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VIOLENCE CONTROL AND THE SELFISH  
URBANITE

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VIOLENCE CONTROL AND THE SELFISH URBANITE

AN ESSAY

by

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ABSTRACT

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The theme of this essay concerns popular support for police actions during periods of urban violence and how to achieve support. The forces of law and order, police or troops, use various techniques to win this support but one powerful and basic trait of human nature is not sufficiently exploited. This trait is human selfishness or self-interest. The essay examines the significance of this trait and possible circumstances under which it can be used.

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It is a fundamental proposition in the United States that all power is drawn from the people. Forces of law and order should make a conscious effort to operate from this premise.

#### THE ADVERSARY RELATIONSHIP

Most authorities agree, and nonauthorities understand, that the problems of maintaining urban peace are more easily solved if the peacekeeping forces, Police, National Guard, or Army, have the support of the local citizenry. The desired adversary relationship among the urban citizens, the peacekeeping forces, and the lawbreakers is:

Peacekeeping force + Citizens = vs = Lawbreakers.

Apathy, fear, and mistrust too often cause the citizens to drop out of the relationship:

Peacekeeping force = vs = Lawbreakers.

An extreme danger to the urban society exists when the citizens actively join or sympathize with the actions of those operating outside the law. Then the relationship becomes:

Peacekeeping forces = vs = Lawbreakers + Citizens.

Basic to all efforts by urban police and armed forces employed in maintaining or restoring urban peace should be an active attempt to establish the first relationship--with the citizenry firmly supporting the forces of law and order. Some efforts in this direction are usually practiced in every city. There are police community-relation programs, Police-Boys' Clubs, appeals to citizens to stay off the streets, rap sessions, Police

Conduct Review Boards, etc., etc. But rarely, if ever, does one hear a plea to the most basic selfish concern of all citizens: "active support of the forces of law and order is in your best interest." An effective campaign in this direction would appeal to a powerful fundamental human trait and not rely on ephemeral concepts of civic duty, community loyalty, or responsible citizenship.

#### PERCEIVED DANGER

If the citizens perceive that their property, lives, or jobs are in danger they will support whatever measures or organizations they believe present the best measure of protection. The greater the perceived danger the firmer the support will be.

#### BASIC HUMAN DRIVE

The primacy of this human characteristic is widely recognized. Erich Fromm, philosopher and author, calls selfishness: "The most powerful and legitimate drive in man." He describes self-interest as: "one of the key symbols of modern society." But the drive of man's self-interest has never been portrayed better than by Ibsen in Peer Gynt. Peer Gynt believes that his whole life is devoted to the attainment of his personal "Self"-interests. He describes this "Self" as:

The Gynthian Self!  
- An army, that, of wishes, appetites, desires!

The Gynthian Self!  
It is a sea of fancies, claims and aspirations;

In fact, it's all that swells within my breast  
And makes it come about that I am I and live as such.

This human drive principle is also interesting in the aggregate: as it affects an entire society. Contrasting support of the armed forces in peace and war is a clear example of this principle. In peacetime, when the citizenry cannot identify a real danger, particularly to personal safety, support for the military can become nonexistent. But if citizens perceive a danger, whether real or propagandized, support increases in proportion to the degree of danger. Hitler, Tojo, and in 1962 Khrushchev truly frightened the American people, and they very quickly became unqualified supporters of those forces that stood between them and the perceived danger.

It is very possible that doctors, who generally enjoy a particularly revered position in society, do so because they stand as protectors of men: between men and the dangers of disease and death. Labor unions occupy a similar, though less revered, position. The rank and file membership are very slow to withdraw their full support from even the most corrupt and oppressive union leadership. They evidence this reluctance simply because they perceive that the union stands between them and forces that could threaten their livelihood. The pragmatic leadership of most union organizations makes very little use of altruistic pleas for support, nor do they emphasize morality among the leaders as the best way to sustain the support of the rank and file.

For many years the Federal Bureau of Investigation enjoyed the particular respect of the American citizen. On the surface this is surprising. Americans, since the founding of the country and drafting of the Constitution, have been generally opposed to any form of federal police force. Traditionally, only local police and militia were thought to be without risk of creeping oppression. The formation of state police forces and federated National Guard was resisted until the early 1900s. Pennsylvania was the first state to have a state police force: the need growing out of the violent coal strikes of the period. Federal influence over the National Guard was very limited until the passage of the Dick Act in 1903. However, the FBI won considerable support and respect from its earliest days. The very dangerous nature of criminals and subversives that the FBI operated against was widely publicized and reported. Even in the face of general distrust of national police forces, the FBI received support and respect.

The old-fashioned term "Public Enemy Number One" had the connotation of danger to the public. Recently even the FBI support has been wanning. The image of the FBI protecting the people from really dangerous gangsters and subversive agents is fading.

#### MORAL ISSUE OF POLICE SUPPORT

Morality among members of law-enforcing forces is frequently the theme of programs designed by social scientists.

However, such programs that rely on moral humans to win the support of the populace are doomed to failure. Cries that police must be completely honest, completely ethical, and knighted guardians of justice have been heard throughout history. The cries have been paralleled by scandals of corruption and repression because completely moral recruits for uniformed service do not exist. The forces of law and order are men: they have all the foibles and weaknesses that are evident in the society of the time.

One example of an attempt to create such a perfect force occurred in Russia in 1826 during the reign of Tsar Nichols I. He had just suffered several insurrections among his unhappy people. The Tsar accepted the suggestion of his trusted German bureaucrat, Count Benschendorff, that a security force established for the good and well-being of the people was the best answer to the existing unrest. The proposal emphasized the need to recruit only men of the highest moral character. No effort or funds were spared in the search for the correct men. The whole body was described as a moral elite to be so recognized as such by the nation. It was called the Third Section of His Majesty's Private Chancellery.

The Section's establishment was announced with great fanfare.

In part the announcement stated:

In you everyone will recognize officials who make the voices of all who suffer audible to the Throne and who place the helpless and silent citizen directly under the supreme protection of the Almighty and the Tsar.

How many unnecessarily complicated and even illegal difficulties may be settled through your intervention--how many evil persons might be prevented from carrying out their infamous plots against the

property of others--if they knew that the innocent victims of their avarice could take a short and direct path to the Tsar's protection!

For this reason the police will find numerous assistants and friends; everyone who loves his Fatherland and seeks Justice, who wishes that Peace and Quiet should rule over all, will stand by you and thus become a cooperater in the fulfillment of the Tsar's exalted aims.

The Third Section was a dismal failure. Its operations were characterized by the arbitrary suspension of all forms of laws. Popular support was never wooed and was never achieved by the altruistically conceived Third Section. The citizenry never thought of the Third Section as protectors, and the directors never attempted to create the attitude of protection. Reliance was placed on moral appeal, love of Fatherland, and not on the premise that the actions of the police were in the citizens' best interest.

#### DIVERTING POLICE FROM BASIC PURPOSE

It is popular today, among sociologists, to saddle the urban police with missions of social reform such as race relations, penology, and equal justice. The idea expressed is that the police should "strike at the roots of urban unrest" as the best approach to law and order. One wonders if sociologists in 1851 felt the police should become Shakespearean critics when the opposing supporters of the two actors, Forrest and Macready, clashed in New York with scores of deaths resulting.

The police should not be diverted from their primary function which is still what it has always been: to protect the citizens and their property. Constantly repeated reminders and manifestations of this theme are necessary to maintain the citizens on the desired side of the adversary relationship.

No matter how effective the forces of law and order become, violence will continue to occur in urban areas where large numbers of people with conflicting views live close together. The reasons for violence are dynamic. In 1837 the volunteer firemen fought the Irish laborers in Boston, in 1838 the Whites fought the Negroes in Philadelphia, antforeigner riots broke out in three cities simultaneously in 1844, and labor, welfare, religion and sporting events have been sources of clashes where large numbers of people come together. To expect the police and military to engage in correction of the causes of unrest is to expect too much. Interference in the causes can even be construed to be antidemocratic. Under laws guaranteeing freedom of speech and association, it is quite impossible to lay down a hard and fast definition of "incitement to riot" or "subversion." These cannot be easily clearly distinguished from legitimate criticism of the government.

Thus controlling civil violence poses a dilemma. Our democracy has no preventative police remedy for mob violence. They can only suppress the violent unrest--and that is what they do. We don't create a political police on the principle that the cure is worse than the disease.

### PROTECTION AGAINST WHAT DANGERS?

A program designed to appeal to personal self-interest by emphasizing the protection function would have to identify those perceived dangers that are most significant to individual citizens. The most fundamental, and most universally compelling, danger is to one's physical safety. When guns are firing in the streets and arson is rampant, the danger is obvious. But it tends to be impersonal when reported by the news media. To act as an effective incentive to police support, physical danger must be personalized to all citizens. Official announcements and bulletins should always emphasize that the actions taken are to protect the innocents living on named streets or to prevent the spread of danger to specific sections of the city.

The role of the police as guardians of personal property, while not as meaningful, is nevertheless a powerful incentive for public support. Almost everyone living in an area of urban violence has some valued property. It may be a house, or furniture, or an automobile. Whatever it is, he is interested in protecting it and will support almost any measures or forces that provide a safeguard. Again, official communications should stress the role of the police in protection of personal property. Instructions to citizens concerning measures to be taken to help the police protect personal property will help establish a pattern of cooperation while these individuals act in their own self-interest.

Loss of income is an important danger to the urban citizen during periods of unrest and violence. Public information programs should not overlook this important incentive to support the forces of law attempting to maintain or restore peace. Law-abiding citizens, whose support is most important, usually have a significant interest in staying on the job--not losing "time" because of the violence of others. The police should accent the fact that protective actions are taken to restore peace in order that individuals can return to or stay at work. Frequently, places of employment are destroyed and jobs are lost forever. A photograph in a national magazine after the riots in Washington, D. C., showed a burned-out store. Painted on the boarded-up front was, "Two Negroes lost jobs here." This was undoubtedly a persuasive argument against apathy or condonation of wanton destruction in the ghetto areas.

#### COOPERATION CAMPAIGNS

The effectiveness of this approach to gain popular support for the forces of law and order is directly related to how successfully the self-interest motives of the populace can be awakened. An efficient program designed to tap this source of power for urban peace must be active well before any violence occurs. All levels of government should have an active campaign publicizing the protective functions of the police. Radio, television, and press campaigns, conducted by police, that instruct citizens how to provide more protection for their

property have been shown to have a beneficial effect on the attitude of many citizens. Likewise, instructional campaigns for single women living and traveling alone create a pattern of cooperation with instructions issued by police.

In addition to this type of direct police-to-public campaigns, authorities should make every effort to solicit press support in the reporting of crime news. A detailed study of the News Bank, Urban Affairs Library of newspaper clippings under the heading of "Police and Community Relations" reveals an interesting feature of crime reporting in the United States. Descriptive articles of riot-type incidents reported in newspapers from Maine to California have marked similarity--essential facts (what, where, and when of basic journalism), purported injustices, demands by militants, and frequently a statement by an official such as a mayor or commissioner that an investigation is under way. None of the many articles examined contain any information or statements concerning the basic reason for police presence at the scene. A thinking reader, of course, can imply that the police were present to protect lives and property. But it would be much better if official spokesmen always emphasized this point and government press officers encouraged reporters to include the detailed reasons for police presence in their stories.

#### MILITARY APPLICATION

Soldiers were first used to control civil lawlessness in the United States in 1794. Militia forces of Pennsylvania, New

Jersey, Virginia, and Maryland were assembled at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in October of that year to move against the Whiskey Rebels in Western Pennsylvania. Since that time soldiers of the Militia, National Guard, and Regular Army have been called upon to provide force in civil disturbances over 400 different times. These occasions ranged from minor peace restoration missions to major confrontations such as the Detroit riots of 1967.

The principles of winning public support that apply to police apply equally to units of the Armed Forces sent to areas of civil violence. The job of violence control can be done more easily if the citizens support them.

In incidents of urban violence the situation is usually very tense by the time the Army or National Guard arrives on the scene. The police have not been able to control the situation. The Army is in a good position at that time to appeal to self-interest of the local populace. They constitute a new force toward which the citizens generally have no preconceived animosity. The Army is differently uniformed and easily identifiable. Announcements of calls for troops and their arrival should stress their role as protectors of the people. The Army, for their part, should use every means available to hammer away at this concept--news announcements on radio and T.V., loudspeakers, leaflets, etc. The context of the Army announcement should be:

We're here now--the situation has changed.

We're here to protect you from death or injury.

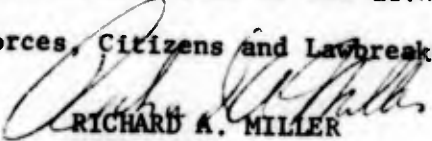
We're here to safeguard your property, to restore peace so you can get back to work.

It is in your own best self-interest to support what we are doing for you.

The official Army report of operations in Detroit during the July 1967 riots contains a section entitled "Lessons." The report mentions the importance of appearance, smartness, and military discipline of the troops. The report states, "The image they portray has a very decided effect on the rioters and on the confidence that they instill in the public." Thus the confidence of the public (even the rioters) is acknowledged as important. Further, the report has a section on Psychological Warfare in which use of radio, T.V., and leaflets is recommended. However, references to the recommended text of the material are only in general terms and are described as efforts to "persuade the more reasonable elements of the mob to go home." No specific mention is made of appealing directly to personal, selfish interests to elicit support and cooperation.

NOT A PANACEA

It is not suggested that even a most efficient program to emphasize the protection role will prevent violence or "strike at the roots of urban unrest." However, failure to make a conscious and planned appeal to the selfish side of human nature in order to enlist support for the forces of law and order is to neglect a potentially powerful element. This approach is not a panacea for the causes of unrest, but it is an unexploited method of moving the Citizens to the desired side of the adversary relationship among Peacekeeping forces, Citizens and Lawbreakers.

  
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