

*(Reprinted due to interference by unidentifiable gremlin to original script who expunged a number of paragraphs from Mr. Biles' original report prior to publication thereof on pages 7 & 8, Vol 2 No.5. We extend our apology to Mr. Biles).*

**"A person who makes a mistake and doesn't correct it is making another mistake."**

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# REPORT OF RAPPOREUR

by David Biles

*(On Tenth Biennial Conference of the Australian Crime Prevention Council, held University of Hobart, Tasmania, 13—17th August, 1979).*



**David Biles, Assistant Director (Research) Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, is also Co-opted Member of A.C.P.C. National Executive representing Criminology. He also holds the position of President of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology.**

The task of a rapporteur at a Conference like this is, as I see it, to do rather more than just summarise the papers that have been presented and the discussions that have taken place over the past five days. One could not present an adequate summary in half an hour, anyway. The main purpose of this report is to identify the highlights, the new ideas, and the new directions that have emerged in crime prevention, and to try and bring these together in some form of unifying statement. It is necessarily a subjective exercise, a statement of my personal reaction to the Conference, and I recognise and accept that other people here will have seen things differently and chosen to emphasise matters other than those I have chosen.

I would like to mention two matters before considering the substance of the Conference. First, there has been some discussion about the Conference format, with suggestions being made for more or less group discussion time and more or less time for plenary discussions. It is obviously impossible to please all of the people all of the time but, for my part, I think the format has been excellent, with an appropriate balance being struck between lectures and large and small group discussions, and very clear guidance to the questions that were to be considered being given in the printed programme. I unreservedly and most warmly compliment Dr. John Tooth and the Planning Committee for the very thoughtful and constructive assistance they have given us in our considerations of the very difficult issues raised.

Secondly, there has been much discussion, both in the formal papers and in the groups, on the role of the media. At least once in every session the role of the media has been mentioned and often the mention has been critical. I am not usually kind to the media, but I feel that I must say the coverage given to this Conference by the Hobart *Mercury* has been excellent. All of the major papers have been skilfully and accurately reported in that newspaper, even when the speakers have been critical of the media. The reports in the *Mercury* have been so well done that they have almost obvi-

ated the need for a Conference report like this. Even though I have not seen much of it, I understand that the television coverage of this Conference has also been excellent.

Enough of compliments. (It does not suit my personality to be particularly complimentary.) Now is the time for us to ask, what did this Conference achieve? I must confess that the answer is: not as much as I, and, I think, the organising committee might have hoped. If I, or they, expected a clearly stated national strategy for planning crime prevention to emerge from this Conference then we are both disappointed. We have all learned a great deal from the expert speakers and from discussion with each other, but there is still confusion about the basic facts. (We seem to be unclear as to whether crime is increasing, or not.) There is also doubt and disagreement about the appropriate techniques or methods to be pursued in preventing crime, and even more serious, there still seems to be little agreement among the professionals or among voluntary workers as to how one goes about planning crime prevention on a long-term basis.

The introduction to the printed programme, apart from saying that "white collar crime" was not to be covered here, says that the aim of the Conference was "to discover what can be done by both statutory bodies and volunteers to include crime-inhibiting factors in their programmes". This was a very ambitious aim and, even though we have all learned a great deal, I do not think that many of us would want to claim that this aim has been achieved. What has been achieved in this Conference is that for the first time in Australia's history urban planners and educationists have joined with the more traditional criminal justice professionals and voluntary workers to add their voice to the ongoing debate on crime prevention. Perhaps the very breadth of the topics covered has made it difficult for some of us to cope, but the fact that it has happened and that we have now broadened the basis of our discussions is, surely, worthy of praise.

At this point I would like to refresh your memory of some of the highlights of the contribution made by the guest speakers, particularly in the first three days. The contributions made yesterday and today are more recently in your minds, and therefore will only be mentioned briefly. The first speaker on Monday morning, you will recall, was Mr. Peter Loof who presented a detailed analysis of the possible directions for the organisation of crime prevention planning and criminal justice planning on a national and State basis. He outlined for us the political and organisational arrangements made some years ago for the establishment of the Australian Institute of Criminology and the Criminology Research Council, and he reviewed the work being done in crime prevention planning in the United States and a number of other countries.

The second speaker was the celebrated local psychiatrist, Dr. Eric Cunningham Dax who addressed himself to the question of children at risk. He presented some of the results of his research with recidivists and multi-problem families, and he made a plea for more understanding, more research, better education, better organisation of social work services, and more freely-available contraception. It was his latter suggestion which, understandably enough, captured the imagination of the media.

In the group discussions that followed these two papers many participants, like the media, seemed to focus their attention on the question of contraception. One group, however, proposed that a possible approach to crime prevention planning could be through the State Branches of this Council. It was proposed that State Governments be encouraged to provide sufficient resources for each State Branch to establish multi-disciplinary committees whose task it would be to review the extent to which crime prevention was co-ordinated within each State or Territory, and the extent to which new arrangements or policies could be developed. Even though this proposal represented a departure from the models proposed by Mr. Loof, he strongly supported the suggestion in this form and argued that such work would be in accord with the ACPC Constitution and aims.

In the afternoon of the first day we were privileged to hear a carefully researched and extremely interesting Opening Address by the Governor General of Australia, His Excellency Sir Zelman Cowen. The Governor General referred to the significance of the work of the late Sir John Barry, and also displayed a broad understanding of developments in modern criminology in relation to the role of law and society. He cited the conclusions of Professor Marvin Wolfgang who suggested that the criminal justice system should be changed by increasing the probability of arrest for offenders, making imprisonment certain for those who commit homicide, rape, and other serious crimes, reducing judicial discretions and establishing a more uniform pattern of sentencing. The Governor General went on to outline what he saw as the vital role of the media in crime prevention and the acquisition of realistic attitudes towards the level of crime in our community today.

Later on Monday we were treated to a most enjoyable Reception by the Premier, The Honourable Mr. Doug Lowe, who made a very moving and sensible speech about government attitudes to crime prevention and cost saving, and after the official Dinner we heard a witty speech by the Very Reverend Harlam Butterly, the Dean of Hobart. His topic was "Public Speaking", and he demonstrated how a speech can be both informative and entertaining without being overly long. Perhaps a number of us here could learn something from Dean Butterly.

On Tuesday morning we heard from two expert speakers on the subject of urban planning and development, Dr. Trevor Lee and Mr. Bob Graham. Both, from my point of view — not withstanding their obvious expertise in their field — were rather pessimistic, as they both strongly argued against the philosophy of "environmental determinism". They both admitted that planners, particularly city planners, could make the social environment worse by insensitive planning, but neither would agree with the proposition that human behaviour can be clearly influenced for good through sound environmental design. I suppose if we can avoid doing harm with our planning then that is some advance, but, as an eternal optimist, I would like to think that we can perhaps do a little more than that. Both of these speakers were aware of the dangers associated with the stigmatisation of socially disadvantaged areas and pointed out the self-fulfilling aspects of stigma.

The group discussions which followed these speakers, as judged from the reports which were made back to the plenary session, revealed a vast array of differing attitudes and opinions. There was certainly no clear consensus which indicated that urban planning has a positive role to play in crime prevention. Participants discussed home savings grants and rental voucher schemes, the Australian Assistance Plan, the value of "social mix", and one group even suggested that perhaps we should tolerate high crime rates if that was the price of keeping ethnic communities cohesive and happy!

It seemed to me from this discussion that if urban planners are to play a more positive role in crime prevention then they must have available to them more accurate and comprehensive crime statistics than they apparently have now, and then they might be able to better measure the social consequences of the policies that they bring into effect.

In the afternoon of Tuesday the two main speakers, Dr. Zula Nittim and Fr. Julian Punch, both raised the complex question of competing value systems in our community. Dr. Nittim reviewed the significance of the work of Oscar Newman in the United States in relation to architectural design, and also argued that since the industrial revolution human beings had been devalued. Father Punch mentioned his work with unemployed young people in Chigwell and analysed their situation in terms of a conflict between the profit motive of big business and the sharing and caring attitudes of the teenage gangs in his area. Both were undoubtedly stimulating speakers but neither added much to the prescribed topic for the afternoon, which was Volunteers in the Community.

The discussion groups which followed these presentations again seemed to raise questions beyond the scope of the papers and of the topic. There was much discussion about the significance of unemployment and strategies that might be used to overcome it, but there was little talk of the role of volunteers or of the value conflicts that were raised in both their papers.

Later that evening, as an adjunct to the main theme, two concurrent sessions dealt with the Tasmanian Work Order Scheme and a project designed to help young people overcome the negative consequences of unemployment. It has been reported to me that both these sessions were extremely valuable and stimulating.

On Wednesday morning Madam Inez Dussuyer and Sgt Col Fogarty addressed themselves to the topic of the Neighbourhood Policeman. Madam Dussuyer presented to us the results of some of her research on public attitudes to the police, and she concluded, somewhat enigmatically, that neighbourhood or contact-policing was likely to result in lowering public respect for the police and that this, in her view, would be a good thing!

Sgt Fogarty followed with a lengthy and forcefully presented address on a range of problems which confront the police officer of today. He concluded by giving his support to the concept of team policing, a form of neighbourhood policing, but pointed to the irony of police regulations which forbade police to be "idle and gossiping on duty".

It must be said that the major part of both addresses was devoted to matters other than neighbourhood policing and, as a consequence, the discussion groups, once more, gave their attention to a diverse range of subject matter. The role of the media, Police Boys' Clubs, traffic law enforcement, and many other subjects attracted the attention of participants. One group reported that neighbourhood policing in Queensland was seen as not working particularly well, and it was recognised by others that the traditional view of the policeman on the beat was prohibitively expensive.

The whole of the Conference on Thursday was devoted to various aspects of education, and in the morning Mrs Molly Campbell-Smith described for us a curriculum experiment with which she had been involved. In essence, her proposal called for weekly unstructured discussion groups with senior primary and junior secondary school children meeting with experienced and trained teachers in order to facilitate communication and provide a forum for the resolution of personal and interpersonal problems. Mrs. Campbell-Smith gave us a number of very moving examples of the positive effects that this programme had had on a number of children.

Mrs. Campbell-Smith was followed by four high school students whose skill at public speaking must have been the envy of many of the adult speakers here. They all presented their views of the schools' role in crime prevention and, even though they disagreed among themselves, their contributions were generally seen as one of the highlights of this Conference. One of the students urged the reintroduction of corporal punishment, but another opposed this. Another argued for a moral code to supplement the criminal code, and the final student speaker pointed out the futility and wastefulness of an education system based on the memorising of facts and the passing of examinations.

On this occasion the reports of the discussion groups seemed to be much more closely in tune with the programmed topic than had been the case in most of the earlier sessions.

Continuing with the theme of education, two papers were presented on Thursday afternoon on the school and the community. Miss Toni Miller spoke on the role of a school community worker and Fran Bladel described the establishment and operation of an alternative school known as the Tagari Project. Both of these programmes aroused a great deal of interest among participants and are illustrative of a wide range of innovations which have been tried in Australian education in recent years. Speaking personally, I am very enthusiastic about these programmes, but I would like to see more comprehensive evaluation of the impact of programmes such as these on the levels of delinquent and anti-social behaviour. That,

after all, is what this Conference is particularly concerned about.

On Thursday evening Miss Patricia Harris and Mr. Chris Cunliffe-Jones gave papers on alternatives to juvenile institutional care and Dr. Peter Grabosky spoke on sentencing alternatives for alcohol and drug offenders. These were concurrent sessions and I have been advised that both presentations also aroused considerable interest.

This morning we have heard from Mr. Bill Clifford on influencing bureaucracies for better planning and he concluded his address by making a number of specific recommendations for action across the broad field of crime prevention. In particular he proposed the establishment of national and State Crime Prevention Commissions that would have co-ordinating, planning and monitoring roles. I would most certainly urge that this proposal receive the deepest consideration at the widest possible level. The final speaker, Dr. Peter Grabosky, made the important point that adequate crime prevention planning cannot possibly be undertaken without an upgrading of our statistical collection systems that apply to crime and all aspects of criminal justice. This point is an obvious one, but one that needs to be repeated. I, and many people like Peter Grabosky, have said on many occasions that our statistics are in a very poor state. As I mentioned earlier, none of us is really sure about whether our crime rates are increasing or not, and if we ask ourselves whether our correctional systems or preventative programmes are effective or not we have absolutely no data which can be used to start preparing answers. Surely, with the approach of the 1980's, we can start doing a little better than we have in the past.

What overall conclusions emerge from this week of talking and listening? Even though we have not, in my view, achieved all the aims given us by the organising committee, I believe that this conference marks a turning point for this Council as the concept of crime prevention is now seen as embracing a much wider spectrum of professional interest than would have been possible a few years ago. Also, with the opening paper of Peter Loof and the one this morning from Bill Clifford, we have seen this wider view being integrated with the ideas of planning. Perhaps we still don't know how to go about planning crime prevention but at least we have raised our sights beyond the still necessary but very limited view of preventing crime by treating offenders. The treatment of criminal offenders, whether by kindness or with harsh punishment, can never be more than a partial answer to the problem of crime. How much human misery and how much money will be saved if we can even move a little way along the path of preventing the problem before it occurs?

This conference, in my view, marks the beginning of a new approach to crime prevention in Australia. We obviously have a long way to go, but, hopefully, in the future, the Australian community will be a little safer and feel a little less fearful of crime as a result of the ideas which have started to foment in this conference this week.

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