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POLICE SCIENCE

A BELGIAN POLICE OFFICIAL'S IMPRESSIONS OF HIS TRAVELS IN THE U. S. A.

F. E. Louwage

The author is Inspector General of the Belgian Ministry of Justice, Brussels, Belgian, and President of the International Criminal Police Commission. He has been active in the police field since 1909 and is the author of several books, including "Police Criminelle—Technique et Tactique," and "Psychologie et Criminalité."

Upon the occasion of Inspector Louwage's recent visit to the United States, he met with several members of the Editorial Board of this Journal. After enjoying their visit with him and being impressed with his ability and sincerity they requested him to write a note for the Journal upon his return to his homeland, telling of his observations and impressions. The following interesting manuscript resulted from that invitation.—EDITOR.

From September 12th till November 8th, 1950, I wandered around the U.S.A. where I visited several courts, prisons, law schools, police academies, and police departments. Having seen so many interesting institutions, all over the U.S.A., it would take too much space here to give a complete account of my reactions. So, I shall make only a summary of the most important ones.

I must say above all that I was especially impressed by the wonderful equipment of the laboratories and the police departments, as well as by the science and sometimes the special art shown by the professors of police administration or criminology schools, attached to certain Universities, and of police academies organized in some important police departments.

I consider that most of those institutions have built up study programs which match with those of the Belgian School for Criminology and Scientific Police and of the most important academies of similar kind in Europe. As president of the International Commission of Criminal Police, it is a real pleasure to realize that the subjects taught in the most cultured parts of the world became synchronized and that the education of all superior law enforcement officers endeavor to attain a high standard for the benefit of a better treatment of all persons coming in touch with the police and for a perfected administration of justice.

This satisfactory appreciation of your institutions, for which I have the greatest admiration since I saw them in action, will excuse some of my open reflexions.

THE "LIE-DETECTOR" AND "TRUTH-SERUM"

In some police departments, I saw that the "lie-detector" was operated by a police officer, sometimes by a patrolman. I have already had the opportunity to express my amazement on this subject to some professors of law schools and schools of criminology. I am very happy to say that they agreed with my objections. I confess, however, that as far as the use in Europe of the lie-detector is concerned, I am not in favor of its application in European crime investigations, owing to the spirit which is leading our conceptions of judicial treatment of offenders. To explain fully my opinion would require a long statement, which would not find its place here. My point of view was developed before the members of our Commission (I.C.P.C.), after a dispute which arose last year throughout Europe, concerning the use in criminal investigation of so-called "truth-serum." The point I developed was that, by using chemical products which provide narcosis, violence is committed to the interior conscience and against the rights of the defendant. If need be, I could give an extended argumentation in favor of my opinion on this problem, though it has been discussed in several medical schools as well as in forensic and law organizations. Most of them came to the same conclusion, even as regards suspects who demand to be submitted to a "truth-serum" test in order to prove their innocence.

Although I concede that there exists a considerable difference between the use of a "truth-serum" and the application of a "lie-detector," I think that a certain relation exists with respect to the basis for my ethical objections.

I shall not discuss the effectiveness of the "lie-detector" and all the possibilities it offers in investigation, but I think that psychiatrists will agree with me that the lie-detector test reveals, at the same time, physiological and psychological reactions of the subject. Is a policeman fit to interpret these reactions and especially to make the very restricted conclusion he is inclined to do, that is to say: "the person lies" or "he is telling the truth"? I am of the opinion that in several cases, such a statement, positive or negative, would not have been delivered, if the reactions revealed during the application had been thoroughly interpreted by a medical doctor or a psychiatrist. There must be many cases where these practitioners would express doubt as to the reactions revealed by the subject. I fear, from what I have seen and heard, that police officers operating the "lie-detector"—even in the supposition that they would be able to give technical interpretation—think they always have to conclude their report with either: "he

lies" or "he is telling the truth," fearing that doubt would be regarded as unfitness or incapability. I should be pleased if I were wrong, but this situation is full of danger for the suspected person.

Let us suppose that you agree with my opinion that the user of the "lie-detector" must be a forensic doctor or a psychiatrist, perhaps you would reply then that the statement so obtained does not affect the effectiveness of the diagnosis attained with this apparatus.

Let me tell you a personal story. About 25 years ago, during a lecture given by a professor of biology, in the school of criminology where I was a student, this professor made an experiment on me to demonstrate reactions to interrogation. The professor asked me to give a simple qualification directly after each word he would pronounce. The first was: "Water?". "Liquid" was my direct answer. The second: "Blood." "Red," I replied immediately. Finally: "Father?" I could not reply. What had happened? A few days before my father had suffered from a congestion. I paid him a visit and, when entering his bedroom, I found the doctor, who had made an incision in my father's arm, drawing blood into a basin. This incident had, unconsciously been strongly registered in my mind. During the above mentioned interrogation, as soon as the word "blood" became associated with the word "father," my reaction was very acute. Let us suppose now that my father had been the victim of an assault and that, being suspected—although innocent—of having committed the crime, I had been subjected to an examination by the "lie-detector," during which application questions comprising successively the words "blood" and "father" would have been asked. May you assert that the same violent reaction would not have occurred? And, if so, could this test not have been interpreted as a manifestation of telling a lie after denying the commission of the crime? It seems to me that in such a case, violation of the conscience can exist. My conclusion is that, in the use of the "lie-detector," circumspection, prudence, and science must be present.

POLICE CORRUPTION AND THE GAMBLING RACKET

During my journey all over the U.S.A., I learned some words I did not know before, such as: Pay-off, rag, slot-machines, bookie, fixing. You Americans will understand me. My visit happened at a very inopportune period; in various cities, scandals were being revealed, and the press was publishing long articles about them.

I shall say, directly, that after what I have been able to consider all over your country, I am strongly convinced that the great majority of

your superior officials and your law enforcement officers are adverse to corruption or bribery; that they are law-abiding, being deeply aware that integrity and a clear conscience provide self-satisfaction and prestige. I shall add that the U.S. is a vast country, with 140 millions inhabitants and that in Europe, one must include the states of all of the Western Continent to be able to match the space and the population of the U.S. I am asking myself if, when such a press campaign would be launched for each case of bribery committed in Western Europe, by an inferior policeman, even in a small city anywhere, the comparison would be in favor of our countries, where, generally speaking, the police have a justifiable reputation of being honest. After this qualifying preface, I hope you will excuse the expression of my sincere feelings about corruption in the U.S.A.

During my first visit in 1925, I found out that at that time of "prohibition" police corruption was quite extensive. It was presumably stopped by the repeal of the prohibition laws. At the present, it is gambling which produces the evil but on a smaller scale. I have seen that in your country, like in all other countries, a sizeable proportion of the public gambles, as it is a common and unavoidable inclination of a considerable part of the population everywhere. Gambling cannot be destroyed. In the U.S.A., betting is not generally permitted through bookmakers and agencies, even for horse races, football games, etc. In Belgium, betting is authorized on games in which skill presides, like sport games, even through bookmakers and agencies, but under certain conditions, especially with control of fiscal agents. An immense part of the Belgium population bets on horse races and football games, in compliance with these regulations. Everybody is able to bet; it is rare that gambling brings corruption in Belgium. I think that, if such conditioned tolerance was established in U.S.A., corruption of this kind would almost disappear.

THE ELECTIVE AND INDEFINITE TERM OF PUBLIC OFFICE

There is another point which surprised me in your legal regulations and administration structure. It is the instability of a great deal of important official functions. In the U.S.A. states attorneys, sheriffs, and most judges are elected. Generally speaking, in Western Europe all officials of this category, as well as police officials, are appointed by the Government and on a lifelong status.

I shall only comment here on the office of police commissioner. When a politician, a business man, or a man without any experience or tradition of police work is appointed police commissioner, knowing that it

may only be for a few years or months, he would be superhuman if he did not yield to the immense temptations which occur at every hour of his functions. These violations could not be excused when committed by a commissioner of police, who has experience and official professional background, and who had an appointment for life. He would be, by tradition, inclined to circumspection, respect of the Law, and integrity. He would realize that his superiors, the public, and justice would severely condemn his misconduct.

NATIONAL DEFENSE

Finally, I shall conclude with an impression concerning the general public of the U.S. I have been most surprised by the revelations made, publicly, concerning all information relating to national defense: Army, navy, and air force. If I had been a spy, it would have been extremely simple for me to reconstitute the entire location and organization of your various defense units, if only by reading your newspapers, by looking attentively to what may be openly seen, by listening to the conversations of your servicemen, and even the officers. You publish too much, you show too much, you communicate too much, you talk too much! Is it by being conscious of your own strength that you think that it is of no importance to reveal to anyone the potential of your forces and the location of your units? Perhaps. I think that most of all those who divulge information of this kind are acting so because they have no sufficient experience of the dangers resulting in such indifference for defense organizations.

You may think that I have been extremely outspoken, but the editors of this Journal asked me to tell the truth "even if it hurts." Moreover, the U.S.A. is a giant that can endure the bite of a mosquito.