

A C P.C AT THE CROSSROADS

(A paper submitted for publication in this Bulletin
by His Honour Judge A.B.C. Wilson, Immediate Past Vice
President of the Council, 1975-77.)

At the VIIth Biennial Conference of the Australian Crime Prevention Council held in Melbourne in August 1973, I was called upon to give an Address called "A.C.P.C.A.C. Today and Tomorrow". I did so in my then capacity as Honorary Secretary of the Council. I said:-

"The time has come for this Council to develop an organisational structure which no longer depends wholly upon voluntary effort, good-will and generosity. Membership of and interest in this Council (both from the viewpoints of government support and involvement of people) is such as to require at the very least the setting-up of a Secretariat with some full and some part-time staff. To fulfil our objects, we must have suitable people with the time and resources to make this organisation work. The development of the Council so that we now have Branches in nearly every State and Territory brings with it a new dimension of work and a new dimension of opportunity for this Council to undertake meaningful work. Conferences of this scale cannot be organised efficiently any longer without calling in professional convention organisers and/or without having paid Council staff to direct and guide them. We need the injection of some professionalism into this organisation."

A plan was then proposed for the structural development of the Council the key to which was stated to be "the appointment of a full-time Executive Director, supported by some (but not much, initially) stenographic or secretarial assistance".

I went on to state:-

"The plan I propose, which might form a blue-print for the Council's development over the next two to four years, is dependent upon sufficient financial resources being available. I believe that, with the government support we now have, we could immediately achieve part of the plan. I further believe that, if Governments are informed of our determination to become better organised, more professional, more efficient, and indeed more active ... then Governments will give us what we require in this regard."

It is now well-known that the Federal Government came to our aid and, to enable us to establish a Secretariat, it has made grants to the Council over the past three years.

We now have a Secretariat. It is very much to the credit of Mr. J. H. Purcell, our first Executive Director, that at this time, less than four years after the Melbourne Conference, the Secretariat is fully established. The National Executive has moved with some vigour to ensure that the Secretariat has been established on sound foundations Mr Purcell and his staff are beginning to make this organisation work, at least at the organisational and administrative levels.

It is good to learn that the Executive Director is able to offer some assistance to the Branches which now exist in every State and Territory. I have no doubt that the Executive Director will soon make a point of visiting Branches on a regular basis. What is of concern is that circumstances have not yet allowed the Secretariat to become involved to any significant extent in the organisation of our Biennial Conferences. The organisation of such Conferences in an efficient and professional manner was foreseen as an important function of the Secretariat and, hopefully, such will soon be the case.

In the Address to which I have been referring, I further stated:-

"It is vital that we maintain a close liaison with the Australian Institute of Criminology. In a sense this Council and the Institute are in partnership. Each has a separate role and neither is in competition with the other. Indeed, one of the FUNCTIONS of the Council is "to make recommendations as to desirable research projects to any National, Commonwealth and State Institutions (including Universities) which are engaged in or are likely to be engaged in correctional research" ... In this area, I suggest that it is important that this Council from within its not inconsiderable membership and diversified resources of manpower prepare recommendations to be submitted to the Institute or bodies connected with it, such as the Criminology Research Council. There is every reason for this Council to initiate moves to undertake research in particular areas, to support such sound moves as are undertaken, and, where no response takes place, to attempt to convince the policy-makers by means of highlighting experience gained in practice and in the carrying out of pilot projects."

What recommendations for research have we made? Have we responded sufficiently to the requests from the Australian Institute of Criminology and the Criminology Research Council to suggest topics for research?

I further stated:-

"The time has come for this Council to give impetus not only to its internal public relations but also to "getting a message across" to the public as to what the Council stands for and what it hopes to achieve both generally and also in relation to specific matters and areas ...

I recommend that, in addition to the periodic newsletters which are made available to members, this Council should produce and publish to its members a quarterly information bulletin. I do not recommend that the Council publish an academic journal. However, there is room for closer contact and affiliation with the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology which produces a journal which is well-known at least in this country. Why could not their journal be, in practice and by suitable and mutually-accepted arrangement, a journal for all members of this Council? Why could not we as members of this Council contribute much more than we do to the publication of that journal? Why could not dialogue be opened up between the Council and the Society with a view to the establishment of closer ties and mutual encouragement to the benefit of all?"

What has our recent record been like in the field of public relations? Apart from the commendable activities which have been organised at the Branch level, have we taken any new initiatives (or, for that matter, any initiatives at all) with a view to informing the general public as to what the Council stands for and what it hopes to achieve in the fields of crime prevention, correction and after-care? What response has there been to the call for contributions to this newsletter? What support has been given to those who have advocated the regular publication of a periodic newsletter such as this?

It was further stated in the Address called "A.C.P.C.A.C. To-day and Tomorrow":-

"To say that there is a need for more community involvement or more public participation in the fields encompassed by the objects of this Council is to state the obvious. This Council must show a lead and must provide the incentive, the models, and the expertise required for the responsible implementation of practical programmes of this nature. Public education is the corner-stone of any development in this area."

Have we shown a lead since 1973? What incentives have we provided? What models have been set up? Have we provided any expertise for the implementation of any practical programmes within the criminal justice system? Have any public education programmes been embarked upon?

The need for a realistic approach was emphasised in the Address:-

"These ideas of "community-based corrections", "community-centred after-care", "social defence", "community-based crime prevention" are not ... visionary slogans but hard contemporary facts. The public must be brought to an understanding of the basic philosophy of the criminal law and the purpose and function of the courts, the basic philosophy which is behind current penal and correctional programmes, and the spirit and intent of contemporary after-care programmes. This Council is in a unique position to do something."

Possible solutions to the problem of how this Council might do something about this problem were suggested:-

"I suggest that the Branches have a responsibility to act to initiate local participation in social defence programmes and planning. The time may well have come for us to establish local or suburban crime control commissions or consultative committees ...

If we wish to remain a "partner" with the Australian Institute of Criminology and if we wish to gain much-needed increases in the level of Government financial assistance to this Council, we must, by deeds as well as by words, indicate our willingness and determination to assist and promote in a practical way crime prevention, correction and the after-care of offenders "

I believe some of the Branches have operated effectively in the last year or so. But what initiatives have been taken at a national level? Have we indicated any willingness or determination to assist or promote in a practical way the prevention of crime, the correction of offenders or the after-care of offenders?

In the Address to which I have been referring, one specific area of involvement was highlighted. It was stated:-

"... This Council has an opportunity and a responsibility to offer its services, its manpower resources, and its diversification of skills to the social and economic planning and regional development authorities being set up by Governments (Federal, State and Local) throughout this country. It is important that we make it clear to Governments (if necessary by firm and direct representations) that crime prevention aspects of planning schemes should be examined in conjunction with other aspects of the schemes."

Have we made any representations to any Government in the period 1973 to 1977?

The matter of regional co-operation was mentioned at the 1973 Conference. It was stated:-

"With reference to the matter of regional co-operation, this Council ought not to overlook a responsibility it has within the Western Pacific Region. Already we have attempted with minimal success to make a contribution to the development of the criminal justice system in Papua New Guinea. Ought we not to be inviting to Conferences such as this more people from New Zealand and people from Nauru and Fiji, and even people from as far away as Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Hong Kong and Japan, and urging our governments to meet the expenses of such visits? Such exchanges of personnel and other co-operative measures could provide an opportunity for this country to take a lead in our region, to be proud of its achievements in many areas of the criminal justice system, and to learn from the experiences of other countries ...

We cannot afford to be isolationist in criminological endeavours. Regional co-operation is something that this Council has a responsibility to encourage, and, if necessary, to demand ..."

Again, apart from the contribution we have made in Papua New Guinea, have we answered the challenge that was presented to us? Are we going to treat the U.N. Congress in 1980 as our only immediate responsibility in the area of regional co-operation?

I believe that twice now in the last twelve months the National Executive has missed an opportunity to plan a programme of activities which, if implemented, would take the Council strongly into the 1980's. The "Think-Tank" Seminar with its theme: "The Future of A C P.C and Policy Planning"

was twice postponed without the policy-makers within the Council really grappling with the problem of how this Council both at a national level and at the Branch level can, by means of the implementation of a programme, further its objectives. I state quite firmly that it is regrettable that circumstances caused that Seminar not to be held in the way it was planned. Will an attempt be made to re-organise it for the third time? Surely the Council has a national role to fulfil and therefore it should have a programme. Surely the Council is not going to operate through the Branches alone, save for the holding of National Conferences.

Have we forgotten that it is the first of the objects of the Council "to assist and promote the work of crime prevention, correction and the after-care of offenders"? Are we content to be persuaded by those who would argue that the Council's role is limited to the achievement of the second and third objects laid down in the Constitution, viz:-

To co-ordinate the activities of all persons and bodies interested in (the work of crime prevention, correction and the after-care of offenders), and

To provide a forum for the free discussion of all matters of interest amongst those concerned with crime prevention, correction and after-care?

One can readily come to appreciate how little the Council has truly functioned by extracting from that part of Article 2 of the Constitution which deals with the functions of the Council a number of questions and seeing how many of them can be answered in the affirmative. In the absence of a positive plan for the future I suggest that, if we are going to be honest with ourselves, we must answer each of these questions in the negative. The questions are:-

What steps are we taking to improve the standards of performance or increase the effectiveness of crime prevention, correctional or after-care systems or techniques?

What steps are we taking to develop citizens' support for, understanding of, and participation in crime prevention, correctional and after-care activities?

What recommendations are we considering making as to desirable research projects?

What steps are we taking to improve the laws in relation to public offences and offenders and the procedures by which those laws are enforced?

If one compares this set of questions with the set of questions that were to have been answered at the Seminar, one can see a remarkable similarity between the two sets. Ought we not either to re-convene the "Think-Tank" Seminar or alternatively set up a number of sub-committees at a national level to start to formulate a programme of activities which the Council should be involving itself in with some sense of purpose in the immediate future?

The questions which were to have been answered at the Seminar were.-

What new progressive programmes in crime prevention, correction and after-care should A.C.P.C. be promoting?

What initiatives should A.C.P.C. be taking to improve standards of performance within the criminal justice system?

What activities involving citizen participation and the use of volunteers should A.C.P.C. be planning?

What recommendations for research and/or law reform should A.C.P.C. be making?

Had we answered these questions at least to the extent of listing a few programmes, initiatives, activities and recommendations which might be the subject of evaluation and/or a feasibility study, then we could fairly state that we are working towards the preparation of a blue-print (or plan) for the future and the achievement of the Council's objects and functions.

At the conclusion of my Address to the 1973 Biennial Conference in Melbourne, I said:-

"... Whatever we do or say, this Council must stand for progress, for development, and for enlightened change in the criminal justice system. In all things we should maintain a balance between the individual's right to freedom and his responsibilities to society."

I adhere to those sentiments as strongly to-day as I did then. The most pressing challenge for the Council at this time is to prepare a plan for the Council's development over the next two to four years.
