Developments in Crime Prevention in New Zealand: An Overview

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In a number of ways New Zealand has undergone a revolution in recent years. The impetus for change has been centred on the need to address long-term structural problems and perceived defects in the economy. By and large, the changes that have occurred have been effected swiftly and with determination. The changes have included a radical restructuring of the state sector, the corporatisation and privatisation of some state agencies, a general deregulation of the economy and the labour market, a reorganisation of local government, and a reorganisation of the funding and delivery of social services. Add to this the changes in foreign policy, the nuclear free stance, and the development of closer economic relations (CER) between Australia and New Zealand, and the enormity of the change process may begin to be realised.

At the central government level these (changes) included the corporatisation and subsequent privatisation of state trading activities, the introduction of a new financial management regime, major changes to the machinery of government, a new system of appointing and remunerating senior public servants, substantial cuts in various government programs, significant changes to public sector industrial relations practices, a growing emphasis upon biculturalism and employment equity, and a much greater concern with accountability and performance assessment. At the local government level, too, major reforms were initiated, many of them paralleling those in the core public sector (for example, commercialisation, corporatisation, the contracting-out of services, the decoupling of advisory, regulatory and delivery functions, and new accountability mechanisms (Boston 1991).

The reforms that were undertaken by the fourth Labor Government (1984-90) were massive by any standards and were achieved in a relatively
short period of time. It was often difficult, even for persons close to the government of the day or the most keen observer, to appreciate all the changes that were being made during those hectic six years. It is only now, with the benefit of hindsight and the assistance of analytic and detached commentaries and accounts of the events, that the full implications of the revolution are being realised.

Although New Zealand has often laid claim to taking a leading role in the development of social policies (Easton 1980), there has been a relative lack of progressive development in the past decade. The reforms of earlier administrations, the works of the architects of the welfare state, have been eroded. The reasons become clear when the wider economic and political realities are taken into consideration. New Zealand has been losing ground in relative terms with other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries in respect to those measures that are accepted as indicators of general prosperity. (In 1991, New Zealand was 19th of 24 OECD member countries, as measured by Gross Domestic Product per head of population.) The crisis of the ‘welfare state’ of the 1970s and 1980s, and changes to economic management, have affected social policy development. The notion of a welfare state that provides universal, accessible, and affordable support and services from taxation funding has been sorely challenged. Part of the reason for this may be found in the ageing population.

The 1991 administration, a national government elected in October 1990, set the agenda for redefining the welfare state. According to this Government, the approach to social policy will be guided by four key principles, namely:

- **Fairness:** It is essential that adequate access to government assistance be available to those in genuine need, but those who can make greater provision for their own needs should be encouraged to do so.
- **Self-reliance:** The design of government programs should not foster dependency on state provision, but increase the ability of and incentives to individuals to take care of themselves.
- **Efficiency:** Social services should be provided in a manner that ensures that quality and quantity of service represents the highest possible value for each tax dollar spent.
- **Greater personal choice:** Alternative providers of health, education, housing, and welfare services will provide people with a wide choice to meet their needs.

Against this background of change there has been another dimension that impacts on the character of New Zealand life and future directions. This relates to the re-emergence of the issues of the Treaty of Waitangi and the recognition that the tangata whenua (the people of the land) not only have
legitimate grievances from the past that need to be resolved, but also a right to be recognised as parties to the Treaty and as original inhabitants. In those respects it is important that any actions of the Crown, and of all its instruments, should be consistent with the spirit and intent of the Treaty and its various interpretations. As an example, all chief executives of government agencies are charged with maintaining personnel policies which contain provisions that recognise the aspirations, employment requirements, and the need for greater involvement of the Maori people in the public service (State Sector Act 1988, s. 56) and to:

promote decision making in the machinery of government, in areas of importance to Maori communities, which provide opportunities for Maori people to actively participate, on jointly agreed terms, in such policy formulation and service delivery (New Zealand 1988).

The need for a concerted approach to crime prevention in New Zealand has been apparent for some time. New Zealand’s crime rate has been increasing over the past decade, and offences against the person have risen disproportionately against all other offences. In addition, the average daily muster of sentenced inmates has grown alarmingly in recent years (Norris & MacPherson 1990). Domestic and family violence have become the focus for urgent attention, and the needs of victims of offences have also acquired a priority status in terms of policy development. Two organisations—the Family Violence Protection Coordinating Committee and the Victims Task Force—have been established by the Government to provide special advice and direction in these areas of concern.

In terms of central government expenditure, the picture is equally discouraging. For the year ended June 1990, it cost the taxpayers of New Zealand $505 million to maintain the police enforcement role, $26 million to run the courts (criminal only), $150 million to administer sentences, and there was approximately $348 million devoted to community development funding. In terms of total government expenditure, this means that 3.6 cents of each dollar was spent on law and order or crime prevention measures.2

One of the problems in discussing crime prevention is definitional: what constitutes crime prevention? In the New Zealand context crime prevention is problematic and at this stage no clear definition exists. The police rightly claim that much of their work is concerned with crime prevention, and that their specific crime prevention programs—including Neighbourhood Watch and/or Neighbourhood Support, public education and media campaigns, and security services—are directly contributing to the prevention of offending behaviour and the reduction of opportunities for crime to occur.

The police hold an important position within the wider criminal justice or law and order system. They are an organisation with a considerable degree of autonomy, and in all matters are free from political interference. For instance, the decisions to investigate crimes and prosecute suspected persons is almost
entirely in the hands of the constabulary. They also have the responsibility for providing a prosecution service in the courts.

From about 1989, with changes to the police management systems and the appointment of a new commissioner, the police have shifted the emphasis from enforcement alone, towards including a community-oriented approach to their work. This has meant that resources are being increasingly employed to develop community-specific approaches to policing. Police Community Councils are a common feature in most towns and cities in New Zealand, and community constables are becoming a common feature of suburban New Zealand.

The need for communities to ‘help themselves’ and be more self-sufficient has been brought about not only by the fiscal considerations of central government, but also by the general movement sometimes referred to as devolution. The passage of the Criminal Justice Act 1985 (NZ) was indicative of this trend. A greater focus on community sentences and dealing with people outside the prison walls was stressed. At the same time, the value of community development skills in the Probation Service was elevated and, in relative terms, the value of other social work skills were reduced.

Similarly, there have been reforms instituted within the prison service. The accent on habilitation and case management reflect the thinking that prisons are part of the community, and the community has a responsibility to play a part in determining how the prisons ought to be administered and what services are required to best assist those persons committed to the care of these institutions for the time being. In that respect there is an implicit recognition that crime prevention, incorporating as it does both security and habilitation, is a primary objective of the administration of the sentence of imprisonment.

Of course, the central government agencies are not the only organisations delivering social services that can be broadly defined as ‘crime prevention’ in nature. There are a considerable number of voluntary welfare agencies, community and some profit-making bodies that contribute directly to social objectives and which offer a wide range of services (such as the NZ Prisoners’ Aid and Rehabilitation Society, outdoor pursuits organisations, security firms, insurance companies, and the work of sporting clubs). It is recognised, however, that not many organisations have directed their activities at crime prevention as a specific objective. Some notable, but not always welcome exceptions, have been the ad hoc vigilante groups that have periodically surfaced.

Although crime prevention has long been considered one of the main objectives of criminal justice policy, it remains a rather ill-defined concept (Tuck 1987). Crime prevention has been seen mostly in terms of other elements of the system such as policing, sentencing, and the administration of sentences that have crime prevention as a goal. Crime prevention has tended to be thought of as those activities that are directed toward ‘at risk’ young people and those persons who are already within the ‘system’, or as situational crime prevention as practised by the police.

It is tempting to employ the much-borrowed health model when analysing approaches to crime prevention (Brantingham & Faust 1976). The difficulty with using the primary, secondary and tertiary
classifications for crime prevention is that, while they fit neatly for the secondary and tertiary types, the boundaries for the primary level are less easily defined. In the New Zealand context this is especially so. It could be argued that the community development activities, for instance, are likely to have a positive crime reducing effect, whether they have specific crime prevention objectives or not.

**The Establishment of Crime Prevention Initiatives in New Zealand**

The development of crime prevention needs to be seen as a distinct but complementary process within the general criminal justice system. As central government withdraws further from the delivery of social services, the onus on local government for providing resources, and in turn the communities themselves, grows accordingly. The job of central government agencies is to help develop policies and facilitate their application at a local level—not to be the providers. It is important to instil the feeling that the ownership and control of the various approaches is located at local level. Any attempt, in the New Zealand context, to impose crime prevention on communities is going to be met with hostility.

The idea of promoting a broader approach to crime prevention than had hitherto prevailed was first examined seriously by an Interdepartmental Officials Committee on Crime Prevention (New Zealand 1989) which was charged with analysing the French crime prevention initiative and to apply the key principles to the New Zealand situation. The committee was concerned with establishing criteria for projects, liaison with local government authorities, and for considering funding issues.

Five major objectives for a New Zealand crime prevention initiative were identified:

- to foster recognition that crime and crime prevention are issues that concern all the community and that the control or prevention of crime cannot be the responsibility of the various agencies of social control and law enforcement alone;

- to provide a forum at the local community level to identify crime problems affecting that community and coordinate the resources and expertise of local government, government departments, Iwi authorities, private organisations, educational institutions, individuals, and where appropriate, relevant cultural authorities and other organisations to address the problems identified;
• to facilitate and promote local initiatives focusing on crime, its prevention, and the context in which crime occurs;
• to promote the development of effective crime prevention initiatives which are suited to New Zealand; in particular, taking account of the status of the Maori people; and
• to promote and support worthwhile crime prevention projects.

Many of the perceptions underlying the development of crime prevention initiatives in France and other countries were seen to have their parallels in the New Zealand context. New Zealand had not only seen a significant rate of increase in offending rates at all levels, but this had been matched by an increase in the concern about crime and the fear of becoming a victim of crime.

The interest of the Department of Justice in crime prevention derived from its concern to 'protect the community and to promote social order.' Traditionally, these goals had been pursued through the corrections system, including the provision of rehabilitative services. These are all reactive measures, that is, they take place after a crime has occurred. The Department continues to believe that proactive measures are also required, particularly to divert young people from entering what is seen as 'the cycle of crime.'

In the sense that crime prevention is designed to contribute to community protection and community stability, it is integral to community well-being and community development. Crime prevention is therefore related to the responsibilities of most governmental agencies. Certainly no one agency has a monopoly on crime prevention and, except in certain respects, this responsibility is not the sole prerogative of centralised bureaucracies. Efforts to make communities safe or healthy, and to promote productive and cooperative activities within communities need to be made by central government in partnership with local communities.

The prevention of urban crime was a focus of the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (United Nations 1991). The Congress emphasised that prevention is the concern of all¾that is, citizens, communities, and governmental organisations¾and that it is the task of governments and other institutions to promote the development of national and local prevention programs. Another notable aspect of the Congress resolution was the recognition that prevention must bring together those with responsibility for family, health, housing, social services, leisure activities, schools, the police and the justice system in order to deal with the conditions that generate crime.

In 1991 there are considerable resources directed to the promotion of safe and healthy communities and thus crime prevention in its broadest sense. In the narrower sense of the concept, the police have traditionally played an important preventive role, as have elements of the correctional services, such as probation and psychological services, through their treatment programs.

In line with international developments, the approach to crime prevention favoured by the Department of Justice has been one which is centred on the partnership of central and local government, and between Iwi authorities and local government. The Department recognises that these partnerships must be supported by adequate resources and appropriate
educational and informational strategies. Above all, effective crime prevention projects must be attuned to the cultural and social setting in which they are applied, with the aim of fostering diversity and avoiding uniformity for its own sake. It is crucial that each community decides for itself what crime prevention approaches are to be adopted.

Another essential element is that leadership should be provided at the local level which transcends narrow sectional interests. Communities need to know that their concerns and fears about crime and the ill-effects of crime are shared by their elected leaders. In this respect, effective leadership assumes a bipartisan approach, both at the local and the national levels.

With regard to funding, it should be noted that the wide involvement of government agencies in crime prevention, in the broadest sense, means that there are already considerable resources going into programs which are of general social value. In view of this it was felt that a crime prevention strategy aimed principally at greater coordination and more precise targeting of such services could be achieved within relatively modest resource limits. The Department of Justice and the police worked together on the development of a crime prevention strategy based on this approach. This lead to the formation of the Safer Communities Program.

The Safer Communities Program plan has drawn on the models pioneered in France and the United Kingdom and adapts these models to the New Zealand situation. A peak council headed by the Prime Minister of the day, and including representatives of local government, provides the basis for political leadership and commitment to the idea that through partnerships, and the recognition that the prevention of crime is not just a central government responsibility, reliance on traditional enforcement and corrections agencies can be reduced.

In July 1990, the Labor government convened an inaugural meeting of the Prime Ministerial Safer Communities Council, a body consisting of key ministers of the Crown, and mayors of four municipalities to preside over the development of a pilot program, for an initial period of two years. This program would promote safer communities and a strategic approach to crime prevention. The impetus for this development on the part of the government of the day had arisen when several ministers of state returned either from France or the United Kingdom and had been impressed with what they had seen. In addition, the Department of Justice had been keen to see some progress made in this area.

A Crime Prevention Administrative Unit, located within the Department of Justice (Policy and Research Division) at Wellington, services the Prime Ministerial Safer Communities Council and provides a link in the relationship between central and local government. The Unit is also concerned with facilitating the development, monitoring, and evaluation of the pilot programs.

Four pilot program areas are operating under the auspices of the relevant local government body. Each of the mayors in these four localities has set up a Safer Community
Council to promote crime prevention initiatives and to encourage the development of projects that best suit the communities they serve. The membership of the Safer Community Councils is drawn from the community and representatives of key public service agencies operating in the Safer Community Council areas. The mayor chairs the Safer Community Council and generally provides the political leadership and commitment necessary at the local level. The police also play an active role on each Safer Community Council.

Each Safer Community Council has the services of a full-time coordinator, employed by the local city or district council. Central government meets the greater part of the coordinator's salary from monies contributed by the police and the Department of Justice from their discretionary funds. In addition, modest seeding money has been distributed or is available to each Safer Community Council to be used to promote or foster safer community or crime prevention projects.

Although central government has provided limited funding (for the employment of the coordinators and for some project work), local government councils have had to meet some costs themselves and devise ways of raising additional funds for specific projects and promotions. Sponsorship from commercial and charitable organisations have been used to acquire funding for the Safer Community Councils.

The position of the coordinator is pivotal to the exercise of the pilot programs. Coordinators not only maintain a network of community contacts and a database of local resources, but also have the responsibility to make things happen at a project level. In addition, the coordinator maintains liaison with the Crime Prevention Administrative Unit and helps to monitor and provide information for the evaluation of projects.

Proposals for specific crime prevention projects are usually submitted in the first instance to the coordinator for presentation to the Safer Community Council. The type of project suitable for support and funding will depend on the perceived or known local needs. The Crime Prevention Administrative Unit does not assume a role for vetting project proposals, although proposals will often be referred to the manager of the Unit for independent comment and for assessment as to suitability for monitoring and evaluation.

The point that should be stressed in the selection of suitable projects for sponsorship or promotion at local level is that the initiatives should arise within the communities. It is not for central government to determine what constitutes an appropriate crime prevention project or whether the objectives of a particular project are crime preventing. In a real sense, the responsibility for determining what constitutes crime prevention, and how crime prevention might be defined, is a community responsibility. For its part, central government needs to determine whether it wishes to support or provide resources for local initiatives, according to its own definitions. In the New Zealand context that will be determined through the Prime Ministerial Safer Communities Council (and the Crime Prevention Administrative Unit), consistent with current public policy.

Considering that most projects were not initiated until late 1990 or early 1991, there has been some pleasing progress in the type and range of projects being developed (see Appendix I for a list of projects). It is too early to draw conclusions from the information available to date. The monitoring and evaluation process is still to be developed, and what comments that can be made must be tentative and subjective. However, the early signs are very encouraging.
The Changing Role of the State: Issues Confronting Policy Developers in New Zealand

There are several possible reasons why the development of a concerted and comprehensive approach to crime prevention has been slow to emerge. The economic situation has been depressed in recent years, and the onus on governments to trim their spending has been intense. Yet, the demand for protections and services provided by central government persists. A news media preoccupation with crime and crime related issues in the past ten years has helped to create a climate of opinion and belief that what is needed is a ‘harder line’ toward criminals and criminal behaviour. For the politician, the realities of the three-year term of parliament tend to make law and order issues one of the platforms for electioneering that is attractive. The possibilities of making law and order issues bipartisan are thus reduced, and the likelihood of developing comprehensive strategies in the field of criminal justice are inhibited. In any event, crime prevention is no quick fix. Politicians have to be committed to it for the long haul. And, because the criminal justice system is not centrally administered, the chances of integrated approaches being advanced are further diminished.

Another reason for the slow development of crime prevention in the New Zealand context is the traditional mind-set that persists when the role of the state is considered. There is a marked tendency for people to look to central government for action, instead of providing it themselves. This attitude of dependency toward the state has been referred to as the ‘superannuation effect’.

But, as daunting as these hurdles to progress are, the logic of developing a strategic approach to the development and administration of criminal justice that is inclusive of a strong and complementary crime prevention component is apparent. The formation of the Prime Ministerial Safer Communities Council has provided the focus for at least a crime prevention strategy to be born. The Safer Communities Program will undoubtedly add weight to the argument that new directions and new solutions are possible.

A number of policy considerations need to be addressed. For instance, what costs the community is prepared to bear to create ‘safer communities’. New Zealanders have enjoyed lifestyles characterised by relative personal liberty and freedom from fear of being victimised. High density, urban living is almost unknown. Safety achieved at the expense of some of these freedoms and living conditions is likely to be unacceptable. A comprehensive police advertising campaign sponsored by commercial interests is highlighting the problems of crime in our communities. Ironically, the campaign is probably contributing to a distorted perception about the incidence of crime and heightening feelings that personal safety is at grave risk. While this may generate a strong motivation among sections of a community to want to participate in crime prevention activities, it could also be counter-productive in the longer term. An innovative and imaginative communications policy needs to be developed as part of a wider crime prevention strategy.

The term ‘crime prevention’¾indeed the whole language associated with crime prevention¾needs to be more precisely defined. The Safer Community Program has been predicated largely on the belief that communities should take a greater responsibility for preventing crime and, to some extent, that
'community crime prevention' is a preferred approach. Crime prevention can mean all things to some people and be interpreted to embrace a wide range of activities. It would not be difficult to imagine that crime prevention could not only be a meaningless catch-phrase, but also a substitute for basic social policy development. In the New Zealand context, the worry is that crime prevention could become a rationale for allowing central governments to minimise their traditional and responsible approach to social policy development, and to shift the onus to local government to provide safety-net measures, of which crime prevention might be one.

If the definition of crime prevention embraces what is now thought of in the literature as 'social crime prevention' (Graham 1990) it could be argued that policy makers were more concerned with preventing crime than with promoting social cohesion, organisation, and integration. While crime in our communities is an important problem area, it should be viewed in a balanced manner. The primary motivation for good social policy development should not be crime or the concern to somehow rid our communities of crime. Instead, crime prevention policies should support, and not lead, wider social policy developments.

It is going to be extremely important in the development of crime prevention strategies in New Zealand that policy decisions are made on the basis of contributions and views of Maori and non-Maori alike. It is not just an ideal but a necessity if the spirit of the Treaty of Waitangi is to be honoured and if a bicultural harmony is to be achieved in the future. The process of developing bicultural policy has never been simple, and local governments and Iwi authorities will need to be given an opportunity to play their parts.

There are signs that the Government is inclined to entertain approaches to social policy development that seek to make resource investments that might make positive returns in the medium to long-term. (For instance, during the last general election campaign (October 1990), the National Party promised 900 more police over the next three years.) The Prime Minister has taken a personal interest in the Safer Community Program and is briefed on progress.

It will be important, in policy development terms, that keen attention is shown to the developments in other social policy areas. If the formation of social policy is to proceed on the basis of the key principles enunciated by the government (fairness, self-reliance, efficiency, and greater personal choice) and the constraints of fiscal direction are to be honoured, then it is clear the case for crime prevention will need to be well-argued, and well-presented to make an impression.

References


Appendix I

The following list is indicative of the range and type of projects initiated as a result of the Safer Communities Program. Space has not allowed for a more detailed description of each project. It is hoped that such descriptions will be available when evaluations have been completed.

- a pilot scheme to assist children with deficient reading skills;
- a short-term campaign aimed at reducing the fear of crime;
- seminars on shop thefts;
- drug and alcohol information;
- policing of ‘dog nuisance’ in one community;
- a trade show on home security;
- school programs about crime prevention;
- promotion of an Age Concern Program;
- support for Maori Wardens;
- the employment of ‘grey power’ community support constables for the elderly;
- working with gangs;
- revival of Neighbourhood Support programs in specific areas;
- provision of programs for ‘at risk’ children;
- assistance with the provision of indoor sporting facilities;
- a program for the elderly;
- the promotion of ethnic tribunals;
- a variety of youth programs, including a poster competition, song contest, theatre promotions, a forum for secondary school students, organising a ‘Krypton’ competition, and safer community awareness programs;
- an anti-graffiti campaign, coupled with a targeted confidence/leadership program;
- the development of a youth-ethnic program associated with a truancy program;
- the organisation of a ‘safety week’;
- a youth incentives program;
- a concerted approach to environmental design;
- patrols of a town centre (ravaged by vandalism) by Samoan community, backed by local business association;
- ensuring that the target groups have a say on the Safer Community Councils;
- developing networks, and maintaining communication;
- profiling a district to better target crime prevention programs;
- incentive weekends for ‘at risk’ youth;
- targeting rugby and rugby league clubs regarding excessive use of alcohol at clubrooms.
Foot Notes:

1. It is recognised, however, that there have been some important advances in social policy development, in such areas as the Abolition of the Death Penalty Act 1989, the Domestic Protection Act 1982, the Homosexual Law Reform Act 1986, and the Victims of Offences Act 1987, to name just a few that are administered by the Department of Justice.

2. The figures quoted have been estimated from published accounts but must be treated with some caution. Government expenditures are not categorised in a way which enables the crime prevention component to be readily separated out. This is particularly so when trying to determine expenditures in the area of community development. (The police enforcement costs do not include the costs for the Serious Fraud Office.)

3. The classification is as follows: Primary = activities directed at modification of criminogenic conditions in the physical and social environment at large; Secondary = activities directed at early identification and intervention in the lives of individuals and groups in criminogenic circumstances (‘at risk’ groups, for instance); and Tertiary = activities directed at prevention of recidivism (for persons already ‘in the system’).

4. Iwi, or tribal authorities recognised as the descendants of the signatories to the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) and for all intents and purposes are the ‘partners’ with the Crown. Iwi authorities have a representative function, as well as providing services to their people.