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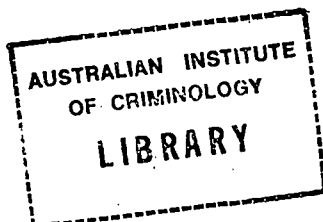
HABITAT AND CRIME

by

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November 1975

Introduction

Human ecology moulds human behaviour as inexorably as human behaviour creates or destroys the environment. This inter-relationship is implicit in Recommendation 4 of the Action Plan for the Human Environment drawn up by the UN Conference held in Stockholm from 5-16 June 1972:-

"(viii) Physical, mental and social effects of stresses created by living and working conditions in human settlements, particularly urban conglomerations"

In the light of work already done on the possibilities of overcrowding increasing or centralising the amount of human aggression, or the effects of building design on the community control of crime, and on the facilities for crime and the complications for its detection represented by the improved infrastructures of roads, transportation generally, investments in commercial enterprises (like supermarkets) and the anonymity of city life, it is indeed remarkable that neither at Stockholm nor in some of the reports being prepared for the Habitat meeting at Vancouver in 1976 is the related issue of crime even mentioned. Many social problems created by economic and physical development, by the way in which attention has been more concentrated on material gain than on human need, are part of the drive for a better environment: but the issue of crime is not even mentioned.

Of course crime has many definitions and unlike air and water pollution it is not as objectively measurable or perhaps as unequivocally undesirable. Yet, despite cultural variations in its significance there seems to be a common core of human behaviour which no society ever really tolerates - like murder, robbery with violence, rape, aggravated theft etc: these may sometimes be dealt with differently by different societies - but they are not usually permissible. When they get out of hand they can change and sometimes completely transform the nature of society. There are concentrations of delinquency in certain housing areas, denudations of centres too

unsafe for anyone with possessions or a respect for life, losses in property values, rises in insurance rates and whole new industries of security guards and protective devices which affect incomes, activities and styles of life generally.

The Level of Safety

There is a great need to relate planning and building, settling and investments generally to the requirements of people and to protect them from pollution, accumulations of waste, and the choking effects of traffic: but people have a no less urgent need for a minimum level of safety, a protection from the dangers after dark, a safeguard against exploitation and extortion. Leisure facilities which cannot be enjoyed are hardly worth the building, homes which have to be barricaded become prisons for the elderly and infirm in some of the large cities, unpolluted air and water which can only be enjoyed by the payment of protection money to the unscrupulous are of little benefit. The most beautifully designed human settlements with every accommodation for human needs can become jungles of unusable amenities if adequate thought is not given in advance, to the human propensity for inhumanity, vandalism, exploitation and even violence.

Criminogenic Planning

Planning, development, investments, contracts, credits, expenditure and all the elements of industrialisation, environmental protection, urban growth and urban renewal mean opportunities for corruption, sharp practice, dispossession and outright aggression. For some reason it has been assumed that we always provide amenities for people who are uniformly good, law abiding and reasonable - or that the majority of people are so. Yet, year by year, the amounts which "developed" and "advanced" societies are having to spend on the effects of thoughtless, unreasonable, illegal and criminal activities are increasing and there is evidence that reported crime may be only a fraction of the crime being committed. There are ways in which even the

the most respectable people at least "bend" the laws. The vast sums spent and the extensive diversions of human resources to crime control are apparently ignored when improved human societies and human settlements are proposed and implemented. Crime becomes more obviously and directly relevant however when pollution itself is made illegal and the attention of the law is shifted from conventional offences to the outlawing of environmental ravages. Once the flora and fauna were protected by the law as royal or private prerogatives: now they are being protected by many countries for their own sake and to ensure their enjoyment by people everywhere. Yet as is obvious where parks and recreation grounds are dangerous it is not sufficient to make them available to all. They have to be made safe and available.

The Habitat and Crime

The 1972 Stockholm Conference was said to be "launching a new liberation movement to free men from the threat of their thralldom to environmental perils of their own making. The movement could succeed only if there was a new commitment to liberation from the destructive forces of mass poverty, racial prejudice, economic injustice and the technologies of modern warfare. Mankind's whole work and dedication must be towards the ideal of a peaceful, habitable and just planet. The Conference could not deal with all the ills of the world but if it successfully accomplished the important work before it, it would establish a new and more hopeful basis for resolving the seemingly intractable problems that divided mankind" (Chap VIII Res. 34,35).

The assumption implicit here is that problems like crime will be dealt with in the process of dealing with the other major problems. But this is to repeat the error of past approaches to developing newer and better societies. The prospects for a "peaceful habitable and just planet" have become bleaker recently as political groups have escalated the use of crime as a means to an end, as international terrorism has developed, as hijackings

have held whole nations to ransom, as political and conventional kidnappings have become mixed in Latin America, as uncontrolled crime has instigated political change in Africa, as Europe has been ravaged by violence and as the world has been "ripped off" by the extra-legal manoeuvrings of the globally capitalistic multi-national corporations or the questionable manipulations in inflating prices and cornering scarce resources of energy supply. The evidence is growing that society and its future can be moulded by crime which, like treason, if successful, may never, in future, be known by its own name. The fact that crime can be successful, that hijacking and kidnapping have been so efficient, that the inter-dependency of a modern technological society makes it vulnerable to the most ruthless, the most barbaric, the most unscrupulous have made it attractive as a weapon, as a device, as an instrument for achieving the most unworthy as well as the most idealistic objectives. Perhaps it did not matter if some of the fighting was against the rules - as long as political or economic enemies were pitted in a struggle for supremacy. But when advantage is sought via indiscriminate bombings, attacks on innocent people and the use of hostages, the dimensions have changed: and the very desire of humanity for peace and quiet is being exploited to total distortion. It has long been clear from politics, both national and international, that peace can be bought at too high a price - or may not be peace at all if it merely buys time.

Habitability is subject to similar limitations. In Singapore recently, people moving into new housing areas sometimes found themselves in the grip of a local crime syndicate which controlled all contractors and without paying to which they could not have locks fitted, window frames fixed or goods delivered. In New York the deterioration of central areas, the abandoning of housing blocks and the rise of a vast protection industry indicate that habitation means more than health, sanitation and leisure. It also means safety - public safety.

In terms no less strong it can be asserted that a "just planet" is going to be impossible without the use of law, convention and regulation to control racial prejudice, economic injustice - and that the other way of expressing such a preoccupation is the prevention and control of crime. Even references to modern warfare, interpreted in the light of recent experience must apply to internal types of warfare as well as the more greatly feared international conflagrations. No society of any ideology or political slant can achieve a measure of happiness and contentment for the mass of its people if they are exposed to the use of fearful weapons by protagonists of both majority and minority points of view. A process as simple as the control of firearms may be necessary to reduce rates of homicide and to prevent a revolver giving illusions of power to the inadequate and disturbed and spreading alarm and fear to large sections of the people.

The Measures Necessary

Of course, dealing with the injustice and inequalities which cause very much crime is a large part of the preventative approach to the problem. It is not the whole however. Unfortunately the evidence is that crime thrives even in the most equal and affluent climates. Nor is the prevention and control of crime simply a matter of giving adequate attention in planning and developing to the requirements of the police, the courts or the correctional services. If it means anything the prevention of crime means beginning with child care, education, health, welfare and physical conditions - and only then providing the mopping up operations of the criminal justice services like the police courts and corrections.

There is a need to concentrate first upon general education and research to identify the ways in which crime - or perhaps certain types of crime may be prevented. Methods of child care and its relationship to future behaviour are badly needed at a time when the character of the traditional home is undergoing fundamental change. The underlying conflict of

education for change and education for conformity in any society needs to be spelled out and subjected to careful investigation to discover how many of society's modern problems are bred and nurtured in the classrooms. Perhaps the very meaning of education is apposite to the development of the peaceful, habitable and just society which must be the central objective of all work on the human environment. Mental health and the spread of services generally to deal with pathological conditions detrimental to social well-being are an obvious part of the concern with crime prevention: and finally the capacity of a society to come quickly to the material and spiritual aid of the unfortunates who cannot keep pace with the rate of change or become sick and incapable is an obvious concern if we hope to reduce temptations to turn to crime. Naturally such interests are not only related to the prevention of crime - they are good for their own sake and would be justified whether crime was a problem or not: but they are also intimately connected with the prevention and control of crime and the fact that they lend themselves so readily to several purposes simultaneously makes it all the more desirable - and all the more convenient - to integrate crime prevention planning with the other types of planning for a better society with a better quality of life.

The crime control services - police, courts and corrections will also bear further scrutiny in the quest for a more "peaceful, habitable and just" society. It may be possible by making use of the older social controls, especially in some of the developing nations, to rethink and reform the social scene in desirable directions.

Law enforcement has certain similarities amongst socialist and developing nations in that both reinforce an official police with more local customary or neighbourhood or factory or tribal controls. Behaviour is regulated not only by a separate paid organisation but by the communities themselves. Providing there is either a consensus or a national unity on basic values this is both possible and very effective. Russia

has its Comrades Courts, China its Courtyard and street Committees, Africa its Customary Courts and recently Papua New Guinea has established special Village Courts to operate at a local level on older traditional precepts. These are mechanisms of mutual support and control which are important not merely for the prevention and control of crime but for the stimulation of community effort to deal with undesirable trends generally. In a very informal way they are discernable in Japanese society, where crime is actually falling despite urbanisation and industrialisation, and they are conspicuously absent in some of the Western countries which have escalating rates of very serious crime.

Studies of the police have shown that the number of man-hours devoted to the direct prevention, detection and prosecution of crime may be no more than twenty per cent of the total man-hours available. In other words, some eighty per cent of police time is spent providing a variety of social services from traffic control to finding lost children and from settling domestic disputes to counselling people in all kinds of different troubles. This fact can obviously be made use of in strengthening not only crime prevention and control but the social sinews of the more "peaceful, habitable and just" society. The entire police system might be recast in social service terms allowing police to get closer to the society in its normal operations so as to reduce the need for intervention when situations become abnormal.

Courts too need careful consideration, since they were never intended to serve any purely repressive functions. They reflect society's basic values, they apply the law but in so doing they usually have a wide margin of discretion and they are often at the fulcrum of dissent and division. They can reconcile as well as punish, guide as well as vindicate and can bring justice to the common man in a less technical and ritualistic style than has been possible in many areas so far.

Corrections may seem remote from all this but the evidence of the failure of the older correctional methods to serve any reformatory or rehabilitative purpose probably means a need to bring society more positively into the reintegration of its offenders. The "peaceful, habitable and just" society will not be achieved merely by exiling or incarcerating all those who do not agree or who fail to keep pace with the new and better quality society. Racists need re-education, polluters need to be helped to change their ways and criminals of all kinds have to become a part of society sooner or later. This may mean the mobilising of peer groups to set standards and the provision of inducements to better behaviour as well as sanctions. Society itself needs to become its own correctional service if it is to be truly effective and already there are many attempts to find better community solutions.

Conclusion

Habitat will be unrealisable if it does not take account of human behaviour as well as human needs. Freedom from fear is a basic need which depends upon a modicum of behavioural control and to ignore this is to pay less than sufficient attention to the way people react to different types of environmental planning. The point is that crime is not a blemish on the face of society which will be readily hidden or quickly changed by the altering of the social complexion: it is a feature of society, as integral and inherent as anything considered normal. If it gets out of control it can transform the best plans and distort any expressions of social improvement. To attempt to achieve a better human environment and a better quality of life without regard to the deep significance of negative human behaviour such as crime is tantamount to the building of a new Tower of Babel. The perspectives need to be as inward as they are outward if our quality of life is truly to be improved.