equipped automobiles as compared to rising police salaries, and the greatly increased effectiveness of the officer when motorized, have made this method of patrol economically sound. A failure to recognize that the motorized officer is fundamentally a foot patrolman who has been supplied with an automobile to enable him to move speedily and without fatigue from the location of one task to another, and that he must spend a substantial part of his time on foot if he is to perform a satisfactory patrol service, has impaired the quality of motor patrol in some communities and created a demand for the return of the foot patrolman. In recent years an increasing number of police administrators have recognized the true character of motorized patrol and its important economy. Present trends are toward more complete mechanization.

During the past two decades the American police have become increasingly conscious of the value of scientific aids in crime investigation. Crime laboratories, many of them well equipped and staffed, have been created in police agencies at Federal, state, and local levels. While

some crime laboratory staffs are not granted the powers of peace officers, no serious objection has been raised to the testimony of police laboratory experts on their examination of physical evidence. Police laboratory operations have been improved in some communities by procedures that assure the prompt search for physical evidence by well trained officers who are on duty on each shift in suitably equipped automobiles. The trend in all but the small departments is toward the provision of laboratory equipment and staff adequate to assure an effective search for physical evidence and to enable screening from it, for reference to a better equipped laboratory, evidence whose examination involves techniques beyond the local facilities.

In the late 1920's, the International Association of Chiefs of Police developed a system of uniform crime reporting on which is based a national system of crime statistics maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The absence of suitable crime statistics before this time has made analysis of the crime situation and the discovery of crime trends practically impossible. The situation was aggravated by the lack of uniformity of laws in the several states, the classification and compilation of crimes in a variety of ways by thousands of independent police forces, and the absence of a central clearing house for the assembly and analysis of such statistics. The present system of national crime statistics is based on voluntary monthly reports submitted by local police agencies to the FBI. The compilations are no more accurate than the submitted reports, and there is evidence that some police departments fail to submit complete reports. There is no law requiring the submission of the crime data, no administrative machinery with the power to audit police records to assure accuracy of reporting, and no penalty that may be assessed for failure.

Records in individual police forces have been expanded and improved; their completeness has substantially increased both the operational and administrative use that is now made of them. Indexes maintained in progressive departments facilitate maximum use in operations; the follow-up made possible through records has improved administrative control over police operations; and the analysis of the data compiled has improved the quality of police planning.

The advent of the automobile imposed tremendous traffic-control tasks on the police that have been substantially lessened in recent years by mechanical control devices and by the elimination of points of traffic friction by improved highway design. With continuing success the police are increasing the use of schoolboy patrols to assist in traffic control in the vicinity of schools. In spite of the continued high accident

rate, the police are probably applying as progressive principles in traffic control as in any other field of police responsibility.

Police departments have accepted some responsibility in assuring suitable treatment for problem children, and some actively participate in the treatment with the voluntary consent of the child and its parents. Many departments provide recreational and character building activities for children under the guise of preventing delinquency; the activity is frequently not directed at the most delinquent segments of the youth population and consequently it usually has a greater public relations than crime prevention value.

ORGANIZATION

The control of police forces by boards, popular during the last century, has been discontinued in favor of a single head in all but a few forces. The appointment of a layman as the head of the force, tried in many departments, has given way almost completely to the appointment of professional policemen to this post. The rapid extension of the city manager form of government has simplified police control in most instances and has consequently improved the quality of police service in most cities where it has been adopted.

The organization of individual police forces has been subjected to marked changes in the past 100 years. The modern police organization structure, when compared to its predecessor, reflects somewhat the complexity of the police task today compared to the simplicity of police work in the past. The many mechanical and electrical devices used by the police and the varied tasks imposed on them by their modern problems have created the need for specialists in police service. Modern forces must have criminalists for their laboratories; communications and traffic engineers; mechanics, statisticians, and persons trained in social and psychiatric work.

In addition to the staff specialists, the line officer has also specialized; some are engaged exclusively in traffic or vice control, others in crime investigation or juvenile crime control. The specialists are inclined to be empire builders; they demand (and usually receive) specialized organization units whose members devote their attention exclusively to the specialized tasks. In consequence, the simple police organization, in which nearly all members were assigned to patrol a beat with only a few assigned to crime investigations and headquarters duties, has developed into a complex structure composed of many specialized units at both operating and service levels. The complex modern police or-

ganization structure is marked by organic units dependent from the chief in a number far beyond his span of control.

Recent years have brought organization reforms strongly influenced in many departments by the experience of their members in military service. The wide span of control has been diminished by grouping related tasks in a smaller number of organic units. The concept of line and staff has been adopted in many departments and increasing attention is being given to staff planning and control by inspection.

While specialization, especially at the staff level, is undoubtedly needed to deal successfully with the complex modern police problems, the extent of specialization at the level of execution raises serious question as to whether it has not been carried to the point where the effective accomplishment of the primary police purpose has been jeopardized. The proportion of police force devoted to preventive patrol has sunk to a low ebb, and in many departments overlapping specialized patrols are provided by traffic officers, detectives, and juvenile division members. According to some specialists, the incompetence of beat patrolmen in the field of special interest makes specialization essential. As the competence of beat officers is improved by superior methods of selection and training, the need for specialization is likely to diminish.

PERSONNEL

Modern techniques of personnel administration have been adopted by many progressive police administrators while others have had these procedures imposed upon them through independent civil service boards. Improved recruitment and selection methods and standards have raised the quality of police personnel during the past two decades. Noteworthy are the higher intelligence and educational requirements, the more thorough character investigations, and the appraisal of the personality of candidates by psychologists and psychiatrists to eliminate those not emotionally qualified for service. Pre-employment residence requirements for police candidates have been substantially relaxed in recent years. The practice of nation-wide competitive examinations to fill the position of police chief has become commonplace. In contrast, the other supervisory and command positions in police departments are invariably filled by promotion from within the force. Determined efforts to base promotions on merit have resulted in over-emphasis of readily scored objective information tests with diminished attention to the less easily measured qualities of leadership.

All departments large enough to support such a program provide recruit training and some a continuation training also. Many take

advantage of training facilities provided by state police and boards of education, the FBI, and such University-sponsored programs as the Northwestern University Traffic Institute, the Delinquency Control Institute of the University of Southern California, and the Louisville University Southern Police Institute. Pre-employment training is provided in a score of universities and colleges. American police service seems to be on the threshold of professionalization.

The welfare of the police has improved beyond the average. While there is lack of uniformity of salaries among the independent forces, pay has increased on the average more rapidly than for workers in private enterprises. The work week has been shortened; the present trend is toward forty hours of work each week. During the past decade many departments have adopted the practice of paying overtime in cash or by granting time off to compensate. Most departments now have generous pensions, some supported by the state in such a manner that service on more than one department may be accumulated to fulfill pension service requirements. Agreements between states to enable police service in one state to be counted toward a police pension in another have not been made.

Dissatisfaction of the police with pay made inadequate by post-war inflation caused the American Federation of Labor in 1919 to lift a 20-year ban on the admission of police unions into the Federation. Police strikes occurred in Cincinnati (1918) and Boston (1919). The right of the police to affiliate with labor unions was challenged and nearly all departments now have regulations that forbid this practice. Police professional organizations exist at national, state, and regional levels. Local forces frequently maintain social and benefit organizations. In some communities these associations have organized public opinion in support of legal enactments designed to raise salaries, shorten the work week, improve pension provisions, assure promotion on the basis of merit and service, and protect the police from unmerited disciplinary action. Grievance committees created in many police departments have demonstrated their value to the administrator in discovering and correcting morale-destroying influences.

The desire to protect the police from pernicious influences has resulted in the sharp curtailment of the power of the American police chief to manage his personnel. Such formidable legal safeguards have been thrown around the rights of the policeman, and even of the police candidate, that the chief of police in many communities has little voice in the selection of men for appointment and promotion, and in their discipline. The protection thus afforded has not invariably improved

personnel administration. Depriving the responsible head of a force of essential authority over its members and vesting this power in independent agencies that lack both the responsibility for police operations and an appreciation of the unique police personnel requirements has resulted, in some communities, in the appointment and retention of persons unqualified for police service.

During the past 50 years the use of policewomen and of both male and female civilian employees has substantially increased. Policewomen have demonstrated their value in the service. The need for technical and clerical skills not likely to be found in policemen, police salaries increasing beyond the level of pay for office workers in private enterprise, and the simplification of some personnel management problems have stimulated the employment of civilians.

The increased cost of police manpower has stimulated attention to economies made possible by its wise direction. Efforts have been made to measure the need for police service as a guide in its deployment. The distribution of the force equally among three platoons, in order to simplify a periodic rotation of the men among these shifts, is gradually being eliminated in favor of a distribution of the force in proportion to the need for service.

THE FUTURE

Weaknesses in police administration, aggravated by the increased complexity of police tasks, have become more readily discernible in recent years, and some trends toward their correction are evident. On these may be based some conjectural future developments.

The future will probably bring substantial consolidation of Federal law enforcement agencies. Present agencies, deprived of general law enforcement responsibilities, will then be restricted to policing Federal employees and property. Federal law enforcement may become more intensive but it is not likely to expand. Control of local enforcement agencies by the Federal government does not seem likely.

Crime control will continue to be considered a responsibility of local government, but it is possible that the need for increased effectiveness and economy will force the consolidation of small local forces on a regional basis. The county may undertake a more active role, especially those under county-manager control; county forces, comparable to the English county constabulary, may be expected to emerge to police rural areas and some urban areas on a contract basis as well.

The states, too, are likely to participate more actively and effectively in local crime control than they have in the past; it is not inconceivable

that some may provide incentive to local law enforcement in the form of grants to jurisdictions that maintain acceptable standards of police performance. While the states may provide administrative machinery to assure suitable performance standards, it seems unlikely that they will undertake an operational or even an administrative control over local forces.

The future will probably restore to the police chief some measure of his lost control over police personnel. Greater attention will be given to the provision of staff services in police departments, but the present trend toward extreme specialization at the level of execution will probably be reversed. Police activity in the prevention of delinquency and the assurance of suitable treatment for problem children will undoubtedly increase.

In conclusion, a fair appraisal of the American police must recognize that none of their major problems has yet been solved. The police, with the other agencies concerned with the administration of criminal justice, continue to muddle along repeating the mistakes of the past with little consideration to the fundamentals of their task. The need for research to discover the underlying factors in crime and other police problems is becoming increasingly apparent. Real progress cannot be expected until professional training becomes a prerequisite for service in police departments throughout the country. The next 50 years may see the American police emerge as a true profession.