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PUBLIC DISORDER IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA

A REPORT TO THE CRIMINOLOGY RESEARCH COUNCIL

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## INTRODUCTION

This research project arose as a result of a growing belief that far too little was known about the incidence of public disorder in Australia. During the nineteen-eighties a number of groups in the community have claimed either that public disorder is rising alarmingly or that a sudden upsurge is about to take place. These diagnoses depended, in the main, on one of two underlying presuppositions. The first claimed that economic recession, structural change and increased unemployment would undermine the social fabric. The second claimed that increased Asian immigration would have a similar effect. There was, in addition, a sense that upsurges of public disorder overseas such as that seen in the British miners strike of 1984 might be repeated in Australia.

Within this context it became apparent that social researchers had very little systematic data on public disorder trends in Australia. This problem was evident both to academic researchers and to those advising the various police communities. The deliberations of the 1985 Conference of Police Commissioners into Civil Disorder and Crowd Control did not have at its disposal an adequate data base on which to base public disorder policing for the future. (Conference of Commissioners of Police of Australasia and The South West Pacific Region, Feb. 1985).

Part of the background to the present research emerged while Associate Professor Holton was working as consultant to the National Police Research Unit on the 'Brixton project'. This project was designed to review the likelihood of Brixton-type

disorders being repeated in Australia, to review the efficacy of pro-active policing policies, such as community policing, to disorder prevention, and to prepare material on crowd behaviour and public disorder suitable for police training purposes. The scope of this project was limited by lack of a historic data base on public disorder in Australia. The National Police Research Unit kept newspaper cuttings on a miscellany of disorders, but these were only available for a 2/3 year period. The need was clearly evident for the construction of an appropriate data base, adequate both for the purposes of academic research and for purposes of police planning.

Associate Professor Holton's long-standing research interests in crowd behaviour are also part of the background to the research. In 1978, while working in the U.K., he was invited to join the Social Science Research Council Research Initiatives Committee looking into crowd behaviour. This led to involvement in research projects in the U.K. in 1982, and to participation in a national conference on Crowd Behaviour in 1985, while on study leave in the U.K. Through this experience, a close knowledge of other attempts to measure public disorder was obtained. Two particular British initiatives worthy of mention are:-

- a) The Leicester University team researching 'Violent Disorders in the UK', headed by Professor Eric Dunning.
- b) The Home Office, Research and Planning Unit contributions to the Public Disorder Study Group, set up in December 1985 under the aegis of the Central Conference of Chief Constables'.

In addition further material was obtained about the major

American 'civil strife' study undertaken by Professor Ted Gurr during the nineteen-sixties, as part of the research commissioned by the Kerner Commission.

These overseas studies indicated both the potential of systematic public order surveys for major industrial societies, and some of the methodological difficulties and pit-falls of this research area. They were influential, then, in the construction of the present research project, funded by the Criminology Research Council, alongside the experience gained through working with the National Police Research Unit.

The final shape of the research proposal and the research design adopted owes a good deal to the advice of those consulted in the formative stages. These include Dr. Gerry McGrath, Director of the National Police Research Unit, Dr. Adam Sutton, Director of the Office of Crime Statistics in South Australia, and the personnel of the Special Projects Section of the South Australian Police Department. In addition Dr. Peter Grabosky of the Australian Institute of Criminology, gave considerable encouragement to the project in his response to a paper delivered by Associate Professor Holton to the Conference on Law and Order held at Flinders University in 1986.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the project were to provide a systematic description and analysis of both the main trends and the various types of public disorder in modern Australia. These aims were pursued by the construction of a data base distinct from judicial records of criminal offences and from internal police records dealing with offenders and with the detailed operational activities of police officers.

The question of a new data base of this kind was seen as a way of addressing two objectives. First there is the analytical objective of a better understanding of the causes of public disorder. To achieve this it is important to have a clear grasp of the explanandum - that which is to be explained. This requires, amongst other matters, knowledge of how rates of public disorder vary over time, and secondly how they vary by major category of disorder. An important aim of the data base was therefore to construct an accurate time series of disorderly incidents, and an accurate index of the relative importance of different types of incidents.

Beyond this point, the analytical objective was pursued through the testing of specific hypotheses about the causes of public disorder. The two hypotheses tested in this study are as follows:

- 1) That rates of public disorder increase with economic hardship and recession as measured by levels of unemployment.
- 2) That rates of public disorder increase with growing levels of multicultural immigration, especially Asian immigration.

Second there is the policy objective of improving the capacity of the police to respond to the threat or presence of public disorder. This objective will be met in part by knowing how much disorder to expect, together with the type of disorder, likely number of participants etc. However it will also depend on evaluation of the options available in policing strategy, including the usefulness of pro-active policing, and the range of strategies available for dealing with specific types of disorder. It was not possible to meet all these aims within the current study. Systematic data has nonetheless been sought on the scale and type of police involvement in different types of disorderly incidents. In this way policy-makers and police strategists will have a better understanding of the call on resources, on the need for additional police training in areas such as riot control tactics, community policing and racism awareness training.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Two major methodological issues were raised by this project, namely:-

- 1) The formulation of an appropriate operational definition of public disorder and of what constitutes a discrete case or example of public disorder.
- 2) The selection of a data base, appropriate to the measurement of public disorder.

These two problems will be considered in turn.

### Public Disorder

The question "what constitutes public disorder?" raises a number of difficult theoretical issues concerning the nature of order and disorder within society. It is important to clarify these issues, prior to the selection of a research design, so as to avoid misunderstanding and ambiguity about what exactly is being measured.

Clarification of the nature of public order and public disorder can be usefully approached via a consideration of the more generic terms social order and social disorder. The first and most general issue here is the epistemological status of the term social order. To put it simply is the existence of social order or social disorder a matter of clear-cut objective fact on which all rational persons in possession of the facts could agree? Or is it a more complex matter of social perception and selective interpretation of the data? If the latter option is the case, as I believe it is, then we are faced with the problem that different perceptions or interpretations are possible of the same set of facts. What is disorder and chaos from one viewpoint



may be interpreted and experienced as orderly and coherent from another. This problem will apply to the extent that no one set of community standards exists as to the meaning of order and disorder.

The problem of selective and quite contrasting perceptions and interpretations is most dramatically exemplified in the case of war. To the pacifist or humanist war represents moral disorder - an intolerable and inhumane violation of human dignity and the sanctity of life. To those who believe in the sacred obligations of the holy war, by contrast, war is a religious duty and an ordered expression of the highest values. Each viewpoint is interpreting the same set of events. On a more mundane level, Australian duck-shooting generates a divide between animal liberationists who see the practice as a cruel and disorderly assault on innocent animal life, and shooters organised in clubs and mateship circles who see it as a legitimate sport with its own rules and conventions. Once again quite contrasting perceptions are evident. In both of these cases, or any case where a plurality of values exist, it is clear that especially acute problems will be posed for the definition of order and the use of police to regulate conflict.

The theoretical premise of this project is that social order and social disorder are relative concepts, relative that is to a particular viewpoint. This is not to say that consensus on the meaning of order and disorder is impossible. There is evidence, after all, that in many communities and for much of the time, communal rules involving a sense of mutual regard and the

obligation to a minimum level of civility - what we might call a minimum level of order - do exist. On the other hand, there is equally evidence of the collapse of these controls and conflict between quite different standards. The findings of some recent studies on fear or crime and disorder in cities and/or urban street life indicate that viewpoints on order vary by age, by gender and by class (e.g. Jones and Young 1986, Wilson and Kelling, 1982). The elderly and women appear most concerned about street-level disorder in the form of gregarious bands of young males, vandalism and graffiti.

It should also be added that media reporting is itself part of the process whereby events become interpreted as orderly and disorderly. Media reports have been seen by many observers as exerting a major influence on these interpretations and definitions by contributing to public fears and anxieties, and encouraging moral panics. At the same time there is little hard evidence that media do any more than select out and amplify particular public attitudes.

It is also clear that viewpoints on order and disorder are influenced by the holding of official responsibilities for maintenance of order and of the law - involving police and the courts. Such official viewpoints will not necessarily be congruent with the viewpoints of various groups of the community, notably the young. This is particularly evident in conflicts between police and young people over what constitutes legitimate use of streets and other public places.

This brings us to a second theoretical problem, namely the relationship between order/disorder and crime - as reflected in

the official mechanisms of public order operated by the police and by the criminal justice system. This relationship is a complex one, but it is reasonably clear that there is an analytical distinction to be made between the function of keeping the peace, and the policing function of fighting crime as part of the criminal justice system. From a historical viewpoint the emergence of policing can be seen very much within a night-watchman framework - maintaining public order in the sense of controlling and removing threats posed by fire, wild animals and disreputable behaviour. Policing generally did not require a specialist full-time body organised in occupational roles. In the 19th and 20th centuries however, with the development of industrialisation and urbanisation, this public order function has become combined with crime-fighting functions practised by professional police forces. The predominant objective here is to solve more crimes, to make more arrests, and to utilise whatever organisational and technological means seem likely to achieve these objectives. If para-military tactics seem technologically more effective in fighting escalating levels of crime and disorder then many advocate they should be instantly adopted. This kind of argument is an important part of the background to the emergence of star force and the tactical response groups, the riot-shield and snatch-squads. What is as yet unclear is how far para-military policing creates modes of public order regulation which are incompatible with, and seen by the public to be incompatible with the conventional and largely pro-active monitoring and control of boundaries.

These two policing strategies need not be mutually exclusive, but can be seen as two different options available in different circumstances. Recent evidence shows that street-level policing continues to involve a considerable discretionary activity by police in peace-keeping roles that do not result in criminal charges being laid against alleged offenders. Such activities, moreover, take place in a context where there remain many community anxieties directed not only at crime, but also at diffuse kinds of public disorder. The fear of being bothered by drunks, rowdy teenagers, and loiterers matters as much as the fear of being a victim of criminal assault. Such considerations suggest that the distinction between public disorder and crime remains a significant part of public attitudes, and not merely an interpretative framework unique to the police. It follows that measures of criminal offences will not be adequate to the task of measuring public disorder as such.

Summing up so far we may say first that order and disorder are relative terms dependent on the viewpoints, perceptions and interpretations of social actors. Secondly we may say that public disorder is not solely a matter of criminal activity and crime rates - important though criminal disorder may be.

Guided by these theoretical considerations, it is now possible to move towards an operational definition of public disorder and of what constitutes an example or incident of public disorder. In selecting a suitable definition, care should be taken to distinguish the phenomena of most concern to this study. First we are not concerned with social order and disorder in general, but with those forms of disorder which occur in public

rather than in private. Secondly, and following in large measure from this, we are not concerned with disorder carried out by individuals or very small groups, including those micro-level crimes of violence which either take place in private, or involve a relatively trivial impact on the public domain. The emphasis is rather on collective modes of public disorder by significant numbers of individuals. Thirdly we are not concerned with 'collective violence' - a term used by Charles Tilly (1969) - as such, but rather with all categories of collective public disorder, whether or not violence was intended or actually used by some or all parties concerned.

Collective violence is in fact a very difficult concept to operationalise as a measure of public disorder. This is partly because some violent actions organised collectively are generally regarded as legitimate e.g. most but not all legally sanctioned use of violence by Government and body-contact team sports. It is also because the attribution of collective violence to a particular incident is often interpreted as a pejorative criticism of participants. Many supporters of the rights of public assembly and peaceful demonstration would object to being categorised as participants in collective violence, and would want to make a distinction between disorderly riots and peaceful demonstrations. There is a tendency to insist on this distinction even though peaceful demonstrations may incorporate a high level of symbolic violence, for example in banners, slogans and other artefacts which take strong adversarial stands against opponents. Such demonstrations may be perceived as disorderly by some even in spite of the non-violent good faith of participants.

An operational definition of public disorder is left then with three main decisions.

- 1) How to decide what constitutes public disorder when perceptions of disorder vary in society?
- 2) How to distinguish the broad category 'public disorder' from instances of overt 'collective violence'?
- 3) What is the minimum cut-off point distinguishing public and collective disorder from private and/or individual disorder?

Ted Gurr's conception, 'civil strife' (1969, pp. 573, 626) is the most useful starting point for an operational definition of public disorder. This is defined as "All collective non-governmental attacks on persons or property that occur within a political system, but not individual crimes". For operational purposes the reference to 'attacks' was not restricted to overt violence, but "included symbolic attacks on political persons or policies such as political demonstrations and political strikes". Again no normative judgement is implied here simply the wish to group together all collective manifestations of disorder. Finally Gurr adopts a minimum cut-off point of 100 participants for an incident of civil strife to qualify for inclusion.

This operational definition grapples with many of the difficult problems we have noted. It still requires qualification on two counts, however. First Gurr does not sufficiently emphasise that his definition of civil strife is essentially an administrative one, based on the evaluations of those legitimately responsible for public order. To group overtly violent and symbolically violent incidents together

reflects a concern on the part of those responsible for public order for both actual disorder or strife, and potential challenges. Both of these require appropriate responses by the agencies of public order, in terms of deployment of police, protection of persons and property, and the apprehension of any criminal offenders.

Given the plurality of possible definitions and interpretations of disorder there seems little alternative to adopting an administrative definition of public disorder. Indeed we might say that public order is essentially an administrative concept, while social order pertains to a wide range of sometimes conflicting views in the community. Operationally, therefore the measurement of public disorder within this study is based on estimations of real or perceived threat made by police and other public authorities. As such it does not pretend to measure social disorder according to the competing definitions which may exist in the wider society. This delimitation is however an advantage from a public policy viewpoint in that it focusses on the challenge actually placed on the police forces, and the responses made.

A second qualification necessary with Gurr's definition was concern over the minimum cut off point of 100 participants. This was designed for an international cross-national study aiming to pick out major incidents of civil strife. In the present study it was felt that this cut-off point was unduly high for purposes of a national survey. Consequently the cut-off point was reduced to 10 persons - too high for trivial street-brawls, but low enough to pick up those public disturbances involving between 10

and 100 participants which require a significant police presence. There is of course a certain arbitrariness in this choice. The cut-off point of 10 did however succeed in excluding small personalised brawls from consideration.

In the light of these modifications to Gurr's concept of civil strife the final operational definition for this study was formulated as follows:

'Any violent or illegitimate action involving 10 or more persons, other than actions by agents of the Government, directed against persons or property'.

#### **Public disorder and the search for an adequate data base**

The second major methodological issue at stake in this study was the problem of securing an adequate data-base. As indicated in the grant application the research methodology adopted involved the construction of a new data base generated through primary research. It is important to emphasise why existing data are inadequate for the purposes of this study, since the decision to create a new data base requires commitments to intensive time-consuming research which is expensive.

Two sources of data of prima facie relevance to the study of public disorder are crime statistics for various categories of disorderly behaviour, and police log-books recording the daily activities of officers. Neither of these sources was regarded as adequate as a means of generating the kind of data on public disorder required by this project.

Crime statistics are typically organised around individual offenders, and prosecutions for specific offences. The main



problem with using this to measure public disorder is that it usually fails to differentiate between offences committed by individuals acting alone or in very small groups, and offences committed as part of some collective group whose actions disturb public order. This is not always the case, since common law offences like riot and affray or unlawful assembly exist, and have been used on occasion during some of the more violent episodes of public disorder (e.g. Bathurst Bike Race Riots in 1985, Cuneen et al, 1986). Nonetheless it appears that on most occasions offenders are more likely to be charged with offences relating to disorderly behaviour, destruction, public drunkenness, and use of offensive language - and it is these very broad categories that are well-nigh impossible to differentiate between incidents involving collective public disorder and those occurring at an individual or very small group level.

A second problem with the use of crime statistics as a measure of public disorder is that not all disorderly behaviour results in a charge. There have often been occasions when police either felt it unwise to attempt to arrest and charge all those apparently involved in disorder for fear of escalating violence, or where police had insufficient numbers to affect such a strategy. Even where crime statistics are organised in terms of unambiguous collective disorder categories, the charge patterns will only measure some part of the disorderliness of an incident, and there is no guarantee at all that the proportion of those charged will remain roughly the same across different incidents.

A third problem with crime statistics is that criminal offence categories do change over time as new legislation

appears, and old legislation is either repealed or modified. This makes the construction of a time-series measuring disorder extremely difficult. One example, pertinent to the analysis of public disorder concerns the use of intoxicating liquor. With the recent decriminalisation of drunkenness, police do not have drunk and disorderly available to them, as they once did, to aid in the policing of those collective disorders where intoxication by alcohol is involved. Wherever offence categories have changed in this way it is very difficult to use crime statistics as a means of measuring trends in public disorder over time.

Such problems do not totally invalidate the use of crime statistics to measure trends in public order, since the extent of criminality is generally regarded as a major component in assessing orderliness. They do however reduce the usefulness of such statistics, to the extent that offence categories are not restricted to collective disorder, to the extent that criminal offences do not represent a constant proportion of actual disorder, and to the extent that legislative changes render offence categories incommensurable or difficult to compare over time.

An alternative way of proceeding would be to focus on actual police behaviour, drawing on police patrol logs and other formal operational records to build up a picture of the scale and typology of public disorder. This data could in theory be combined with interview or survey data, of the type collected in the Policy Studies Institute's major survey of the London police concerning the distribution of police time (Smith and Gray,

1983). There are of course a number of other studies of this kind.

There are three problems with this methodological strategy. The first is the lack of sociological observation and detail involved. The primary purpose of police patrol logs is not to take detailed sociological field-notes, but to record basic factual details of the time and place at which specific activities were undertaken. Such reporting is necessarily highly routinised and rationalised, though it is of extreme importance in monitoring individual's activities, in assessing police workloads, and in adjudicating complaints made by members of the public against the police. Where police are required to record additional information on offences and offenders, these too will be organised to fit the demands of the criminal justice system and police administrative procedures first and foremost. Such demands will only ever be partially congruent with the sociological interests of the present project, even though improvements in such areas as crime statistics are currently being made.

A second problem in assessing police patrol logs is a practical one, namely the extremely time-consuming nature of the activity. Since involvement in coping with public disorder - as defined here - represents only a limited proportion of police time, the scrutiny of police patrol logs is not likely to be a cost-effective use of research time. Finally, there is the problem of variations in reporting conventions and standards between different police areas, noted by Carole Willis in her paper 'A Classification of Public Disorder dealt with by the

Police' (Willis, 1986) and between different officers. These difficulties introduce problems of comparability in data which appear insurmountable.

As a result of difficulties associated with the use of crime statistics and patrol logs for purposes of public order measurement, this study is based on measurement by means of systematic newspaper content analysis. This research strategy has itself to be justified, however, given certain problems connected with the use of newspapers for social scientific purposes.

The most basic objection to this procedure is that newspapers are prone to bias, distortion and sensationalism. In other words they are vulnerable to highly subjective influences where emotion, ideology, proprietorial and editorial political standpoints, or personal perceptions will influence both the selection and the coverage of news items. There is, in addition, a widely canvassed sociological critique, advanced amongst others by the Glasgow Media Group that the media - with print and electronic - tends to skew the reporting of sensitive or controversial news items towards the viewpoints of the powerful and influential. For example, the claim is made that the reporting of industrial disputes is slanted more to the employer than the workers' case.

Both these criticisms carry some weight in relation to the study of public disorder. There is evidence that newspaper reporting does, on occasion, involve the emotive and sensational treatment of public disorder, both in the reporting of actual

events and in the creation of emotionally-charged expectations about events, before they actually happen. The New South Wales team researching the Bathurst motor-cycle disturbances identify this tendency to heighten expectations of extreme disorder in various sections of the New South Wales press (Cuneen et al, 1986). Similarly there is evidence of social and political bias in giving uneven coverage to different parties that may be involved in disorder.

The fact that such criticisms carry weight is not however surprising given the basic theoretical standpoint of this study - namely that order and disorder are not objective terms, but vary according to the moral viewpoint, and the age, sex and class of observers. Even if there are certain events such as the Hells Angel shootout at Milperra, N.S.W. during 198 which almost all parties regard as disorderly, there are far more about which rival interpretations and evaluations exist. Newspapers cannot be expected to be immune from these pressures and problems.

The issue is not whether newspapers are sources of objective fact, they quite clearly are not. The methodological issues at stake here are twofold. Firstly, does the type of data contained in the print media carry substantially accurate sociological content to be usable as an index of public disorder. Secondly, is this data largely or wholly unobtainable from any other source. We are not talking here about pure laboratory conditions for a controlled experiment, but of pragmatic choices between a range of possible sources, containing varying degrees of imperfection and bias.

Crime statistics certainly offer quantifiable measures of reported crimes and details on offenders apprehended, within prevailing categories of offence and offender characteristics. Within these parameters, they are almost certainly more objective than general newspaper reporting of crime and disorder. What they do not provide is first of all a measurement of public disorder in the broadest sense including behaviour that did not result in a criminal offence. Secondly, the crime statistics categories do not measure collective events but rather individual offences. Newspaper reporting, by contrast contains highly selective, personalised and selective commentary. It is uncontrolled by rules of criminal justice procedure attending the official definition and reporting of crime. It is also clear that reported incidents of disorder are not identical with actual rates of disorder - though this problem is analogous to the problematic relationship of reported criminal offences to actual offences - that is behaviour that would be classified as criminal if detected.

The methodological problem of relating reported disorder to actual disorder is of course a difficult one. The major strategy for dealing with this problem is to identify those influences which might change the ratio between reported incidents and actual incidents. As far as newspapers are concerned this might be expected where economic changes affected the size of a paper or the ratio of news and copy to advertising. It might also arise where changes of ownership and editorial policy affected decisions to cover certain events, although it is doubtful whether major instances of public disorder could ever be entirely

ignored. It is not at all clear that either of these changes occurred to the Australian press during the time period of this study.

It should also be added that additional methodological checks and balances can be built into a newspaper-based survey to attempt to control for bias and inaccuracy in reporting. Such checks include:

- a) comparison of newspaper reporting with official data of the same event - to compare for accuracy
- b) selection of more than one newspaper covering the same event as another check on accuracy or bias
- c) selection of more than one newspaper as a basic source of data - to bring the scale of reported disorder closer to actual disorder
- d) selection of the less sensational, 'quality' press as data bases

At the outset, it was anticipated that all of these checks could be built into the research design, and operated on the data collected.

While aiming for the most accurate data base possible, this project chose to develop a newspaper-based data index for reasons that may ultimately be described as pragmatic. In other words the gains to be expected from the breadth of coverage and the scale of observational detail and commentary provided by the print media and no other single source, were believed to be sufficient to outweigh the costs of dealing with imperfect sources prone to bias, and selective reporting.

It is worth noting that the same kind of pragmatic judgements have disposed many other researchers - including historians, political scientists and sociologists - to utilise newspaper reporting as a major source, though not the only possible data source in analysing public disorder. Prominent examples include the major American 114 nations survey of civil strife conducted by Ted Gurr at the American University, Washington D.C. in the 1960s as part of the evidence made available to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. Newspaper sources have also been used by the University of Leicester study of violent disturbances in 20th century Britain headed by Eric Dunning. In Australia, too newspaper sources have been a major source of data, for example for the N.S.W. team researching the Bathurst Motor-cycle disturbances for the Criminology Research Council.



## RESEARCH DESIGN

The original research design was to record all incidents of public disorder occurring during the 36 year period 1950-85, utilising two newspapers. This period was seen as relevant to the testing of the two research hypotheses listed above. With the onset of economic recession and Asian immigration in the nineteen-seventies, it was decided that a sufficiently long time-period should be chosen, during which any marked change in the secular trend of public disorder might reasonably be expected to become apparent. In other words any marked upturn in rates of public disorder from the mid nineteen-seventies onwards should be taken as confirmation of the plausibility of the hypotheses in question.

Due to constraints of funding, however, the original plan was subsequently cut-back to the 16 year period 1969-84 (inclusive). When the Council's funding for research on this reduced scale was confirmed, preliminary work indicated that it would not be possible to take detailed incident-data from more than one newspaper across this time-period. It was felt to be preferable to provide in-depth data from one source over the full time-span, rather than retaining the 2 newspaper comparative design for a lesser time-span. This would still allow the research hypotheses to be addressed, though at the cost of a less than desirable reliance on one source only.

To maintain some element of methodological control, two major newspapers the Melbourne Age and the Sydney Morning Herald were sampled for the quality and quantity of their coverage of public disorder incidents. After sampling 3 months coverage it was

decided that the Melbourne Age tended (a) to report more incidents and (b) tended to report interstate incidents (i.e. outside Victoria) more fully than the corresponding interstate reporting (i.e. outside N.S.W.) of the Sydney Morning Herald. For this reason the Melbourne Age was chosen for systematic attention.

The decision to rely on the Melbourne Age, was of course almost certain to skew the data collected to Victoria-based incidents. In this sense the study does not pretend to be a comprehensive national survey of all incidents of public disorder. What is presented here is not therefore an index of the absolute number of disorderly incidents in Australia between 1969 and 1984. Rather it is a survey of relative changes in the numbers of incidents across time, together with a typology of the incidents of public disorder, and a survey of police responses.

The skewing of the study to Victoria clearly limits the comprehensiveness of the study. At the same time, it does not significantly diminish the capacity of the research design to test the key research hypothesis. This is because Victoria is a state with economic and social characteristics germane to issues of economic recession and Asian immigration. In the first place, Victoria during this period had a higher proportion of its economy dependent on manufacturing industry, than the national average, though its unemployment rates were slightly below the national average.

Secondly, Victoria during this period had a higher proportion of Asian-born in the population, than the national average for Australia. As a result the sample-bias of this study does not

significantly impede the testing of the two research hypotheses. If there is no significant increase in public disorder since the early nineteen-seventies on the basis of this data, skewed as it is to Victoria, then the hypotheses would be disconfirmed at least in respect to the measures recorded here.

#### **Recording of information**

Files of the Melbourne Age were systematically examined for the period 1969 to 1984 inclusive. Using the definition of an incident of public disorder described above, a separate incident recording sheet (see Appendix 1) was compiled for each incident. Data was collected on the date, location, type of disturbance, age-sex composition, occupational composition, ethnic composition, scale and duration of each incident, together with numbers killed, injured and arrested and the estimated value of property damage incurred. Data was also collected on the scale and type of police intervention for each incident. Wherever possible additional data was collected on the more qualitative characteristics of each incident including the existence of 'generalised beliefs' (see Smelser 1962) among participants, the degree of formal organisation involved, the presence or absence of institutional mediation of conflict, the presumed origins of the incident, and the connection (if any) with previous and subsequent disturbances. Such information is not available for every incident, and proved to be extremely time-consuming to research in each individual case.

Within this mass of data, particular note should be taken of the typology of public disorder utilised. This drew upon the typology developed in the UK by Eric Dunning and his associates

(Dunning et al., 1987). This sub-divided public disorder into four major categories, namely political, industrial, sport and leisure and community. For operational purposes, these were defined in terms of the criteria proposed by Dunning, thereby allowing some degree of international comparison between Australia and the U.K. The criteria are as follows:

- (i) **Political....** refers 'not just to collective disturbances in connection with the activities of political parties and at elections, but also to disorders connected with public demonstrations and protest marches'.
- (ii) **Industrial....** refers to disorders 'related to the industrial protests of workers'.
- (iii) **Sport and leisure....** refers 'not only to the disorderliness of spectators in and around stadia, but is a more general category which includes the broad spectrum of leisure activities, such as fairs, carnivals, public dances, theatres, cinemas etc.'.
- (iv) **Community....** refers to 'racial, ethnic or religious disturbances' and large scale 'street fighting and brawls not otherwise included!.

In using this typology it is of course necessary to bear in mind that incidents may combine two or more of the elements of the typology, such as disorders between ethnic groups at soccer matches. The instructions given to the research assisant were to code incidents in terms of the most important characteristic, and where this was impossible to discern, to code as a complex incident.

One major amendment was however made to the typological classification, namely the sub-division of the four major categories into more precise sub components. Political disorders, for example were sub-divided into 18 further classifications. These included sub categories such as Vietnam War protests (including anti-conscription), disorders involving ethnic groups over events outside Australia, disorders over womens issues, disorders involving conservation issues, disorders over issues of policy affecting aborigines and so on. A three digit coding manual was developed for the Typology variable, in order to register fine distinctions in the sub-typological classification.

A final note should be made of the procedures adopted to measure the scale of disputes. Data such as to the number of participants in most disorderly events represents an estimate, and such estimates tend to vary depending on the position and standpoint of those making the estimates. It is well known that protest organisers, for example, produce estimates of crowd participation well in excess of police estimates. The procedure adopted here was that every estimate should be recorded and an average of all estimates obtained. There is clearly an unavoidable loss of precision involved here, but there seems little alternative to proceeding pragmatically in this fashion.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Preliminary observations

The basic components of the research methodology and design - centering on the operational definition of an incident of public disorder, and on the main typological distinctions between different categories of disorder - did in the event prove workable. Between 1969 and 1984 (inclusive), a grand total of 570 incidents of public disorder were recorded, representing an average of nearly 36 per year. The 'disorderliness' of this set of events is reflected in the fact that 94% of these incidents involved police intervention, over 70% involved at least one arrest, and 50% more than five arrests. Of those incidents, for which data on injuries and property damage is available, around 33% reported personal injuries to participants and 42% property damage.

Data of this kind does not support the contention that Australian public disorder exhibits high levels of overt collective violence. Only 12 deaths were recorded across the 570 incidents reviewed, for example. This finding is consistent with Ted Gurr's 114 nation study which ranked Australian civil strife at 96 out of 114. Nonetheless it should be emphasised once again that the data presented here are not intended solely as measures of overt violence, but rather as measures of the broader category of public disorder, embracing symbolic aggression and threats of criminal behaviour as interpreted by the police.

Another preliminary observation is that the minimum scale criterion of 10 participants did seem to separate out genuinely collective and public disorders from private disorder and micro-

level crime. Of those incidents for which numbers of participants are known, almost 90% involved 25 participants or more. In this sense, phenomena such as small street-brawls did not enter into consideration, though one or two typically small-scale criminal disorders such as a gang rape did appear in the marginal 10-12 participant category.

The area where most amendments were made to the initial research design was in the typology classification. The operational decision to code the typology question on the basis of the most prominent feature of disorders proved workable in the sense that all but 2 disorders could be treated in this fashion. In other words the problem of complex heterogeneity was not as difficult as might have been expected.

It did however prove necessary to amend Dunning's basic four-category classification by the addition of a fifth category including major types of disorder not applicable to the categories 'political', 'industrial', 'community' or 'leisure/sport'. Two particular types of disorder of this kind were identified. The first were the prison riots. These were generally not politicised, did not fit the labour market categories of the 'industrial' category, at best represent only a weak quasi-community, and cannot be regarded as fitting into conventional definitions of leisure/sport. The second category was student disorder over internal institutional issues such as university government rather than broader political policy issues, such as the introduction of fees. This category was not political in the conventional sense, could not, as with the

prison riots be fitted easily into the industrial category, was at best weakly quasi-community like, yet was too specifically focussed on education issues to be regarded as leisure/sport.

A final point to make at this stage is that the predicted skewing of the data to Victoria was indeed confirmed.

**TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF REPORTED INCIDENTS IN THE MELBOURNE AGE, 1969-84 BY STATE/TERRITORY**

|                    | No. of incidents | % share |
|--------------------|------------------|---------|
| Victoria           | 306              | 53.7    |
| N.S.W.             | 102              | 17.9    |
| Queensland         | 52               | 9.1     |
| A.C.T.             | 34               | 6.0     |
| SOUTH AUSTRALIA    | 27               | 4.7     |
| WEST AUSTRALIA     | 27               | 4.7     |
| TASMANIA           | 11               | 1.9     |
| NORTHERN TERRITORY | 11               | 1.9     |

Table 1 indicates that the majority of incidents reported in The Age were, not surprisingly from Victoria. This skewing effectively rules out the use of the findings reported here as an accurate measure of the total amount of public disorder in Australia as a whole, and as a reliable indicator of the relative scale of disorder between the states and territories. These limitations are the direct effect of funding constraints and the abandonment of the 2-paper research design. At the same time the data presented here remains of considerable value as a measure of relative changes in public disorder over time, the different types of disorder, and of the typical demands on police intervention over time and by category of disorder. In turn, this permits the empirical testing of the two major research hypotheses.

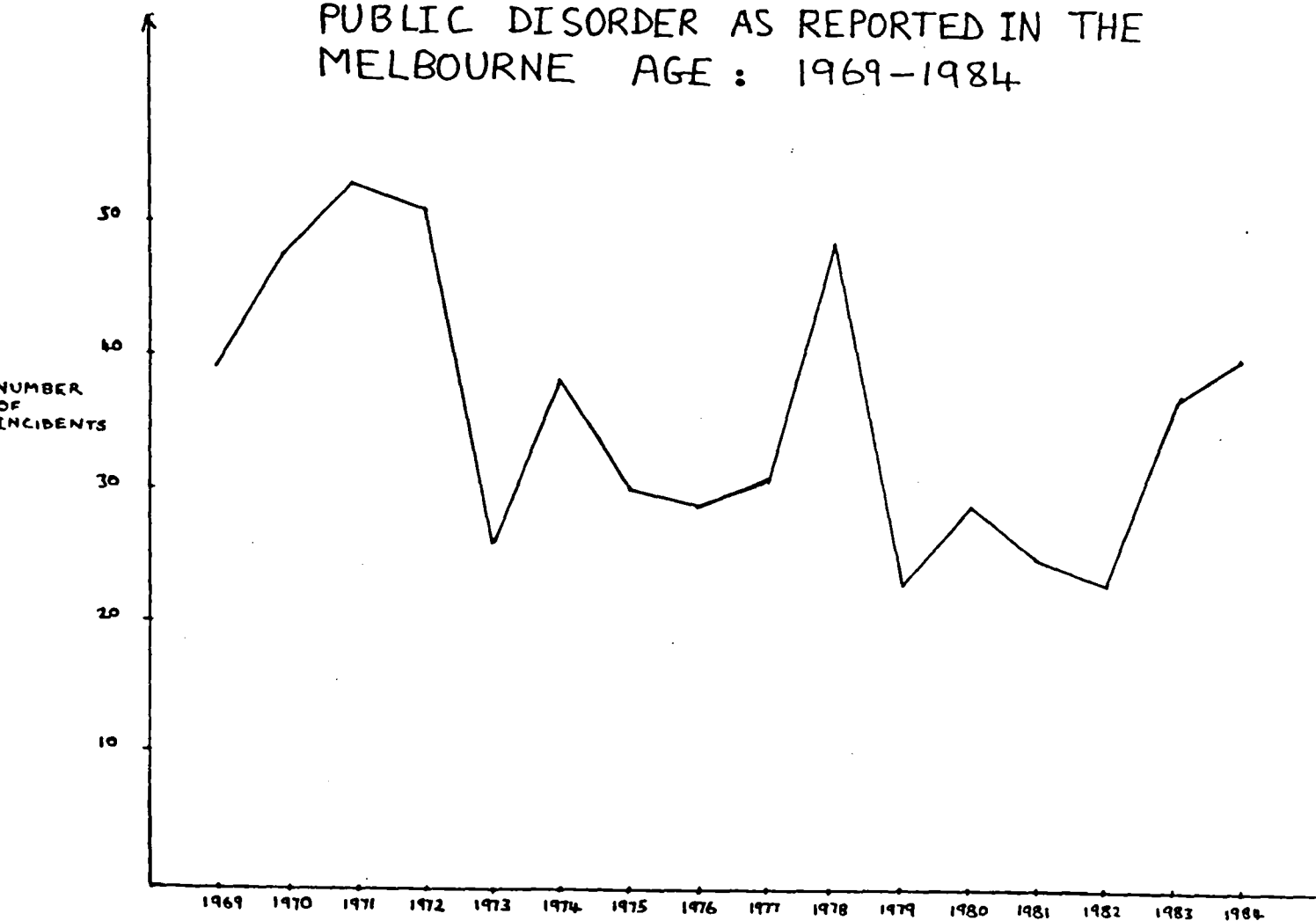


**MAJOR FINDINGS**

**(a) The Recent Evoluton of Public Disorder in Australia**

The first major set of findings in the study concerns the aggregate pattern of public disorder in Australia 1969 and 1984. This pattern is outlined in Table 2. Table 2 represents the aggregate numbers of individual incidents of public disorder recorded each year between 1969 and 1984. This data shows no

TABLE 2 ANNUAL NUMBER OF INCIDENTS OF PUBLIC DISORDER AS REPORTED IN THE MELBOURNE AGE : 1969-1984



secular trend - either for public disorder to expand or to contract over the 16 year period involved. Instead there is a complex fluctuating pattern with peak years such as 1970, 1971, 1972, 1978 and 1984 each recording 40+ incidents, and slack years such as 1973, 1976, 1979, 1980, 1981 and 1982 where less than 30 incidents are recorded. These findings are consistent with overseas studies by Dunning (1986) and by Gurr (1969) which find no evidence of a progressive diminution or of a progressive increase in levels of collective violence or civil strife for the U.K. and the U.S.A. respectively during the 20th century.

There is no evidence here in support of theories or anxieties about the imminent collapse of public order - as we have defined this term. This does not however mean that other measures of disorder, such as patterns of serious crimes or micro-level street conflicts will necessarily point in the same direction. Disorder, as we have pointed out, can be measured in different and not necessarily congruent ways.

Having said this it is equally apparent that public disorder, as defined here, is not in steady decline as predicted by some models of the institutionalisation of conflict. While the historic institutionalisation of conflict through the establishment of the nation-state, representative democracy, and industrial arbitration systems may well channel a good deal of political disorder into institutional procedures, it clearly does not lead to the erosion of all serious disorders. The limits to the institutionalisation of conflict theory are indicated by the periodic upswings in aggregate disorder levels indicated in Table 2.

(b) **The Typology of Public Disorder in Australia**

Further analysis of public disorder trends requires the disaggregation of the measures reported in Table 2 by type of disorder. This strategy is necessary in order to answer the two specific research hypotheses of this study, namely:-

- 1) That rates of public disorder increase with economic hardship and recession, as measured by levels of unemployment.
- 2) That rates of public disorder increase with growing levels of multicultural immigration, especially Asian immigration.

Testing of these two hypotheses requires attention both to the typology and chronology of public disorder. Confirmation of the first hypothesis was seen as dependent on demonstrating an increase in disorders in the 'industrial category', that is involving trade union-employer relations over economic issues, disorders involving the unemployed. In addition increases in the sub-classification of 'political' disorder, specifically involving disorder over government economic policy would also tend to confirm the hypotheses. The timing of such increases would be expected to occur after 1973 with the secular increase in unemployment. If such trends did not occur then this should be taken as disconfirmation of the hypothesis.

Confirmation of the second hypothesis was seen as dependent on demonstrating an increase in disorders in the 'community category', especially in the sub-category dealing with ethnic and racial disorders. In addition increases in the sub-classification of 'political' disorders, specifically involving disorder over government policies on immigration and

multiculturalism especially as they affect Asians. This timing of such increases would be expected to occur after 1975 with the increase in Asian immigration after Government policy changes in the immigration make-up. If such trends did not occur then this should be taken as disconfirmation of the hypothesis.

It should be noted that this analysis of possible causal influences on public disorder is quite rudimentary insofar as it fails to allow for the interaction of changes in the economic with changes in social and cultural arrangements. To be more specific it does not allow for the possibility that changes in economic performance and structure may have indirect effects on inter-cultural relations or vice versa. This is an important problem, but it is one about which we feel consideration can for the moment be suspended while we examine the basic patterns of public disorder by type.

The basic frequency distribution of disorders classified according to the five major categories is outlined in Table 3. This data has at least three major features. Firstly, it clearly demonstrates the over-riding importance of political disorders over all other categories. Secondly it indicates that industrial disorders and sport/leisure disorders represent a comparatively small component of the overall pattern of disorder. Thirdly, it indicates the significance of the other residual category involving student in-house disorders and prison riots as important elements in the national picture.

It is worth pointing out at this stage that these Australian data yield rather different conclusions from the Dunning study of the U.K. Here, in the period up to 1975 for which data is

available, the overwhelming trend of disorder fell into the sport and leisure and community categories, with industry and politics being very small components of the whole. This pattern reflects the importance of soccer crowd violence, youth group conflicts with police, and racial violence in Britain, producing a pattern which is on the face of it rather different from the highly political context of Australian disorder.

**TABLE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC DISORDER INCIDENTS BY MAJOR TYPOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION, BASED ON INCIDENTS REPORTED IN THE MELBOURNE AGE 1969-84**

|   |     |       |
|---|-----|-------|
| Political disorders   | 288 | 50.5% |
| Community disorders   | 129 | 22.6% |
| Other disorders<br>i.e. student intra-<br>institutional disorders and<br>prison riots | 60  | 10.5% |
| Industrial disorders  | 48  | 8.4%  |
| Sport/Leisure disorders   | 43  | 7.5%  |

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Further analysis of the typology of public disorder requires additional data on the distribution of the major categories of public disorder over time. Table 4 provides this data for the period 1969-84.

TABLE 4 ANNUAL DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC DISORDER INCIDENTS BY MAJOR TYPOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION AS REPORTED IN THE MELBOURNE AGE 1969-84

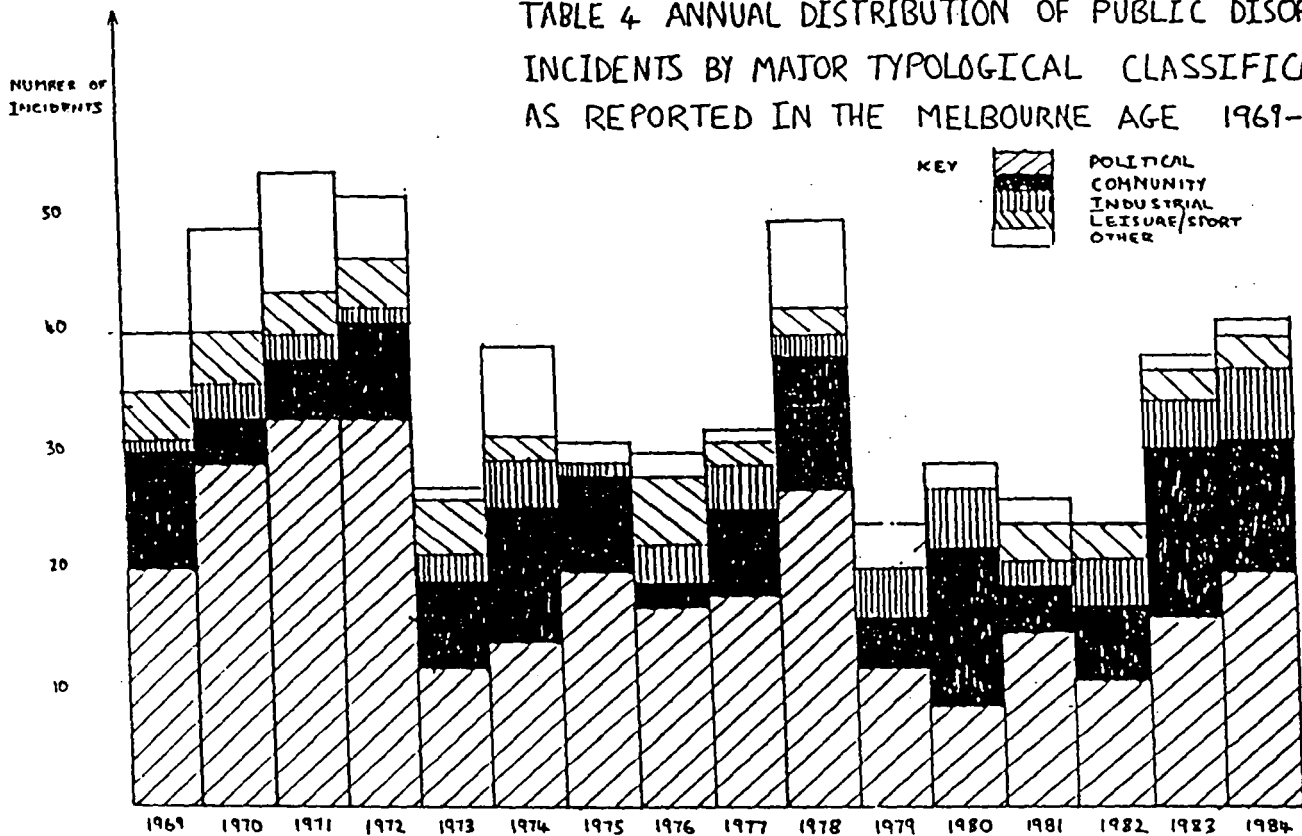


Table 4 reveals that political disorders represent the most numerous category of disorder in all years except 1980, when community disorders represent the dominant category. Political disorders fluctuated between 63.3% and 28.6% of all disorders, while community disorders consistently represented over 15% of all disorders except in 1970, 1971 and 1976, fluctuating between 8.3% and 46.4% of the total figure. The other category fluctuated from zero in 1982 to 21.1% in 1974, being particularly

marked in the early seventies period of student unrest. Industrial disorders, fluctuated between 2.6% and 17.9% of the whole being slightly more prominent since 1979 than before, but never on a massive scale. Sport and leisure incidents were significant in 1973 and 1976 respectively reaching around 20% of the whole, but fluctuated between zero in 1975, 1979 and 1980 and 20.7% in 1976.

From this mass of detail, there are no dramatic relative changes in the importance of the major categories. There are nonetheless some noteworthy changes over time, which can be picked up in Table 5.

**TABLE 5: NUMBERS OF DISORDERLY INCIDENTS BY MAJOR CATEGORY 1969-75 AND 1976-84 AS REPORTED IN THE MELBOURNE AGE**

|                    | Political         | Community       | Sport/Leisure   | Industrial      | Other           |
|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1969-75<br>(7 yrs) | 142<br>av. 20.3pa | 53<br>av. 7.6pa | 22<br>av. 3.1pa | 14<br>av. 2.0pa | 44<br>av. 6.3pa |
| 1976-84<br>(8 yrs) | 146<br>av. 18.3pa | 76<br>av. 9.5pa | 21<br>av. 2.6pa | 34<br>av. 4.3pa | 18<br>av. 2.3pa |

First of all there is an increase in the importance of community and industrial based disorder in the years after 1975 compared with the years before. There is similarly a decline in the 'other' category, mainly explained by the decline in student activism. In all of this the predominance of the political category remains clear-cut.

The overall patterns reflected in Tables 3, 4 and 5 do not, in and of themselves point to a clear verdict on the two research hypotheses under consideration in this study. The overwhelming 'political' emphasis of our Australian data, seems to suggest that overt industrial and community disorders are of limited significance - though the greater absolute scale of community disorder compared with industrial disorder is certainly noteworthy. On the other hand, the growing significance of both community and industrial disorder since 1976 is at the very least consistent with the two hypotheses, and requires further analysis. It is at this point necessary to dig deeper, by disaggregating the general typology classifications into more precise and usable sub-categories, and to bring to bear other relevant data.

Taking the 'economic' hypothesis first, it is clear that economic recession, and increased unemployment levels since 1973 far in excess of the typical post-war levels of 1-2% has not resulted in a massive explosion of industrial disorder. Given the scale of Government intervention in the economy in general and the labour market in particular, it is important to consider the additional possibility that economic and industrial unrest has been transposed into the political domain. In other words aggressive industrial conflicts at the workplace may have become less important than political demonstrations and challenges over Government economic policy issues.

Given this possibility, it is important to add political disorder over economic policies affecting the labour market to the disorder levels, directly experienced in industry. If the



288 cases of political disorder, recorded here, are disaggregated, however comparatively few would appear to fit into the economic policy/labour market category. Having discounted the large numbers of political disorders associated with issues such as the Vietnam war, civil liberties protests, womens issues and uranium and anti-war protests, and so forth we are left with a maximum of 33 - i.e. less than 12% connected with demonstrations over domestic public policy issues not included elsewhere. If all these were related to economic policy/labour market issues it would lift the aggregate 'industrial figure' from 48 to 81. This new total would still represent only 14.2% or around one-seventh of all disorders. This measure would however be too high in that a number of the policy issues involved in disorders were not connected with economic policy as it affects labour markets.

To discount the economic hypotheses entirely, on this basis would however be premature. In the first place there remains the increase in industrial discontent since 1976 to explain. Secondly it is apparent that the skewing of the data to Victoria may have produced an under-counting of the scale of industrial disorders.

Table 6 outlines the distribution of industrial disorder by State/Territory. From this data it is apparent that states such as Western Australia and New South Wales have a rather higher rate of recorded industrial disorder than Victoria. The skewing of the national data to Victoria therefore leaves a good deal of suspicion that the scale of industrial disorder has been under-counted. The total absence of reported disorder in Queensland is

a particularly graphic example of the limitations of the data base, given what is known from other sources about serious disputes during this period. It would clearly be preferable then to have a more adequate national data base before entirely writing off the economic hypothesis.

**TABLE 6: DISTRIBUTION OF INDUSTRIAL DISORDER WITHIN EACH STATE/TERRITORY AS REPORTED**

|          | Ind. disorder cases | % of all State/Territory cases |
|----------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| A.C.T.   | 5                   | 14.7                           |
| N.S.W.   | 14                  | 13.7                           |
| N.T.     | -                   | -                              |
| QLD      | -                   | -                              |
| S.A.     | 3                   | 11.1                           |
| TAS      | -                   | -                              |
| VIC      | 20                  | 6.5                            |
| W.A.     | 6                   | 22.2                           |
| NATIONAL | 48                  | 8.4                            |

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Beyond this particular line of argument, there is a further dimension to the economic hypothesis, namely the more general proposition that increased unemployment may have a more diffuse impact on levels of public disorder impacting not only on industrial relations and political demonstrations but also on community relations between ethnic groups and on leisure/sport encounters where young people, particularly prone to unemployment clash with police.

This might be called the diffuse economic hypothesis on public order, as distinct from the focussed economic hypothesis discussed earlier.

One way of looking at the diffuse version of the hypothesis would be to look for connections between increased unemployment and general increases in public disorder. Table 7 matches aggregate numbers of unemployed against absolute numbers of reported disorders for the period 1969-84. If we test the hypothesis that the number of reported incidents varies according to the level of unemployment using this data, the hypothesis is NOT confirmed. No statistically significant relationship was found between the number of reported incidents and the unemployment rate. A simple regression analysis of this relationship produces an R2 of 0.12.

**TABLE 7: NATIONAL PATTERNS OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND LEVELS OF PUBLIC DISORDER REPORTED IN THE MELBOURNE AGE 1969-84**

| Year | Unemployment Rate | Number of Reported Incidents |
|------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| 1969 | 1.5%              | 39                           |
| 1970 | 1.4%              | 48                           |
| 1971 | 1.7%              | 53                           |
| 1972 | 2.5%              | 51                           |
| 1973 | 1.8%              | 26                           |
| 1974 | 2.3%              | 38                           |
| 1975 | 4.5%              | 30                           |
| 1976 | 4.7%              | 29                           |
| 1977 | 5.7%              | 31                           |
| 1978 | 6.2%              | 49                           |
| 1979 | 5.8%              | 23                           |
| 1980 | 5.9%              | 28                           |
| 1981 | 5.6%              | 25                           |
| 1982 | 6.7%              | 23                           |
| 1983 | 9.8%              | 36                           |
| 1984 | 8.5%              | 40                           |

We now turn to the second hypothesis concerning the possible relationship between multicultural immigration and increased levels of public disorder. Has the onset of Asian immigration in the nineteen-seventies, and the consequent growth of a visible Asian presence in most major Australian cities led to a discernible increase in public disorder?

Before we look at the data collected in this survey, it should be emphasised that the measures of disorder outlined here, refer to incidents involving 10 or more people. As such they may not pick up certain serious small scale conflicts that may affect immigrants. They would not for example pick up the British patterns of arson, attacks on homes, shops and mosques experienced by Asian immigrants on a considerable scale in the nineteen-seventies (Home Office, 1981).

If we take the aggregate data outlined in Tables 5, 6 and 7, there is no very conclusive evidence of a sharp upswing in public disorder connected with multicultural immigration. For the hypothesis to be confirmed, one would expect a significant upward shift in community disorder. Table 7 indicates a significant upswing of this kind between 1976 and 1984. Nonetheless community disorder still represents only around one quarter of total disorder reported for the period 1976-84, and only 22.5% of disorder over the period 1969-84 as a whole - see Table 5 and 6. In addition, disorder connected with multicultural immigration, is only one of a number of sub-types of community disorder and so the aggregate data do not tell us very much. If we disaggregate the general typological categories, we might expect to pick up disorders connected with multicultural immigration in at least

two ways. The first involves that sub-set of community disorders involving ethnic and racial disorders - but excluding aboriginals. The second involves that sub-set of political disorders involving the same kinds of ethnic and racial conflicts.

Using the three-digit coding classifications of type of disorder, together with a separate classification of participants ethnicity, we arrive at the following possibly surprising results. First, of the 129 recorded incidents of community disorder, only 11 or 9% involved disorders within or between ethnic communities. This compares with 26 incidents of disorders involving aborigines, and 36 involving Xmas Eve, New Year's Eve and other holiday-based incidents involving conflicts between young people and police. These comparisons help to get the relative scale of community disorders affecting ethnic groups into perspective. The relatively modest scale of such disorders remains, even if we add in all 12 of the soccer crowd disturbances - usually an expression of ethnic conflict - though classified here as a sub-set of the leisure/sport category.

Secondly, of the 288 political disorders, 32 or nearly 12% involved the participation of ethnic groups in disorders relating to events outside Australia, in such places as Yugoslavia, the Middle East and Indo-China. Such events are important, but they are not in and of themselves evidence of the dislocating effect of multicultural immigration on public order. It is also interesting that the number of such events outnumbered the number of community disorders involving ethnic groups.

Overall then we have at most 11 community incidents, 12 leisure/sport incidents and 32 political incidents, which qualify as potential measures of public disorder related in the broadest sense to multicultural immigration. What is significant about these numbers is not their absolute values, which represent only that fraction of the national picture reported in The Age. Rather it is the relative scale of this sub-set of 55 incidents or around 10% of total disorder that is significant here. This proportion clearly does not support the idea of a massive upswing of overt conflict engendered by multicultural policies, though this is not to say that covert prejudice and hostility may not be of far wider significance.

Finally it is important to attempt some measure of the specific involvement of Asians within these various episodes of public disorder. Of the reported incidents in the categories 'political' and 'community' already discussed, only 6 involved Asian, in the sense of those with a background in South East/East/and Southern Asia, while another 6 involved those from a Middle Eastern background. Around 12 out of the 55 incidents already identified as being germane to immigration - related disorder, involved Asian or Middle Eastern groups, that is less than one quarter of incidents in this category.

The conclusion to be drawn from this data is that there is no strong evidence in support of the hypothesis that multicultural and especially Asian immigration is creating major problems of public disorder in Australia. There have been some incidents that indicate areas of conflict, but these are as much concerned with events outside Australia as within it. These findings apply

even though the Blainey debate on Asian immigration began in 1984 - the last year surveyed here. There is no hard evidence that this debate was a response to increases in overt public disorder in ethnic relations or that it provoked such disorder - at least in the short-term. 1983 and 1984 did it is true see a significant increase in reported rates of public disorder from the levels of 1979-82 (inclusive), but the main upswings were concentrated in the Xmas/New Year/holiday disturbances sub-category of community disorder and in the 'conservation movement' sub-category of political disorder.

#### **SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AFFECTING THE OBSERVED PATTERNS OF REPORTED DISORDER**

The two research hypotheses, when examined against the Melbourne Age data-base do not appear to explain the observed patterns of disorder. This throws doubt, therefore on the significance of economic recession and multicultural immigration as causes of public disorder in contemporary Australia. How then is the pattern of public disorder to be explained? There are I think two major lines of interpretation which look more promising.

The first theory, that of Charles Tilly, addresses the primarily 'political' characteristics of the reported disorders (see especially Tilly, 1969). Tilly's argument is that collective violence and public disorder are a normal part of social life. This does not mean that they are desirable or inevitable in every case. The normality of some measure of public disorder is rather connected with constant shifts in the

struggle for power. While many aspects of this struggle occur institutionally in a peaceful and orderly manner, there are moments and situations in which disorder and collective violence break out. To explain these "we do not need a stifled universal instinct of aggression", according to Tilly. Nor need we search for pathological institutions or individuals. Rather the normal process by which groups try "to seize hold, or realign the levels of power" regularly generates extra-institutional conflict. The moments of greatest significance in this respect are those where "groups acquire or lose membership in the political community", that is struggles for access to rights and rewards, or struggles over exclusion from rights and rewards.

Tilly's theory, developed in the first instance to explain patterns of collective violence in 19th century Europe, does not deny the salience of processes such as industrialisation and urbanisation to the forms taken by public disorder. What he does dispute is that material deprivation, or cultural disorganisation can be regarded as sufficient causes of collective violence in any direct manner. Wealthy nations such as the United States in the nineteen-sixties can be the scene of domestic turmoil, while it is not generally the most deprived or culturally rootless who are participants in disorder. What is at stake is conflict over rights of access to power.

This essentially 'political' understanding of collective violence is highly germane to the present study of public disorder. As we have noted, over 50% of the 570 separate incidents reported here can be classified as overtly political forms of disorder. Theories of economic deprivation have little



purchase on the pattern of disorder, while theories of cultural disorganisation and conflict linked with multicultural immigration seem equally weak.

Further support of Tilly's argument can be gained from a closer examination of the most numerous sub-categories represented in the patterns of disorder. In Table 8, the ten numerically largest disorder sub-categories are outlined in rank order.

**TABLE 8: AGGREGATE NUMBERS OF PUBLIC DISORDER INCIDENTS WITHIN THE TEN MOST NUMEROUS SUB-CATEGORIES, BASED ON REPORTS IN THE MELBOURNE AGE 1969-84**

| No. of Incidents | Type of Incident  |
|------------------|---|
| 66               | Vietnam war protests (including anti-conscription)                    |
| 36               | Xmas/New Year's Eve/Holiday disturbances                              |
| 33               | General disorders associated with domestic political issues           |
| 32               | Trade union/worker demonstrations over economic issues                |
| 28               | Student protests over institutional issues                            |
| 27               | Prison riots  |
| 22               | Disorders associated with ethnic groups over events outside Australia |
| 19               | Conservation issues   |
| 18               | Anti-uranium/anti-war/anti-biological warfare                         |

While there is a significant measure of heterogeneity in this list, it is very striking that so many of the leading categories are essentially concerned with political and extensions of citizenship rights, and with attempts to influence power in favour of groups hitherto politically weak, such as women, students, anti war and pro-peace campaigners and conservation

groups. Although trade union worker conflicts are represented here it is striking how limited their significance is in the overall pattern of disorder. This in turn seems to reflect one area where the institutionalisation of conflict and the creation of workable normative procedures of arbitration over the years has had some effect. While increased unemployment has brought virtually no direct effects on levels of disorder, the contrasting struggle for extension of political and social rights has contributed far more to disorderliness.

Tilly's argument is an insightful one, for these reasons, though it does have some inadequacies. In the first place it does not explain in any direct or clear-cut way the significant levels of community-based disorders associated with disturbances around Christmas Eve/New Year's Eve and holidays. These might perhaps be explained through some notion of youth deprivation and aggression, in response to exclusion from the political community. This type of explanation would not, however, account for the largely hedonistic context of these disputes or their largely apolitical character. Since youth struggles have achieved a far higher level of political identity in parts of continental Europe, it is difficult to categorise most of the Australian examples as political in any sense other than conflicts over rights to the hedonistic use of public places.

Secondly Tilly's argument is directed more to the context of industrialisation, than to post-industrial society. In this way it does not engage with the sociological theories of new social movements developed by writers like Agnes Heller, (Feher and Heller, 1984), Alan Touraine (1981) and Andre Gorz (1982). In

particular, Tilly does not consider whether there are particular distinctive characteristics to contemporary political disorders, associated with peace movements, womens movements, conservation movements, student movements and so on.

One of the key features of the theories of new social movements which I take as the second promising line of interpretation is the displacement of social class as the key feature of conflict, disorder and violence. Gorz bids farewell to the working class as the key social movement at the forefront of political struggle and social change, and looks instead to non-class struggles of non-producers. Heller and Feher speak of a shift from Red to Green, by which they mean a symbolic shift from the politics of socialism and movements geared to capture state power, towards movements which emphasise the values of life, freedom and personal growth.

Much of the pattern of Australian public disorder - especially that contained in the category of political disorder - appears to fit this notion of a shift in the characteristics of groups struggling for rights to power and influence within the political community. The data reviewed here are not dominated by labour movements but by struggles for political access and policy changes on behalf of a far wider range of movements - movements which tend to transcend cleavages of class.

Why then should this type of new social movement engender public disorder and collective violence? Cannot such demands be institutionalised within the political system? Neither line of interpretation altogether answers these questions.

In one sense of course the institutionalisation process is occurring concurrently with episodes of disorder, to the extent that political parties and governments embody new demands into their programmes. Continuing episodes of disorder and collective violence are nonetheless to be expected for two reasons. The first emphasised by Tilly is that struggles by new political groupings generate measures of disorder conflict as they meet the resistance of existing groups with their own values and interests. This has occurred, albeit on a small scale in conflicts between ethnic communities, and between supporters and opponents of abortion. More commonly, however disorder arises to the extent that the police perceive public protests and demonstrations as overtly or covertly disorderly. The police may at times find themselves responding to disorder originating in conflicts between two or more other groups. On many other occasions, however, they act as parties to disorder themselves, defining the actions of another group as threatening to public order in general - and hence disorderly.

How far such perceptions are influenced by the pressure of outside political or economic interests is a complex matter that requires specific attention in each individual case. Police action is however linked not merely to interest group pressure, but also to the preservation of normative order, reflected in the rule of law. Within the contemporary world where a plurality of competing values exist, this normative function - otherwise known as keeping the peace - requires the exercise of police surveillance and control over public space to the extent that the

actions of particular groups may threaten the rights of others. In exercising this function, there is clearly much scope for low-grade frictional moments of disorder in relations between police and protests, demonstrations or crowds occupying public space.

To sum up, public disorder may be expected to persist not only because new political movements may threaten existing and entrenched interests, but in addition as a result of the active pursuit by the police of normative order in the public domain. This kind of two-pronged explanation, it seems to me helps to explain both the participation of new social movements in disorder, but also the involvement of disorderly revellers, drunken celebrants of public holidays and youth sub-cultures in conflictual relations with the police. It is doubtful however that either category will disappear during the course of social evolution. This is because neither category of disorder can be completely institutionalised into orderly channels, unless complete value consensus is attained. Such an unlikely consensus would be required moreover both in the structure of power-holding in the political arena, and in the use and enjoyment of public space by society in general. If we are correct in assuming such developments are unlikely then the future demands on police to preserve public order will not diminish significantly even though the composition of disorderly incidents may be subject to variation, and new patterns of institutionalisation may be implemented.

## PUBLIC DISORDER AND THE ROLE OF THE POLICE

Police perceptions and operational strategies are clearly a major variable in the analysis of public disorder. As was noted at the outset, this study is premised on an administrative definition of public disorder, in which the perceptions of those responsible for keeping the peace and law-enforcement, serve to distinguish between order and disorder. The twin challenges of peace-keeping and law-enforcement set challenges to policing policy in both a reactive and a pro-active capacity. For police the task is not merely to react to disorder in a way that restores public peace and enforces the criminal law, but also to operate pro-active policies that reduce the likelihood of overt disorder breaking out in the first place. Public disorder policing policies are not then simply a matter of the most effective response to public disorder, since general policing policies exert their own influence, among other variables on the presence or absence of disorder.

This study, with its emphasis on overt disorder, is not designed in such a way as to compare the efficacy of various pro-active policing policies, such as community policing. This would require an in-depth historical case-study design like that presented in the Bathurst study (Cuneen et al, 1986). The data collected in the present study by contrast is limited to the characteristics of individual episodes of disorder. As such its implications for policing policy focus in the main on the challenge faced by police in reacting either to pre-existing disorder or to crowd behaviour in public places which is construed as threatening or likely to become disorderly. Within

this limited focus, a number of points of relevance to policing policy emerge.

In the first place, Australian police seem unlikely, on the face of the data presented here, to be faced with a secular uprising in aggregate rates of disorder. Neither heightened unemployment nor the increase in multicultural immigration, seems to bring with it an upswing in disorder. However, it is equally the case that the heavily political character of disorderly events, suggests that disorder is indeed, as Charles Tilly puts it, a normal part of the political process within a democratic society. While Australia is not faced with radical challenges to the existing order on the part of labour movements or ethnic groups, there are other newer social movements around in the areas of anti-war protests, conservation and feminism, whose behaviour is perceived by police to challenge or threaten public order. Public disorder, in other words will not go away.

Secondly, the scale and intensity of Australian public disorder does not appear as violent, insurgent and aggressive, in the main, as that of recent British riots, or the unrest experienced by the United States in the nineteen-sixties. As we have already noted of the 570 incidents reported here, only 33% reported personal injuries to participants and 42% property damage, while nearly 30% of incidents involved no arrest at all, and a further 20% five arrests or less. The typical Australian incident of public disorder is without fatality.

The size of individual public disorders varied considerably from the minimum cut-off point of 10 to well over 1,000. In the bare majority of cases (52%) where the number of participants is

clear - over 100 participants were involved. In 95% of cases however disorders lasted only one or two days - the main exceptions being anti-uranium demonstrations - such as Roxby Downs - which averaged 7.6 days, and conservation disputes which averaged 3.5 days. These siege-like episodes contrast markedly with the majority of one-day disorderly demonstrations or holiday leisure-based riots. In addition the number of persons typically involved in political disorders tended to be larger than those involved in most community, sport/leisure and industrial disorders.

Since disorders vary so considerably in size of participants it is not surprising that the scale of police interventions vary themselves. Precise figures of police involved were obtained in only 38% of all incidents, suggesting that newspaper-based data is not especially useful as a source of information on this area. Nonetheless of these 38% of incidents (N=219), 113 or 52% involved 50 or more police, and 37 or 17% involved over 200 police. Disorders on this scale clearly represent a major and very costly deployment of personnel.

The pattern of arrest data is also of some interest. Data on arrests is available for around 90% of all incidents - that is 516 out of 570 cases of disorder. Around one-third of these (172 out of 516) involved no arrests at all, while further one-third of cases (174 out of 516) involved between 1 and 10 arrests. These data are not easy to interpret. Low arrest levels could equally be evidence that police succeed in policing threats to disorder by containment leaving little space for criminal behaviour, or alternatively, they could be seen as



evidence of the orderliness of many public gatherings in spite of police perceptions to the contrary. Without reviewing more detailed case studies it is not easy to resolve this element of ambiguity.

At the other end of the spectrum, mass arrests of over 100 or more participants occurred in only 30 incidents, or 6% of the total. This data may be analysed by disaggregating arrest patterns into different categories of disorder. Table 9 indicates the mean number of arrests for those categories of disorder which experienced the highest arrest figures.

**TABLE 9: MEAN NUMBERS OF ARRESTS BY SPECIFIC TYPES OF DISORDER AS REPORTED IN THE MELBOURNE AGE 1969-84**

| Type of Disorder                                | No. of Cases | Mean number of arrests |
|---|--------------|------------------------|
| Civil liberties protests                        | 16           | 102.9                  |
| Motorbike/car event riots                       | 8            | 87.3                   |
| Conservation disorders                          | 19           | 72.1                   |
| anti-uranium/anti-war protests                  | 18           | 48.6                   |
| Gay rights                                      | 4            | 43.2                   |
| Xmas/New Year/Holiday disturbances              | 32           | 43.0                   |
| Anti apartheid                                  | 15           | 41.3                   |
| Political demonstrations over aboriginal issues | 14           | 34.9                   |

It would be tempting to seek out a purely ideological explanation of these arrest patterns, along the lines of police hostility to radical social movements leading to high arrest rates. Such an explanation would however be premature, and I believe, largely mistaken. Before reaching such a judgement

account needs to be taken of the scale, duration, and strategic characteristics of the disorders in question. As far as scale is concerned, the types of disorder featured in Table 9 are generally large, with numbers of participants typically ranging from several hundreds into the thousands. Two particular categories as we have already seen - namely anti-uranium demonstrations and conservation disputes - typically last for between 3-10 days. These characteristics make it more likely that such disorders will generally involve larger than average arrest patterns.

Beyond this considerable emphasis must be placed on the typical strategic patterns of the political/civil liberty/civil disobedience disorder. This often takes the form of non-violent obstruction or trespass by significant numbers of protestors often in a seige-like encounter with police. Participants in such disorders often do not take defensive action against arrest, relying on the moral affect of arrest in publicising the cause in question. Arrests in this context are, from a police operations point of view, easier to execute and hence arrest numbers will tend to be larger than in disorder where individuals actively seek to evade arrest.

Having said this, it is nonetheless clear that operational policing policies are a variable in their own right in the pattern of arrest-data. The Bathurst study clearly shows that different strategies have been used in policing the bike-race crowds over the years. These vary in objectives from saturation policing to achieve maximum control, with high levels of arrests as a likely concomitant, and more cautious policies of

containment with a lower police profile, and a more discretionary approach to balancing public order with law-enforcement objectives. Such insights are however dependent on a detailed case study methodology not available in the present study.

What the present study does show is the relative presence of special tactical support/riot control personnel within the overall pattern of disorder. In the 353 cases for which type of police intervention is relatively clear, the vast majority - i.e. 221 out of 353 cases or 65% - involved police on foot without overt special squad participation. Only 29 cases or around 8% of disorders saw special squad involvement. This lower figure is in part explained by the comparatively recent development of special squad facilities, such as the New South Wales Tactical Response Group, established in 1983.

There is insufficient data here to address Mark Findlay's comments on the shift to a more para-military style of policing. While it is clear that the formation of special squads does represent a shift towards a greater capability in this direction, it is not by any means clear from this data that such squads are over-used in inappropriate situations. It would appear that the majority of disorderly incidents continue to be policed in a routine way making use of general police facilities able to cope with small-scale short-duration disorders. Routine resources would not however appear to be able to handle the larger-scale longer-duration disorders (i.e. over 500 participants, and usually over more than a single day), nor those which occur in remote facilities or rural areas. These may represent a minority of cases of disorder and should not be exaggerated in

their typicality. They tend nonetheless to be of considerable public significance, where they involve issues of political principle and civil liberties, or whether they dramatise public fears of social order and collapse of the social fabric. It is difficult to see how such non-routine challenges could be effectively handled without some involvement by special squads with training in a range of crowd control and physical fitness skills.

There remains the question nonetheless of whether special squads tend to be used in a para-military fashion, so as to override the advantages gained through policing by consent and compliance. Such questions are difficult to resolve because they involve considerations of political philosophy as much as issues of fact concerning the relative merits of different policing strategies. The experience in Australia and overseas suggests that community policing is not a panacea for dealing with incipient public disorder, but one of a range of policies which may work pro-actively in some places for varying periods of time. The limits on pro-active policing policies are set largely by factors outside police control such as underlying social and political grievances, and the perceived deficiencies of remedial Government policies. While saturation para-military policing has been charged with failure at Bathurst (Cuneen et al., 1986) and Brixton (Scarman, 1982), it is not clear that alternative policies tend to succeed in securing public order and law enforcement. In some contexts the underlying social difficulties may be too sizeable for any policing policy to be continually successful. In other cases there may be a tension between public

pressures for a greater degree of law enforcement, demanding a high police profile - and sensitive areas of community relations which favour low profile policing to achieve public order preservation.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

1. Contemporary Australia is neither faced with a massive upswing in public disorder nor with the completely successful institutionalisation of conflict.
2. There is no hard evidence that either high unemployment or multicultural immigration is contributing significantly to levels of public disorder.
3. The most widespread category of disorder between 1969 and 1984 involved political considerations, including Vietnam war protests, general demonstrations over domestic political issues, demonstrations by ethnic groups over events outside Australia, conservation battles, and anti-uranium and anti-war demonstrations. The political character of so much of the disorder suggests that disorder may be a normal and regular part of the political process.
4. Newspaper data-bases are a valid methodology for public disorder research, offering data that is often unavailable from other sources. They are useful in developing typologies of disorder, profiles of typical scale and duration, and broad surveys of police intervention. They do not provide the historical case study data necessary to understand detailed origins, and to the assessment of different policing policies. They are also time-consuming to execute.

5. Public disorder is a highly heterogenous matter, with disorders varying considerably in type, scale, duration and the challenges they pose to police. These differences need to be accurately addressed in both the analysis of disorder and the determination of optimum policing problems.

6. There is no evidence of a massive shift to para-military policing of public disorder in Australia. The majority of relatively small-scale disorders are handled with routine resources. On the other hand the scale and challenge of certain political types of disorder, demands non-routine policing resources and would appear to justify the existence of special squads with public disorder responsibilities.

7. There is need for an extension of the present data-base for the period 1985-87 to bring it up to date with the most recent trends in disorder and policing strategy. There is also need for a permanent data-base on a national scale to be maintained as an ongoing commitment.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the Criminology Research Council provide the sum of \$4000 to the Flinders team to complete the public disorder data-base for the years 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1988 by the end of 1988.

2. That the National Police Research Unit be approached to utilise the survey methodology adopted by the Flinders team to compile an ongoing data-base for the use of Australian police forces - including annual reports, up-dates, and recommendations to forces.

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