

Crime Prevention — Community Fear or Community Safety

In this issue of the Journal we include several of the papers presented to the Biennial Conference of the Australian Crime Prevention Council in Wollongong.

The Conference was officially opened on 2 September 1991 by the Governor of New South Wales His Excellency Rear Admiral Peter Sinclair AO.

The opening remarks made by His Excellency were both reflective and stimulating.

The Governor's remarks are included in this issue for the benefit of our readers.

Chairman – The Hon. Mr Justice Purvis your Worship,
The Lord Mayor of Wollongong – Alderman Frank Arkell
Members of the Council

My wife and I are delighted to be with you this morning and I feel honoured to have been invited to open this important conference convened by the Australian Crime Prevention Council.

It has been suggested that I talk about community involvement and the reduction and prevention of crime and this I am happy to do – albeit with a layman's knowledge of the subject.

The major part of my life has been spent in the Navy and my experience is therefore of the sea and National Security rather than domestic crime prevention. And yet there are parallels. National Security is dependent upon the establishment of appropriate standards of international behaviour, which in turn needs to be cultivated through diplomatic processes and activities designed to relieve extreme cases of need and sources of tension. A nation must also show a capability

to deter and, if need be, willingness to deal with threats to national and international security that may arise.

It seems to me that the same principles apply to the reduction and prevention of crime in the community. There is a need for a community to determine its values and standards of behaviour; those standards need to be established in law and convention, and promoted at all levels within the community. There must also be the means of deterring and preventing breaches of acceptable behaviour, and of protecting the community from those that transgress.

That all seems so simple and logical, and to some extent it is easy to recognise the problem – after all, crime prevention is probably amongst the oldest human interests and activities. But just as the definition of criminal behaviour must be sensitive to the changes in community values and expectations – (for example, we are always decriminalising some activities and criminalising others) – so must the means

of preventing and controlling crime be constantly fine tuned to conform with the community's needs and expectations.

Crime prevention is thus a complex and ever changing subject which requires the constant attention of all elements of the community, and not just the judiciary, the police, custodial services and related professions, if a community is to maintain a civilised and secure environment for its citizens.

How serious is the crime situation in our community? As Judge Purvis has pointed out in his opening address, the news is not all bad. By international standards we live in a relatively law abiding community, free from the excess of internally inspired terrorism and with domestic crime rates per capita that compare favourably with most countries.

Notwithstanding some of the statistics and trends are disturbing. Whilst recognising that crime statistics have varying degrees of validity, records for 1989/90 suggest that almost 1 in 10 households

in New South Wales suffered a break-in or attempted break-in that year; 1 in every 50 people were victims of at least one assault; of every 1000 people in the State, 76 (or in every 13) had recorded offences.

Whilst it may be comforting to compare these figures with countries with much worse records, the bottom line has to be whether our community is happy or satisfied with the incidence of crime and its response to it. Are we allocating sufficient resources to dealing with crime and are we utilising resources that are available in the most efficient manner?

These are matters for this conference to address, within the framework provided by the theme – crime prevention – community fear or community safety? Your conference agenda covers a wide range of relevant matters, many of which could be conference subjects in themselves, but this only goes to emphasise the fact that crime prevention is such a complex and all embracing issue.

I would be wise not to focus on any one issue covered by your agenda, but wisdom sometimes escapes me! I notice that Brother Evans, the principal of Edmund Rice College, is to address you after dinner tonight "the erosion of community standards and the hidden face of crime"! I urge you all to keep alert during that address, because I believe that subject lies at the very heart of crime prevention..



A community might choose to give its Police Force unlimited resources, build the best possible detention facilities, supported by first class parole and social welfare agencies. It can provide such laudable community organisations as Neighbourhood Watch and give its law enforcement agencies full support. However, unless that community sets and maintains appropriate moral values and standards, it will always be in a reacting mode, with little prospect of making lasting, long term gains in the fight against crime.

As well as dealing with the incidence of crime a

community should be doing all that it can to remove, or at least reduce, the root causes of social malaise which breeds crime. I believe much of this can be sheeted home to the changes to community values, standards and priorities which we, individually and collectively, have accepted over recent decades.

Of course, changes in social conceptions are inevitable in this dynamic world of ours, but every community has a responsibility to ensure that changes that are adopted are beneficial in the long run to both present and future generations. I believe we need to reassess our

position on such things as the place of the family in the scheme of things; the matching of rights with individual responsibilities; whether ethical conduct in business means more than just keeping within the law; whether winning really does justify any means of achievement; of the true meaning of fair play and sportsmanship and of the importance of moral values, integrity and character in our children's education.

These things are important, and I sense from my wanderings that our community is in a mood to lift its game in these and other areas. If it can be encouraged to do so, through example and

leadership within and at all levels of the community, then it will have made a significant move in preventing crime that will have lasting effects in the years to come. Conference delegates have a role to play in this process.

Ladies and gentlemen, I leave you where I began by again emphasising the importance of this conference to the community of New South Wales and, indeed, to all Australians. I wish you well as you deal with the many agenda issues in the next five days – and I now have great pleasure in declaring this biennial conference of the Australian Crime Prevention Council – Open.

"The first thing to understand is that the public peace ... is not kept primarily by the police, necessary as police are. It is kept primarily by an intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves ... No amount of police can enforce civilization where the normal, casual enforcement of it has broken down."

Jan Jacobs, Death and Life of Great American Cities

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