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## THE DANISH POLICE AND VIOLENCE

HAROLD K. BECKER

Harold K. Becker, D. Crim. is an Associate Professor of Criminology and Director of the Center for Criminal Justice, California State College, Long Beach, California. Professor Becker joined the faculty of California State College in 1963 having previously served with the Los Angeles Police Department. He has acted as consultant in a number of programs and during 1969 and 1970 traveled extensively during a sabbatical leave studying various European police systems. Professor Becker is author of several books including *Issues in Police Administration*.

The objectives pursued in this research were: (1) to contribute to the comparative study of police administration through the analysis of formal police organization, and (2) to develop a cross-cultural analysis of illegal police use of violence.

The writer was granted a sabbatical leave from California State College at Long Beach during the 1969-70 academic year. The American Embassy in Copenhagen, Denmark, assisted in developing introductions and acted as initial sponsor to the police system to be researched. In addition, personal contacts from the individual police system and local academic institutions aided in establishing this writer's formal acceptance into the various police functions.

Organizational permission was granted to participate in various types of police activities, such as: walking the beat with the area constable (patrolman), patrolling in police vehicles, and becoming involved in police training programs.

Participant observation was directed at the constable level of police work. Observation and interaction took place in all types of work situations as well as informal social gatherings.

Data for this study were gathered through direct observation, structured interview, government documents, and library research. Data was collected on personnel who were assigned to the patrol function of the police. Only personnel who could be described as constable were considered in the study. A total of twenty-one police constables was observed and interviewed in Copenhagen.

*Police.* The Copenhagen police was firmly established by 1682 with the creation of a chief constable position. Rules and regulations defined the responsibilities of police in a combination of civil and criminal areas.

The Danish Criminal code of 1866 was Scandi-

navian in origin and was based upon statutes. By 1969, there were 3.98 police per thousand population in Copenhagen. The initial salary for a police constable was approximately \$4,410 per year. Union negotiation was expected and accepted by the police in the preparation of salary for the police. Civilian direction was not only sought but welcomed by the police force. Cooperation and community understanding was also obtained by permitting policemen to hold public office in local and national government as legislative and executive contributors. A civilian model of policing had well been established since 1682. Administratively, there was decentralized control of the police. Although for purposes of coordination a national police system existed in the establishment of 74 police jurisdictions, local responsibility was the rule.

### VIOLENCE AND THE POLICE

Violence was viewed in terms of a predisposition toward the illegal use of violence relative to the total cultural expectation of this phenomena.

William A. Westley, in 1953, published an intra-cultural case study of a municipal police system in the United States. His findings were the following:

1. The police accept and morally justify their illegal use of violence.
2. Such acceptance and justification arises through their occupational experience.
3. Its use is functionally related to the collective occupational, as well as to the legal, ends of the police.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> William A. Westley, *Violence and the Police*, 59 AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY, 34-41, June 1953, the article being adopted from Westley's Ph.D. dissertation, *The Police: A Sociological Study of Law, Custom, and Morality*, University of Chicago, Department of Sociology, 1951; and his work, *VIOLENCE AND THE POLICE: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF LAW, CUSTOM, AND MORALITY* (1970).

His findings were used in part, in this research, to measure the illegal use of violence by the Danish police.

The enactment of illegal violence by the police is in part a position of police discretion which has been described as "... a power of authority conferred by law to act on the basis of judgment or conscience, and its use is more an idea of morals than law."<sup>2</sup> The above statement reflects the attitude of a moral position on the part of the user of violence and utilized as a means to fit a legal end by the user.

The Copenhagen police has the capability of force which is not readily apparent. A large segment of their personnel is on constant standby for crowd control and riot prevention. They have available the use of dogs, horses, and weapons in the event a situation deteriorates to a point where these methods might be employed.

Constables are required to carry weapons in patrol cars, but placed little importance on the gun as a deterrent to crime; 80.9 percent (N = 21) of the patrolmen did not believe it necessary to carry a gun to perform their police job. Many times the constable left the gun in his locker in the dressing room when beginning his tour of patrol duty. The constable did carry a truncheon, and this appeared to be accepted but only to be used under the most dangerous conditions. The constable was equipped with this same truncheon during police formations when dealing with crowds. The constable during his initial training developed an attitude of team work which was based on mutual respect and cooperation. This attitude was emphasized during the instruction of gymnastics which was part of all training regardless of rank.

During 1968, there were approximately 328 demonstrations in Copenhagen. The vast majority of these demonstrations were assisted by the police in the planning and development of routes and meeting areas to accompany the size of the group, and re-routing traffic and general public safety. Permission had to be obtained from the police 24 hours in advance of the demonstration.

During April, 1968, it was estimated that 70,000 persons demonstrated in front of the American Embassy in Copenhagen. The crowd was confronted with 160 policemen who were arranged in various tactical formations. An additional 400

<sup>2</sup> THOMAS J. AARON, *THE CONTROL OF POLICE DISCRETION: THE DANISH EXPERIENCE* (1966), p. ix. Also refer to Chapter II for a description of the function, organization, and administration of the Danish Police in general.

police were held on reserve some distance away and completely out of sight. The only additional piece of equipment the constable wore during a demonstration was a light plastic inner liner which fits a World War II style helmet. The helmet itself was very seldom worn. During the height of the demonstration the police identified the crowd as an unlawful assembly and demanded, "In the name of the King and the law, go home." This statement was repeated three times. The group failed to disperse, which brought in the reserve police force. With less than 600 police, the crowd was dispersed without *major* incidence of violence.

During the first six months of 1969, there were 65 demonstrations in Copenhagen.

The press reports these demonstrations as well as being reported on the spot via radio and television. The police are under close scrutiny from the participants as well as the general public. In 1968, there were 13 cases of police misconduct brought before the Danish ombudsman in all of Denmark. Of these, 12 cases were unfounded, and the remaining case brought an official warning to the policeman.<sup>3</sup> Outward aggression did not appear to be a characteristic of the present Danish people,<sup>4</sup> neither by its police nor its public.

The police did not accept the use of violence, legal or illegal, except when impossible to avoid, as reported by 47.6 percent (N = 21) of the constables. The formal organization in its recruitment, training, policy, and procedures, and informal setting negated a moral position of violence as a means to fit a legal end. Personnel identified a difference between legal and illegal police practices, 95.2 percent (N = 21) indicated this position.

*Personnel Composite.* Based on an extensive interview, a personnel composite of police personnel (N = 21) in Copenhagen portrays the typical response to the questionnaire.

The constable is 29 years of age and has been on the police department for nine years. He is married and pays rent. He does not hold an outside job. He believes morale is high on the department and would join the police force again. He does not believe the gun is necessary to perform his job, that he is not involved in a war on crime, or force is necessary to perform his job. He iden-

<sup>3</sup> *Folketingets Ombudsmands Beretning for Aret 1968* (København: A/S J. H. Schultz Universitets-Bogtrykkeri, 1969), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Refer to ASHLEY MONTAGU, *THE BIOSOCIAL NATURE OF MAN* (1956), 111; and for an account of aggression, see ANTHONY STORR, *HUMAN AGGRESSION* (1968).

Table I  
COPENHAGEN POLICE FORCE: UNDER WHAT  
CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD YOU USE FORCE?

Rank Order of Responses	Copenhagen (N = 21)	
	Number	Percent
A. Only when impossible to avoid. . . .	10	47.6
B. For self protection. . . . .	6	28.6
C. To make an arrest. . . . .	2	9.5
D. When you know the man is guilty. . . .	2	9.5
E. When ordered to do so. . . . .	1	4.8
F. To obtain information. . . . .	0	0
G. Disrespect for police. . . . .	0	0
Total. . . . .	21	100.0

Table II  
COMPARISON OF LEGAL AND ILLEGAL BASES  
OF FORCE

Organization	Legal	Illegal
Westley's Findings. . . . .	31%	69%
Copenhagen. . . . .	85.7%	14.3%

tified the police organization as being civilian in behavior. The public would come to the aid of the constable and the public have a positive attitude toward the department. He would indicate there is a difference between legal and illegal police practices and that he would report and testify against

another policeman who used illegal force. He would use force only when it was impossible to avoid.

The question was asked, under what circumstances would you use force? The question was derived from Westley's study and "the intent of the question was to get them to legitimate the use of violence."<sup>5</sup> The replies are tabulated in Table I.

An inspection of the types of responses indicates 1) that violence is legitimated by illegal ends (D, E, F, G) in 14.3 percent of the cases; and 2) that legal ends are indicated in 85.7 percent of the responses (A, B, C).

A comparison of Westley's findings is found in Table II. The category of violence being legitimated by illegal ends is 69 percent. Disrespect for the police was not portrayed by the Danish police organization as significantly as in Westley's study where he indicated 37 percent of the personnel responded to violence on personal grounds.<sup>6</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Statistically, Westley's desire was to "... point out the extent to which the policeman tends to transfer violence from a legal resource to a personal resource, one which he uses to further his own ends."<sup>7</sup> This condition exists in Copenhagen, but *not* in the magnitude indicated by Westley in his study of American police.

<sup>5</sup> William A. Westley, *Violence and the Police*, 59 AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY, 38, July, 1953.

<sup>6</sup> WILLIAM A. WESTLEY, *VIOLENCE AND THE POLICE: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF LAW, CUSTOM, AND MORALITY* (1970), 122.

<sup>7</sup> *Violence and the Police, op. cit.*, note 5, p. 38.