

# Paper Presented By \*Mr V.A. MacDonald To The Queensland Branch, Australian Crime Prevention Council Seminar On 'Crime Prevention Planning' Held 24th October, 1978.

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It would appear to be a common failing in western society particularly that responsibility for the prevention and detection of crime is left almost solely in the hands of law enforcement agencies. Too often we hear angry criticism of police forces for alleged disinterest and inactivity in the face of publication of figures indicating a general rising crime rate.

It is very easy to criticise the police officer for what many people regard as an inability to come to terms with crime and the professional criminal. But what most critics fail to realise is that every section of the community has not only a responsibility, but a duty to themselves and to all their fellow citizens to take a much more active role in crime prevention. I am not suggesting that every citizen become an instant policeman, however there is certainly room for considerable improvement in the area of security in homes, shops, offices, warehouses and factories and in increased personal vigilance to be aware of strangers and unusual occurrences.

A look at any annual report of the Queensland Police Department will reveal that crime on all fronts is increasing. But then so is the efficiency and effectiveness of police officers. Although the Commissioner's report for the year 1977-78 has not yet been tabled in Parliament I can say that the clear-up rate for the past 12 months is the highest in the department's history and this is not only due to better policing. A marked improvement in relations between Queensland police and the public generally, with a corresponding improvement in

co-operation, has been a significant factor in permitting police investigators to resolve many criminal acts and effect arrests of offenders. Across the board increases in crime rates in this state averaged some 200 percent over the past six years, with the exception of drug offences which rose by a staggering 1200 percent, and all this while our population was growing by a mere 13.6 percent.

Police researchers through our collator system and information bureau are continually assessing crime patterns and trends. From this wealth of information they are able to provide investigators with valuable information on the high risk areas for criminal activity and in many cases the identity of professional criminals who may be responsible for some of the offences. It is possible to generalise on some of the causes of this upsurge in crime.

Increasing unemployment in recent times must be regarded as a prime factor particularly in the area of stealing. In our materialistic society the possession of luxury items in competition with other members of society has become almost a religion. We all want to equip ourselves with fine cars, television sets, stereograms, electronic labour-saving devices for the home, boats, caravans and beautiful clothes to name only a few. Most people in society are prepared to work towards these goals and purchase them legally. An increasing minority, however, is prepared to risk criminal convictions and take short cuts by stealing these articles for their own personal use.

The quality of life of our modern society does place tremendous temptation in the way of the emotionally immature and the criminally inclined people among us. The rapid explosion in technology has placed a wide range of "miracle gadgets" and "creature comforts" within the range of many more people in the community. Saturation advertising through radio, newspaper and television enables manufacturers to bring their products to the attention of many more people than in past years and the departmental store approach to marketing, in some respects make it easier for the would-be thief when he is confronted by masses of open shelves of goods laid out within easy reach.

Another contributing factor to anti-social behaviour is the trend towards shorter working hours and more leisure time. More and more people are finding themselves with time on their hands and apparently lack the initiative to profitably occupy that time. If we cast our minds back to our childhood, I am sure most of us can recall that on many occasions we were required to create our own recreational activities and may even have had to improvise in constructing or manufacturing play things or toys. This talent for improvisation seems to have been largely lost in the present generation and, possibly through the influences of television, young people today expect their recreational activities to be organised for them by older people.

This may well be an area to which this seminar could devote some attention. I believe there is a definite need to devote some time to looking at measures which may be taken to increase the range of recreational activities available for young people in many areas throughout the state. Nothing could be more calculated to result in trouble than having a population suffering the frustrations of boredom through having nothing to do in their leisure time.

One of the major problems in policing which we face in this state today is a direct result of increasing population and the movement of this population into urban areas. I am sure all of us here today, at some time or other, have been amazed at the rapid growth of housing estates on the fringe areas of an already large and sprawling metropolis like Brisbane. If I may, I would like to introduce a little of historical statistics at this point. Queensland separated from New South Wales on 10 December 1859, but it was not until 1 January 1864, that this state saw its first police force. At that time the police strength was 287 to serve a population of 61,467. Since then our population has grown 33-fold to more than 2 million. On this basis of population increase, and if the police department had kept pace, we should have in this state today a police strength of 9,500 to serve our community. In fact, our police department numbers just 3,760 police and 684 civilian employees. When you realise that Queensland police are responsible for an area covering 1,728,000 square kilometres or the combined area of France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, West Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Spain you can see we are very thinly spread on the ground and you can also realise how much the police department depends on public co-operation not only in crime prevention but in many other areas of police work.

With the growth in urban areas there is a continual need for a reappraisal of police strengths and patrolling capabilities to give the public the protection and security they expect and demand. The department's planning and research branch is fully engaged in assessing crime trends throughout the state and in making recommendations to the commissioner covering such aspects as the need to increase numbers in certain areas where the crime rate has risen and the possibility of reducing the police strength in other areas which are relatively free of crime. Police officers therefore could be regarded as society's nomads in that they are called upon quite regularly to move on transfer throughout the state as required. But one can only get so much juice out of one orange and where urban populations are growing to the extent that they are in Queensland, it becomes a real headache for police administrators to provide the required police service with existing facilities and staff.

I have left the most vexatious problem on the crime scene until last, and that is the growth in drug abuse in Queensland in the last few years. You may recall that I mentioned previously that drug offences have increased by 1200 percent in this state in the past six years. This, according to our most reliable information, is only the tip of the iceberg. The use of marijuana or cannabis is wide-spread particularly among younger people in the community and one aspect which is causing considerable concern to police, as it should to all thinking members of the community, is the steady increase in the use of hard drugs by many of our fellow Queenslanders. A drug addict literally finds himself on a rapidly downward spiralling merry-go-round when he takes the fatal step of trying hard drugs such as heroin. He finds his craving needs increasing supplies of the drug to be satisfied, and this habit is not cheap in Australia.

We have information which indicates that some of the more advanced addicts require almost \$100 a day to purchase drugs. The vicious circle which drug abuse creates means that in many instances the addict is incapable of holding a job for any length of time and there is only one alternative for the addict in finding money to ensure that his supply of drugs is uninterrupted. The greater proportion of hard drug addicts become thieves and armed robbers. Many also

turn their attention to doctor's surgeries and pharmacists to raid their drug cabinets. This major problem seems to have no ready solution and the best defence appears to be improved policing and a greater awareness among the public of the dangers of this modern social cancer.

I would like delegates here today to give some consideration to the following points in crime prevention, some of which I do believe contribute materially to the number of crimes which are committed, principally in the area of breaking and entering. I wish to make some comment on modern design and construction, the involvement of local government agencies in regulating security, the role of the public in crime prevention and the role of business and industry in crime prevention.

One has only to compare the rather stolid designs and very substantial construction of buildings, both residential and business, of past years with their modern counterparts to realise that the really determined criminal has a far greater chance of effecting entry to today's glass-dominated structures than his criminal colleague would have had in the early years of this century.

The trend of modern architecture has been to the aesthetic and functional rather than go to the need for security. Wide expanses of glass, and light building materials are not much of a barrier to the intruder intent on criminal acts. I would suggest that this seminar attempt to arrive at a recommendation that approaches be made to a representative body of Queensland architects to enlist their future support in improving the security aspects of their designs.

Similarly, building regulations need close examination by the various local authorities to ensure that builders and contractors improve the security provisions of their buildings. It seems to me that economically it would be far cheaper to take precautions at the design and building stages rather than have to make modifications and additions to dwellings or commercial premises after construction has finished. In many cases improved security precautions are only embodied in these buildings after a criminal has struck. Local authorities should be approached throughout the state with a request that consideration be given to ensuring that the stable door is shut and adequately secured before the horse has bolted.

I have already touched upon the need for the public to become more actively involved with their police department in all aspects of crime prevention. The maximum public involvement in any crime prevention programme is crucial to success as will be seen later in this paper when I discuss a recent most successful campaign in the Brisbane area. Today no member of the public may regard himself as being sacrosanct or safe from the attention of the criminal. It behoves everyone to take precautions and ensure that their property is safeguarded and protected. If measures are taken to improve security and make it difficult for the thief to gain entry to your premises, he will turn his attention to other buildings which are not so well protected. The Queensland Police Department has a most effective Crime Prevention Bureau which displays the latest in security and locking devices for home and industry. Officers of this bureau are ever ready to visit premises in the metropolitan area, indeed throughout the State, to carry out security checks and advise the owner of apparent weaknesses which should be remedied. This service is available free and although many clients have only approached these officers after suffering at the hands of a breaker, many people have undoubtedly saved themselves considerable expense, inconvenience and upset by taking advantage of this security advice.

Queenslanders have the reputation of being among the most hospitable in Australia. In many areas this has meant an almost blind faith and trust in the goodness of their fellow citizens. One can no longer leave one's dwelling unlocked and opened to the cooling breezes in the expectation that no thief will enter and steal during the owner's absence.

People must be educated to the realisation that there are those in the community who are earning a very good livelihood from the proceeds of wholesale house, office, warehouse and shop breakings. They must be encouraged to take a greater interest in what is happening around them particularly in their own backyard. All of us get to know our neighbours, their habits and the types of vehicles they drive. For our own peace of mind and self protection we must become our brother's keeper. If strangers and strange vehicles enter your area and appear to be paying particular attention to a neighbour's property which may well be unoccupied the only course of action is to report these activities to police. Of course, the informant may be in error and feel that he has made a fool of himself but on the other hand he may well be saving his neighbour the expense and heartache of losing valuable and sentimental property.

We can build a happier and safer community if we can overcome this modern attitude of "not becoming involved". After all, the next victim could be you.

Industry also has a heavy role to play in crime prevention. Too often the work of the criminal, thief or bandit is made relatively simple by business houses in their failure to take adequate security precautions to protect their property or cash. Many instances of just plain

unthinking carelessness also come to police attention. How often have we read of business houses sending young junior females or elderly females to the bank to deposit the day's taking or to make large withdrawals for the department's operations and all this without any protection whatsoever.

This should never be allowed to happen in today's climate. At the risk of seeming a male chauvinist I would say that female staff members should never be allowed to handle the transport of large sums of company money to and from banking institutions on their own or even in pairs. This is a more suitable role for male staff. The old adage of safety in numbers holds true in this area. Escorts should be provided for any movement of money about the city.

Further, business and industry should call upon the expertise of security and crime prevention officers to advise them on improving plant and office security. And all these measures must be tempered with common sense. Too often we have the sorry situation of a company going to considerable expense to put in safes, alarms and the latest burglar-proof locking devices only to leave the keys to the safe lying around within easy reach in the office. You would be surprised at the number of safe robberies which are committed because an office manager has been kind enough to leave the keys in a handy place for the midnight visitor.

Earlier this year, as the result of initiatives taken by Sergeant George Lane, the Office in Charge of our Crime Prevention Bureau, the Police Department embarked on a Crime Prevention Campaign in the western suburbs of Brisbane. As envisaged the campaign was to be a completely new concept in Queensland in the field of crime prevention for the extreme western suburbs of Kenmore, Kenmore Hills, Brookfield, Moggill, Pullenvale, Pinjarra Hills, Upper Brookfield, Bellbowrie and Anstead.

Support was enlisted by the department from community groups, youth groups, schools and churches in the area. A citizen's committee was formed under the chairmanship of Mr Doug Donaldson, to co-ordinate the campaign among local citizens. The object was to enlist total community support and involvement in the campaign to reduce the incidence of breakings in the area which had one of the highest rates in Brisbane, if not in numbers then certainly in the value of property being stolen.

The campaign was to run from early June until the end of July and the major highlight was to be the official opening of the new Kenmore Police Station, the first in the district.

On the basis of a break and enter in this area every three days and with more than \$32,000 in valuable household property stolen since the beginning of the year the campaign got underway with the assistance of a professional public relations firm to ensure maximum publicity during the currency of the project. Business firms responded magnificently to the concept and large donations were made by the Commonwealth Bank, the National Bank, the Community Crime Check Campaign and Kenmore Rotary. Other organisations and individuals volunteered services and time to ensure that the campaign reached virtually every citizen in these nine suburbs. Colour brochures were printed and distributed to every household in the area and posters, car stickers, badges and T-shirts were prepared to popularise the campaign theme of "never give a burglar an even break".

I was present at a public meeting called to officially open the campaign at the Kenmore South State School on June 15. I was delighted at the response to this meeting of the people of Kenmore and surrounding suburbs because on one of the worst nights of the year which was memorable for cold, blustery winds and rain, more than 200 interested people packed into the school auditorium. I said in my opening address and I quote "what we are hoping to encourage as a general rule is a spirit of co-operation between the public at large and the police. This campaign brings home to us all just how effective this co-operation can be in protecting ourselves, our families and our property from the inroads of the professional criminal". I believe that these comments were prophetic as you may have already gathered from the remarks made earlier by the Honourable, the Minister for Justice, Mr Lickiss, when he outlined the success of this campaign in his opening remarks.

All police officers involved in this exercise were hopeful that the public would in fact support this optimistic campaign. If it was a success it was planned to use it as a blue print for further similar campaigns throughout the state. Personally I can say that the campaign exceeded beyond all expectations and further campaigns along these lines are planned on a regular basis in other high-crime areas in Brisbane and later it is hoped to extend the programme into provincial centres.

I hope that this paper has provided delegates with some food for thought.



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