

1970

A Commitment to Change

Robert Sheehan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Robert Sheehan, A Commitment to Change, 60 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 381 (1969)

This Criminology is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

POLICE SCIENCE

A COMMITMENT TO CHANGE

ROBERT SHEEHAN

Robert Sheehan is a Professor in the College of Criminal Justice, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts and heads his own police management consulting firm, with representatives in 13 states. In 1968 he served as president of the International Association of Police Professors and presented this paper as his presidential address at their San Francisco meeting in May 1968.—
EDITOR.

Police education and training in America are suffering from acute inbreeding and lack of commitment to change. As in the development of other established professional educational programs, progress is *painfully* slow. Those close to the scene, who will admit to the truth, are cynical and concerned. Their cynicism and concern have been reflected in blood on the streets of Watts, Newark, and Detroit, where according to the President's Riot Commission Report, police ineptness in the handling of incidents triggered violence and death. In no small measure, the fault lies with police educators. To put it mildly, police educators and trainers are in a state of acute cultural lag.

This statement is not to imply that sincere and knowledgeable people are not actively involved in trying to right the wrongs of decades of lethargy by police themselves and by colleges and universities, which have traditionally looked upon police education as too vocationally oriented to become involved with and the police service as too unimportant to professionalize.

To be fair, we must indict the police service for its failure to insist on quality and pertinent training as well as the myriad college faculties of this country which have come to accept (in the professional sense) medical, dental, nursing, business, and engineering education in the academic scheme of things, but which have failed to accept police science in the same way.

Such faculty attitudes are understandable, but inexcusable, in the face of the trauma of social disorder that exists in this country today. If education cannot rise to meet the needs of a society crying for help, then education becomes a useless prelude to what may inevitably become the final and absolute dissolution of the social order.

Academic neglect of the police has been both

tragic and shameful. From 1940 to 1965, according to Niederhoffer, only six articles concerned with the police were published in the *American Sociological Review* and the *American Journal of Sociology*. Since then, however, and soon after it became apparent that massive expenditures of Federal money would be poured into the police field, sociologists by *droves* have become interested in the problems of the police. With the establishment of the Office of Law Enforcement Assistance and with the availability of direct grants to assist colleges in developing police degree programs, there emerged an overwhelming surge of interest on the part of institutions of higher learning which had never before evidenced concern for either the police or their problems. President Johnson's legislative program, which calls for an expenditure of at least \$100 million, has further aroused the latent academic conscience. As a result, meetings are being held everywhere to determine in the best judgments of these heretofore disinterested academicians from every conceivable discipline, how most innovatively President Johnson should spend this money, usually with the hope that they, too, might somehow be included in his plans.

This historical, but changing, reluctance of educators is only a part of the difficulty, however. There has also been a traditional political resistance to educating police. The root of this resistance lies deeply imbedded in what seems to be a prevailing, but rarely stated, political attitude that if the police are encouraged to become professional, and thus are made more effective, they will become a much less controllable arm of the executive branch of government and hence less amenable to the interests of political influences that almost always lead to partial, rather than impartial enforcement of law.

Arthur Niederhoffer, in his book, *Behind the*

Shield, has said that the political machine, traditionally allied with the police, is an extremely powerful force opposing police professionalization. As Niederhoffer puts it:

When it gains influence, the machine demands favors for its followers. Whatever the ultimate effect may be on morale and morality, such alliances are profitable. Why should political bosses encourage the growth of a movement that automatically signifies the termination of the long-standing political partnership between the force and the politicians? Professionals are guided by universal, not particular criteria. Favoritism would be out; the politician would lose his influence.¹

Dan Dodson, in a speech delivered several years ago at Michigan State University, spelled out the problem when he said that:

The police officer does not enforce all the laws of the community. If he did, we would all be in jail before the end of the first day. The laws which are selected for enforcement are those which the power structure of the community wants enforced. The police official's job is dependent upon his having radar-like equipment to sense what is the power structure and what it wants enforced as law.²

Dr. Joseph Lohman, Dean of the School of Criminology at the University of California, backs this up by saying that the "police function (is) to support and enforce the interests of the dominant political, social, and economic interests of the town, and only incidentally to enforce the law."³

There is an often expressed need to professionalize law enforcement, but a rather naive understanding of how this can be accomplished. There is also justification for an alternate concern that a professional police organization, less subject to political control, takes this country one dangerous step closer to the police state.

Political leadership, so much dependent on the power structure of the community for support, finds itself this year in a dilemma it has never had to come to grips with before, the dilemma of impending insurrection from militant elements

within the Negro ghetto. The inevitability of having to professionalize the police, ultimately means less control over police and much less leverage from the standpoint of political patronage. Political careers, especially in the cities, may well be dependent on the political leadership's ability to resolve this basic issue of police professionalization. Riots affect the economic as well as the social stability of the nation. Police officers, working within police departments which bend to political pressures, can contribute to the unhealthy climate that causes riots. We have arrived at a point in history when the power structure, whatever it may comprise in any given community, can no longer afford to support political leadership which is either unwilling or unable to professionalize our police.

The writings of Harvard Professor of Government, James Q. Wilson, perhaps the best objective commentator on the police in the United States today, seem to imply that professionalism is often a ploy used by the police to shield themselves from public criticism. If this is so, even on a subconscious level, then it is not enough for us to say here in the simplest of terms that what we need is more and better police education and training and let it go at that. We are charged with an involved and difficult task. We need to determine how to develop, primarily through education, a professional police system which in a democracy must remain a political entity subject to the authority of elected officials, while at the same time making provisions for the police establishment to be free from the kinds of political corruption which play havoc with established processes for the administration of justice.

The debate until now has been largely esoteric. With so much at stake politically, and such drastic change inevitable, issues have been clouded by the fierceness of the dialogue and the political overtones of the debate. The public has little understanding of police problems as they exist in an extremely complex cultural framework. Politicians all too often take stands on police matters as vehicles for self-promotion. Academicians can only speculate; there is no real body of knowledge to strengthen our opinions. The police themselves, victims of their own traditions and folkways, unable to cope with mounting public criticism and pressure and usually silent except when defending themselves, have far too little insight into their own problems. They are much too close to the

¹ ARTHUR NIEDERHOFFER, *BEHIND THE SHIELD*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967, p. 24.

² DAN DODSON, *PROCEEDINGS OF THE INSTITUTE ON POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS*. Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 1956, p. 75.

³ WILLIAM A. WESTLEY, *The Police: A Sociological Study of Law, Custom and Morality*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1951, p. 38.

action to see themselves clearly and much too beleaguered to maintain a posture other than one of defensiveness.

To complicate matters, there is a tendency common among us all to believe that the criminal law remains a viable, effective instrument of social control, when, in fact, this is not so at all. Dr. Norval R. Morris, the eminent international authority on human rights, has said that it "may well be to regard the criminal law as failing in its task as quite wrong. It may be that the community relies much too heavily on the criminal law as a technique of controlling antisocial conduct."⁴

The police have become a scapegoat for all of the major social institutions of our society which have failed to control adequately the social mores relating to crime and antisocial behavior. No one blames the church or the school when an epidemic of crime breaks out on the street. The police always seem to take the brunt of the criticism. It is the police commissioner who stands before the television cameras to answer for crime, not the bishop or the school superintendent.

The lack of understanding of police problems, by the public, the absence of perspective on crime causation, the prevailing, yet erroneous belief, that the police are the sole protectors of society, the total reliance on police to minimize crime, and the panic engendered by fear of crime and violence on our city streets are all reflected in a sense of frustration that neither the public nor the police fully understand.

It is with this complete lack of understanding, in this state of utter confusion, that police education and training are beginning to emerge as two hopeful ways of making progress in a field where, with few exceptions, *meaningful* programs of training and education have been practically nonexistent.

Throughout the country professional programs are emerging with all too little support from state legislatures, but with real interest on the part of the police and the public. Legislatures have been highly conservative in their appropriation of funds in support of police education and training, while Chiefs' Associations and Police Associations generally have been active in supporting legislative programs aimed at professionalization.

Despite this, this writer's observations have

⁴ NORVAL R. MORRIS, *Human Rights and Criminal Law: Progress in the United Nations*. POLICE, July-August, 1962, p. 23.

convinced him that there are strong pockets of resistance among some police officials, who continue to see little need for police education and training. A recent report of the Massachusetts Governor's Committee on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice seems to substantiate this and goes on to point out that "the Commonwealth's police departments are doing little or nothing to encourage officers to continue their education after they have been appointed."⁵

In view of the fact that the President's National Crime Commission has recommended a minimum of two years of college as a prerequisite for appointment to police departments, it would seem that all states should be moving forward more rapidly than they have and that state legislatures should be apprised more fully of the educational and training needs of the professional policeman.

It also seems apparent that before real progress can be made it will be necessary for all of us who are involved in police education to take a long, hard look at ourselves without being unduly threatened by the look.

Generally speaking police science degree programs in this country are substandard. It makes little sense to propagate this pattern.

They are substandard because in all too many cases, their faculties are literally married to the police departments they serve, in the sense that the departments have become their clients, not their colleagues.

In all too many cases, police educators have refused to play the academic role of critic and have sold out rather than take the criticism of the police community-at-large. As a result of such pitiful and increasingly obvious faculty weakness, most police degree programs are weak programs academically.

The writer for one believes that the police educator has become much too dependent on the police practitioner for his survival. If police educational programs are to develop in a meaningful way, it is vitally important to recognize that the police educator, unlike the police trainer, needs to remain separate and apart from the police establishment. He cannot in any way be dependent on the police for his livelihood. His role, which will often necessarily be extremely critical of the police, must afford him complete freedom of expression. Other-

⁵ The Police in Massachusetts, A Report by the Governor's Committee on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. Boston, Massachusetts, December 21, 1967, p. 19.

wise, police progress through education is impossible, and police education in this country will be emasculated before it can begin. The problem here is to develop police educational efforts which the police understand that they cannot control. The police themselves must become much less sensitive to outside criticism before we can talk sensibly about educating the police in the classic sense.

As a police educator, it is always pleasing to know that what one says is significant enough to disturb the *status quo*, for no real progress can be made in the police field without healthy controversy. It is vitally important for the police educator to be controversial if he is to effect progress. What bothers one at this time is the possibility of establishing large numbers of police degree programs under the direction of educators who might not see their role as a critical one and who might bend to conform to pressure which could militate against academic freedom.

The police, speaking generally now, have not yet arrived at that stage of maturity, in the professional sense, where constructive criticism can be translated into productive dialogue. There is, therefore, a great danger in moving forward with a massive educational program for police without considerable planning.

It is important to recognize, however, that a dialogue has begun and that many young, progressive, active, and vocal police officers and administrators are beginning to recognize that our police will never be professionalized until the existing order is gone and traditional police practice and attitude is modified and, in some cases, completely changed. There is a growing awareness by a few enlightened policemen that the role of the police educator is not to perpetuate mediocrity and preserve a *status quo* that has proved to be inadequate as a factor in the fundamental democratic process.

As a rule, faculty for police educational programs should not be recruited only from the ranks of the police. In the writer's opinion, it is an unusual police officer who can make the transition from policeman to professor. This will remain so until police education has created a substantial pool of municipal police professionals. Usually, policemen are too much a part of the present system to be effective in teaching new and innovative police thinking, an essential ingredient in police progress. If quality police education is to be our goal, our colleges and universities will have to make a much

more substantial commitment in funds which will establish salaries that will attract the nation's most capable police educational administrators and teachers to staff programs.

The police educator must work for a climate in which he will have freedom to speak out against wrongs before any of us can begin to talk seriously about police education.

For this to happen, and this may be the most important point made in this paper, our most prestigious colleges and universities must become involved in police education and embark on research programs aimed specifically at improving police practices. Our sights should not be set solely on developing associate degree programs at the community colleges and baccalaureate programs in our state colleges and universities. We need a much greater commitment of talent than our present thinking calls for.

The New Jersey Governor's Commission studying racial disorder, reported that there

is a clear and present danger to the very existence of our cities. . . . Our disadvantaged communities must see far more tangible evidence of a commitment to change than has emerged so far or the summer of 1967 is likely to become a prologue to tragedy and time for study and planning will have run out.⁶

We have done precious little to provide our policemen with education. Within our most prominent educational institutions, there has been almost no commitment to the kinds of change just pointed out, change so necessary if catastrophe is to be averted this summer and in the summers to come.

The need for college faculty excellence cannot be overemphasized. The common cry that only policemen can teach policemen is as outmoded today as the horse-drawn paddy wagon. Police work is far too complex not to rely on the resources of the entire college community if the job is to be done right. The policeman of today and tomorrow needs a strong liberal arts education, fused with highly specialized police education, if he is to achieve an identity as a professional person (which is very important both to him and to society) and if his role, in the sociological sense, is to change appreciably, as it must, to meet the needs of a changing world.

Police training is another matter, but surely one

⁶ Newark Police Hit in Rioting, BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE, February 11, 1963, p. 3.

of equal importance. Certainly police officers should be involved in establishing and running training academies. Policemen are thoroughly capable, and in many cases the only ones capable, of teaching such subjects as mechanics of arrest, departmental policies, first aid, firearms, defensive tactics, crime-scene search, and protection and preservation of evidence. But under no circumstances should a policeman's training be limited to mechanics and procedures. Today's policeman needs a broad, general education in the liberal arts, in human relations, and in the philosophy of American jurisprudence if he is to be qualified to do the sensitive and difficult work presently required of him. While it is essential that he be trained to operate mechanically for his own safety and that of the public, it is equally essential that he be given an opportunity to acquire the professional perspective that only education can give him. He should be educated at least to the level of the public he serves.

But before one can honestly discuss the direction police education and training should take, there needs to be a frank acknowledgment by all concerned that past allegations of police inefficiency, corruption, and brutality are not simply unfounded charges made by uninformed and misguided liberals, a position that many overly-defensive police officials, sadly even police educators, would have us believe even to this day.

The President's Crime Commission reported that in cities it studied "a significant number of officers engaged in varying forms of criminal and unethical conduct."⁷

Defenders of those police moves which condone such practices are still very active in police administration and have become the self-styled protectors of the ongoing outrage. It would be fair to say that they and their predecessors have been responsible for conditions that necessitated such United States Supreme Court decisions as *Mapp*, *Escobedo*, and *Miranda*.

Those police administrators who espouse traditional police thinking, their heads firmly and rigidly rooted in the sand, are, as Arthur Niederhoffer has put it, "locked in a struggle for control" with the new so-called professionals.⁸

Until the struggle is won, care should be taken to evaluate the philosophies of all those involved

in police education and training and an effort should be made to identify their values. To transmit, through training or education or both, the kind of thinking that has prevailed in most *traditional* police departments would be to negate the very purpose of the education or training experience.

The most significant qualification for a police instructor, either in a university or in a training academy, is his stand on the great social issues of the day that relate to the police: poverty, housing, race, integration, and police-community relations. Those defenders of past practices who insist that nothing is wrong with the present system should never be given an opportunity to teach policemen. There is much wrong with the present system, and some horrendous things have gone on in the past. Someone who fails to understand the implications of this or who refuses to admit, even to himself, that there is plenty of room for improvement, cannot possibly teach men to better the system and make it a more effective, viable, and acceptable instrument of progressive social change.

The police instructor who really meets his responsibilities and obligations must be a man who, for at least another decade, will often be in direct conflict with the police practitioner. He must constantly be prepared for challenge from a field which is resisting change so strenuously and is threatened so severely that it becomes outraged by criticism and stifles all dissent.

For a police training program to be very effective in an atmosphere so hostile to change presents some real difficulties. At best, police training in the immediate future will serve only to teach job skills, not professional skills. On the surface it may appear that this presents no problems at all. But in the police field, it is a rather grave problem, because job skills often are intimately involved with professional skills.

Because police training academies are almost always controlled by the police, there is little hope for much progress through police training for some time to come. One notable exception to this blanket indictment of police training is the work being done by the Professional Standards Division of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, which has managed not only to maintain its integrity consistently but which has also made a far greater contribution to significant change in the police field than any single college police program in existence.

⁷ TASK FORCE REPORT: THE POLICE, The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. Washington, D. C., 1967, p. 208.

⁸ NIEDERHOFFER, *BEHIND THE SHIELD*, op. cit., p. 3.

Except for what the International Association is doing training-wise and continuing state efforts in California and New York, almost no real headway is being made.

In conclusion, there is but one recommendation to make. The writer strongly suggests that the International Association of Police Administrators consider the feasibility of establishing an inde-

pendent accrediting capability which would look objectively at our curricula, our libraries, our laboratories, and our faculties, so that national standards can be established and imprimaturs given with no grandfather clauses allowed.

If police education is to become recognized as an independent, professional discipline, now is the time for us to put our house in order.