

# The Cost of Crime to the Community

By P. F. JOHNSON, M.P.  
*National Vice-President 1977-79,  
Queensland Branch Deputy Chairman*



## THE PREVALENCE OF CRIME

This is a subject we find controversial or depressing — yet in some way we all apparently enjoy — if we take into account the dependence of our world of entertainment on crime themes and drama.

We not only enjoy it — we take part in it, because, if law defines crime, then I doubt if any of us could honestly claim to have been respectable in the sense of being entirely law abiding.

If any of us imagined that an entertainment arrived and performed before us without passing through the scene of crime, he is sadly misinformed. In the production, processing, marketing and sale of all such commodities there is a measure of crime — a very considerable measure.

We should not imagine that all our crime is committed in the streets or even dealt with in the Courts. We should not imagine that production takes place entirely in accordance with the law, that there is no exploitation or cheating. We know that stealing, pilfering, wastage of a technical criminal nature takes place in processing, marketing and sale.

Stealing from work is now almost a norm in some places as is our resignation to the losses we suffer all along the line. We even accept that we have to produce or supply more because of the theft that will take place. We insure against it — and we pass on the cost to the consumer because we rather naively trust the system more than we like to get worked up about people's modest peccadillos.

So the cost rises, first imperceptively, then beyond our control. It gets built into the inflationary process; and we cover it by seeking higher incomes — or by cutting our costs, by reducing the number of jobs. We have all paid a good deal more for many things than we should have done because of crime — but, and this is important, we don't give it much thought — or if we do, we do not get overly disturbed about it. Like higher fuel prices or bathing in the nude, we learn to live with what we have failed to control.

If we add the more obvious defalcations, forms of undesirable business, sharp practices or outright cheating, which now goes largely undealt with, then we have large amounts involved which never enter our calculation of the costs of crime.

## THE COST OF CRIME

Before we had the Australian Institute of Criminology, the concept of the costs of crime was extremely vague. Now, for the first time, we know that even if we cover only the budgets of the police, the Courts and the Correctional Services, we are paying nationally \$600 millions for our identification crime prevention services.

If we add a little justifiable speculation on the amount of goods stolen or property destroyed and/or damaged, we are up near the \$1,000 millions mark every year. The Director of the Institute,

looking into a 15 year future, has suggested that we might not be far out in expecting this to quadruple. The Institute has advised that it could not possibly calculate with complete accuracy the amount of crime unrecorded or with the real costs in terms of personal damage, loss of life and the tragedy of many crimes.

We know, for example, that there is a vast amount of crime which never finds its way into our criminal justice system. It has been suggested that the police deal with, that is, hear about, only one-sixth of the total crime committed. We are all aware of this. Just as we are all aware of our own misbehaviour which never gets as far as the police or the Courts, so we are aware that many serious crimes, for a number of reasons, do not come to official notice.

Just what do we pay for this in terms of lost man hours at work, medical or health costs, or the costs in insurance to people who feel that they cannot wholly rely upon the police? Maybe, in the real costs of crime, we should build in the costs to private enterprise, and the Government, a new and burgeoning industry of private security — guards, alarm devices and electronic equipment. I hope by now you as readers, are as alarmed as I am about the costs of our crime.

## THE PREVENTION OF CRIME

It used to be argued that if we built more schools, we would not have to build prisons. We know now that this was simplistic. We have societies where crime almost seems to have increased in proportion to the spread of education — and we do not need reminders now that a healthier population is not necessarily more honest, less violent or law abiding.

Obviously we now have to think about reducing the costs — not only because we have to reduce inflation but because we are all becoming aware of how crime is affecting our lives, whether by forcing us to submit to searches when we travel by air, making us pay more insurance, constraining us not to go out at night or to walk in certain areas of our big cities after dark or having to sit on hard chairs or concrete benches in waiting rooms, public places or in public transport because these are the kinds of seats which cannot be easily vandalised.

So where do we look to reduce costs? I believe that before we had the Australian Institute of Criminology we would probably have thought in terms of spending more on the police, the prisons or the Courts. One of the ways in which the Institute has educated us is the realisation that more police, courts and prisons do not mean necessarily less crime. Experience shows that they may in fact be associated with increased crime if only because they are our natural reactions when we think of crime.

Instead of looking to such specialised services to rid us of crime, we have to recognise that they handle only a fraction of our total problem. It has been estimated anyway that policeman may spend no more than 20% of their total time on crime — or

crime prevention — that 80% or so is taken up by the social role of the police with all manner of cases we cannot deal with otherwise. We have greatly increased our Courts — but why are we more litigious for example, in New South Wales, than in Victoria? We can save on juvenile courts, it seems from the South Australian experience, if we have a variety of diversionary programmes, and young people can be dealt with by advising panels.

Prisons are really interesting from a cost benefit point of view. They are a sad necessity for the hard core of our offenders but it has been shown recently that we could keep a prisoner in luxury accommodation in the Wentworth Hotel more cheaply than in an institution.

Two years ago the Royal Commission on Prisons was told that the daily cost of keeping a prisoner varied between \$3.2 in a periodic detention centre to \$104 in a maximum security block. This means that in a maximum security gaol such as Long Bay it costs \$104 each day, each prisoner.

I would think you could live it up quite well at any of the luxury hotels in Sydney for that amount. If the prisons were justified by the fact that we were reforming offenders it might be well worth the expense.

### THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY

So this brings us back to ourselves, to the community, to you and me. We not only have the responsibility for preventing crime — for co-operating with the specialised services — we have to pay for it when we don't. Whenever we leave it to others, to the system, to the professionals, we find it coming back to us in

terms of increased insecurity and charges of one kind or another.

It is old fashioned these days to preach honesty and unselfishness. We believe in "live and let live" and in not being our brother's keeper and relying on impersonal systems and authorities — **BUT IT WILL NOT DO.** We pay dearly for dishonesty and selfishness as I have shown. When we insist on our rights to be left alone, we lose contact with neighbours and friends — and we become more vulnerable to criminal attack. When we close our eyes to what is happening to others, we cannot complain if they close their eyes to what is happening to us.

We can ignore people who shoplift if we are prepared to pay the higher price for all the goods which is occasioned by the need for security and insurance for the business. My point is that we are punishing ourselves by our indifference, and opting out at great cost to ourselves. I would also not like you to think that the whole situation is beyond hope. We spend all too little on self analysis — we will have to spend more if crime is not to begin costing us even more than I have been suggesting; but to all our problems there is one solution. The community. We know that crime is lower where communities are firmly established, not only in this country, but in countries abroad. We know that where we atomise and individualise too intensively, crime increases.

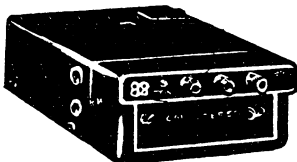
So, although we pay a lot of lip service to the community when we get crime we have to really ask whether we have a real functioning community. Nuts are given us, but we must crack them ourselves.

## ROCKHAMPTON

### CAR RADIO/C.B.

### SPECIALISTS

- WIDE RANGE OF LEADING BRANDS
- RADIOS, RADIO CASSETTES, CARTRIDGE PLAYERS & ACCESSORIES. EVERYTHING FOR CAR STEREO ENTHUSIASTS
- TECHNICAL ADVICE FOR THE HANDYMAN INSTALLER
- INSTALLATION ARRANGED IF REQUIRED



## WESMAC ELECTRONICS

# RKHPTN 2 3959

269 ALMA ST., ROCKHAMPTON

## GENERAL CONTRACT CLEANERS

(A/ASIA) PTY LTD SERVICE



Clubs  
Interior Cleaning  
Shops

Offices  
Restaurants  
Flats etc.

SPECIALISING IN CARPET SHAMPOOING

42 ELEANOR ST.

## GOULBURN

# 21 1326