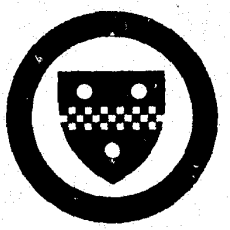

A Decade of Urban Police Problems

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Patrick V. Murphy

Sixteenth Annual Wherrett Lecture

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On Local Government

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PATRICK V. MURPHY
Executive Director of the Police Foundation
Washington, D. C.

INSTITUTE FOR URBAN POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION
Graduate School of Public and International Affairs
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

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Ring Lardner used to say that watching yachts race is as exciting as watching grass grow.

Seeking to identify lasting improvement and reform in policing during the past ten years has been about as rewarding.

There has been relatively little permanent, beneficial change in policing. The core problems of a decade ago persist, and new impediments to the improvement of policing have developed. One such impediment has been the introduction on a national level of "law and order" political rhetoric that has tended to obscure the limitations of the police in dealing with crime.

There are, of course, some bright spots. For example, many police departments now deal with minority citizens and neighborhoods in a more enlightened and sophisticated manner. Team policing in several cities is an example of basic organizational change — placing authority and responsibility at the neighborhood level — which permits a shifting of the police role toward more prevention and community involvement. As employees and consultants, many more civilian professionals are assisting in the resolution of complex problems. Police legal advisors are increasing.

Family crisis intervention training and innovative approaches to dealing with disputes are evidence of an increased awareness of the complexity of the problems officers regularly face and of the need to improve traditional responses. Increased utilization of women, especially in patrol work, demonstrates a less rigid perception of basic police tasks. A few criminal justice bureaus are slowly beginning to rationalize the functioning of prosecutors and courts as parts of one system with the police. In time, this can mean more intelligent enforcement policies and utilization of personnel in police departments. Diversion programs, as pioneered by the Vera Institute of Justice, are increasing the effectiveness of police and courts and saving valuable time for both.

The development at the Police Foundation and elsewhere of stronger evaluation capacities than have previously existed are beginning to provide the testing and measuring devices which will lay bare the myths or confirm the truths, assumptions about productive methods of policing.

Following the dramatically effective work of a knowledgeable investigative reporter and the subsequent creation of a powerful investigative commission, many improvements in organization and management to bring corruption under control were achieved in the nation's largest police department with the assistance of dozens of specialists working in newly created professional positions. The appointment of a special prosecutor

on the Knapp Commission's recommendation has exposed serious corruption among prosecutors, courts, correction personnel and defense attorneys as well as police.

However, a survey of the past ten years in policing is, overall, discouraging. Here it is important to avoid the trap of assuming the police have improved significantly because big city rioting has stopped. Increases in reported crime and new knowledge about unreported crime rates impress the public much less than riots. The police deserve credit for learning to correct the mistakes which previously had contributed to many riots. But they are moving too slowly in improving their capacity to prevent and control crime. The principal reason is that there has not been on the federal and state levels sufficient firm, consistent and enlightened leadership and direction to force the changes necessary for the improvement of policing.

This will become more explicit during an examination of some of the basic problems in policing.

THE COMMUNITY. The police are only a part of the crime control system in the United States and the crime control system is only a part of the whole society. The amount of crime, disorder and tension in any community is obviously related to many factors which for the most part are beyond the control or influence of the police. The National Crime Commission in 1967 identified a number of the root causes of crime that the police cannot affect.

But the public, which ultimately determines the quality of policing it receives, has not absorbed this message. Instead it has been fed a series of easy answers to the problem of crime. If a national spokesman on the issue of crime existed, it was J. Edgar Hoover. For years, tougher police enforcement, the elimination of "country club prisons and bleeding heart judges" and reduction in the use of parole and probation were his one-dimensional answers to crime.

During his 1964 presidential campaign, Senator Barry Goldwater spoke about crime in the streets, and, in effect, raised it as a national political issue for the first time. In the same year, the federal government for the first time undertook responsibility for reform of the police at the state and local level and for research in policing as well as in other elements of the criminal justice system. Riots, racial tensions and growing crime rates in the mid- and late-1960s reinforced crime as a political issue. "Law and order" became a major theme of the 1968 presidential election and a slogan for the Nixon administration when it took office.

The Nixon administration promised law and order but has done

little to truly effect improvement in policing. It has not directed the federal government to an influential role in dealing with crime and has not required that the states take firm action within their jurisdictions for the reform of police and other elements of the criminal jusice system.

Perhaps this is understandable. Crime is a national disgrace — a scandal.But it is a losing issue politically for those with responsibility for its control. Governors and state legislatures are not anxious to share the responsibility for crime control which has rested heavily to date on the shoulders of mayors and police chiefs.

The Nixon administration's attempt to change the distribution of Law Enforcement Assistance Administration money is instructive.

It proposed in early 1973 that the LEAA program become tied to revenue sharing, a step which would have lessened the responsibility and visibility of the federal government as a partner of state and local governments in controlling crime. The administration measure failed. A Congressman questioned then Attorney General Richard Kleindienst at the House Judiciary subcommittee hearing about the measure. "I ask you realistically, do you feel a mayor confronted with a choice of buying a police cruiser or a sociology course is going to purchase the course?" Kleindienst said that as a result of the first five years of LEAA there had been a great awakening among police and local government officials.

But in fact there has been no such awakening. LEAA obviously has contributed to some improvements in policing. However, the federal government has expended 10 years and three or more billion dollars on policing with relatively little to show for its investment. A great amount of money has gone for hardware such as helicopters, underused and misused computers, flashing red lights, weapons and other items that tend to attract public and press attention. But relatively little federal money has been devoted to such needs as the development of policies and rules, personnel administration and improved management techniques.

POLICE ADMINISTRATORS. After 10 years police leadership still is not oriented to change or to basic improvement. Little pressure is felt by police administrators to modernize, increase productivity, upgrade personnel, justify budgets or account for the performance of their officers. Police chiefs generally make few efforts to identify the best existing practices in policing or to transfer them to their own departments.

There are reasons for this, of course. Most police chiefs are far from secure in their positions. Any one of several problems can occur when least expected and result in a change of police chiefs. The most influential evaluators of the performance of a chief of police, from his point of view,

are the news media. The average chief is keenly aware of the power of the press and usually is uncomfortable in dealing with it. In fact, many chiefs despise newsmen. An unfortunate consequence has been the failure of police chiefs to tell their good stories — to explain their side, to describe the complexities of the administration of police departments, to generate understanding and cooperation and the public support that they need.

The name of the game for most chiefs is survival. Change, reform, upgrading, research, professionalism — all these may seem worthwhile goals. But the average chief is usually preoccupied with more immediate and pressing problems. And the steps that could lead to improvement in policing may backfire. It is easy for the average administrator to take the view that it is much safer not to rock the boat. This is especially true, because, for most chiefs, their job is the best they can ever hope to have. Here it is important to note that the police, to improve, will require better leadership than is currently provided by closed civil service systems.

Almost every chief of police in the United States began his career in the department he now heads. This creates a serious problem that is not well understood. There is little chance for improvement in many aspects of policing if the police chief comes, in almost all instances, from the ranks of his own department. He is a product of the insularity that deprives departments of the improvements achieved in other more open agencies of government.

The question arises here, what can be done to develop good police leaders?

O. W. Wilson was imported in 1960 to serve as superintendent of the Chicago Police Department. In seven years, Wilson accomplished much more than could have been reasonably expected considering the depth and breadth of the problems he encountered. He used his power to achieve an enormous turnover in top and middle management personnel. He brought several civilian professional employees into the department. Wilson ended the long-standing practice of retaining civil service promotion lists that lasted five, ten or more years. He rapidly advanced many bright, younger officers. Wilson improved relations with the black and other minority communities and he recruited large numbers of minority officers. He implemented the best communications dispatching system in the Nation. Finally, he projected a much improved image of the Chicago department.

Seven years after his departure, the Chicago Police are suffering from scandals involving corruption and brutality. Some believe that the department has declined in the past seven years as much as it had progressed under Wilson. Certainly, it has lost ground, but perhaps not all that had been gained.

The Chicago experience points to questions about good leaders. How can mayors, city managers, police board members and others in authority be influenced to seek good police leaders as chiefs? How can these officials be convinced to support good leaders and protect them from improper outside interference? What can be done to assist mayors, city managers, police board members and others responsible for urban government to accept more responsibility for policing and to acquire an enlightened understanding of the police and their problems? Should mayors of cities over a certain population, or with police departments of more than a specified number of personnel, have a full-time staff assistant with responsibility for the police department? How should elected or other city officials measure police performance?

These are some questions — generally unanswered in the past ten years — that affect the quality of policing. That they are unanswered indicates one reason why there has been so little improvement in policing during the past decade.

For example, in one sense police chiefs and administrators have been too independent because they have not been held accountable by mayors, managers, city councils, the community or the media for the productivity and improvement of their departments. In another sense, the police lack independence. In too many localities police chiefs and administrators are still subject to deleterious outside political influence. In brief, the outside pressures most police chiefs experience are not for reform and improvement but for the advancement and aid of special, often selfish local interest.

Most police chiefs, in their own right and in responding to community pressures, emphasize law enforcement rather than crime prevention. Reward systems in police departments continue to over reward arrest and other enforcement activities. Uniform crime reports are usually the only measurement of productivity for police agencies. So far, relatively little progress has been made in rewarding those chiefs, other administrators and rank and file officers who are more effective in preventing crime, maintaining order and fulfilling a more positive police role.

POLICE DEPARTMENTS. There are many variations among urban police departments in terms of organization, policies, practices, priorities and goals. This is true even in the number of police per thousand population from city to city. San Diego, for example, has 1.3 police officers per thousand while Washington, major beneficiary of the current ad-

ministration's "war on crime," has 6.5 officers per thousand. Per capita cost of policing varies similarly.

What most police departments share is a low level of performance and productivity. There are many reasons. One of the most significant is the traditional and regrettably unchanging fragmentation in policing. There are more than 25,000 police jurisdictions in this country. There is very little exchange of experience and ideas among them. The National Crime Commission's 1967 report identified as a problem the lack of research about crime control. It pointed out that little was known about what the police were doing and why. Seven years later, the police continue to know very little about what they are doing. Certainly, new research has been undertaken. New knowledge has been gained. But the new knowledge, like the knowledge that has been available for many years, is only feebly exploited by a police system (really a non-system) which lacks the integrating forces for intellectual and professional development that only the state and federal governments can provide. Until the states accept a greater responsibility for upgrading all police agencies within their boundaries, old, current and future knowledge will be ignored or only applied haphazardly by those who administer the police. In the meantime, research could be helpful in indicating better ways to gain the support of local government officials for police reform.

There are many instances where knowledge, available for years, has not been employed. For example, more than 25 years ago, O. W. Wilson and others described the need to stagger the number of officers on patrol duty by time of day. In 1972 the New York City Police Department, after major changes undertaken the year before, had approximately 50 per cent of its street manpower for a 24-hour period on duty from 4:00 p.m. to midnight. Less than 15 per cent of its manpower for the 24-hour period was on duty from midnight until 8:00 a.m.

This change in the deployment of manpower represented a basic productivity step. Yet in 1974, as in 1964, many police departments, including several with the most enlightened police leadership, continue to employ about the same level of manpower on patrol duty over a 24-hour period.

Gaining new knowledge about policing implies testing both new techniques and traditional assumptions. The Police Foundation has given a great deal of attention to this area by stressing controlled experimentation and evaluation. For example, in Kansas City, the Foundation has supported experimentation and evaluation that tests the effectiveness of preventive patrol. It currently is supporting a team-policing experiment

in Cincinnati. As significant as such research is, however, it is important to recognize that the results will be of relatively little use unless they truly influence police operations. It is not enough to challenge traditional assumptions about policing techniques and find them wanting. When such techniques are no longer useful, they must be discarded. However, the insularity of many police agencies too often retards the exchange of ideas and the adoption of new policies and practices developed through research.

Another problem that most police departments share deals with the proper use of personnel. Younger officers in lower ranks are obtaining more education than their chiefs have had and are motivated to improve their departments. Unfortunately, these younger officers often are neither encouraged nor permitted to contribute to progress by many of their chiefs, some of whom feel threatened by a new, better educated breed of officers. This, despite the fact that the National Crime Commission's report specifically called for more education and even college degrees for police officers. Thousands of better educated officers anxious to improve policing and willing to work for change as yet are unorganized. Research efforts might help to predict whether organizing those with higher educational qualifications could provide a significant, positive force for better policing.

Another problem that police departments share is a rote devotion to the military model of organization. When Chief William Parker died in 1967 after leading the Los Angeles Police Department for 17 years, he left a markedly good police agency by comparison with other departments. Of course, it had its weaknesses. It had not recruited nearly enough minority officers (Chicago and Philadelphia had far exceeded its progress), had not done enough work in riot prevention and had made some mistakes in handling the Watts riot. But the Los Angeles Police Department has maintained high levels, at least by comparison, of integrity, modern management procedures, productivity, police development, educational achievement, credibility and community support. An important point about the Los Angeles department is that the military model, so highly developed under Parker, continues to be employed while its value diminishes and a professional model is strongly indicated. Mayor Thomas Bradley, a former police officer, has suggested a need to give a more human face to Los Angeles police officers similar to the style of New York officers who smile and laugh occasionally, instead of cooly asking for "just the facts, ma'm."

A core problem in policing in 1964 was corruption. Recent scandals

in Indianapolis, Cleveland and Philadelphia demonstrate the problem still is a major one. And unenlightened police administrators, unions and local politicians still subscribe to the discredited notion that police corruption reflects "only a few rotten apples in a basically good barrel." There are successful methods for dealing with police corruption. One is making individuals within the chain of command accountable for the corruption. One is making individuals within the chain of command accountable for the corrupt acts of their subordinates. However, this is either not understood or ignored in most United States police departments.

PROGRESS. This paper has had by necessity a pessimistic tone. The source of that pessimism, as is evident, is that the root and structural factors that hold back improvement in policing remain. Corruption, lack of communication among departments, adherence to the military model, the resistance to change and relative unenlightenment of many police chiefs, the failure to educate the community to the complexities of the problem of crime, the political misuse of the problem of crime and the role of the police — these factors and others are the result and, in some instances, cause of the failure of the federal and state governments to assume leadership and direction necessary to change policing.

But as has been noted, there have been some hopeful developments, most of them realized since the National Crime Commission report was issued in 1967.

In the middle 1960's, the accepted practice for crowd control was a show of force. Little attention was paid to communication with the leadership of demonstrations and marches. Little intelligence information was gathered in this problem area. But now the police are much more advanced in these matters and understand how to use their discretion in dealing with crowds.

The enormously important fact of police discretion has been explored and described in the Commission's report and the work of Professor Herman Goldstein and others.

Very little has been done to improve control of discretion, but the work which has started is very valuable in such areas as developing stricter policies on the use of force.

On the bright side is a continuing large city middle management personnel exchange program funded by LEAA stimulating an information exchange network. Many more training opportunities for police are now available. There has been a great increase in educational programs.

In the early 1960's, large city police departments and some smaller

ones had begun to concern themselves with the problem of police-community relations, but these early efforts were not very effective in preventing disorders and riots. Police departments too often failed to establish necessary ties in their communities. Many police efforts at community relations were in effect little more than superficial public relations productions. But some departments now have developed working community relations programs that are bearing fruit.

A number of new and experimental approaches in policing are being applied. Team policing is a subject of experimentation in some cities. With it, the old crime-fighter image is gradually giving way to that of the police officer who keeps the peace, maintains order and seeks to reduce crime, all at the same time.

Another recent innovation in dealing with the problem of street crime has been the employment of so-called anti-crime patrols. Officers function out of uniform, not as detectives, but blended into the environment in which the mugger, thief and rapist operate. These patrols are deployed in accordance with careful analysis of crime patterns as determined by location, time of day and specific types of crime.

On the national level, there have been some encouraging developments. The appointment of Clarence Kelley as director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation is a hopeful sign. He served for 12 years in municipal law enforcement where the gut handling of the problem of crime occurs. His appointment suggests some important questions. What is the appropriate role for the FBI in assisting police? What can be expected of the FBI under the direction of Clarence Kelley? What role will he play as a national spokesman and leader in improving policing?

At LEAA new leadership is shedding light on important issues and assuming an increased visibility that can play an important part in the improvement process.

THE FUTURE. If there is to be major progress in policing in the next ten years, several steps will have to be taken.

—Most obviously, the federal government must require that the states, as a condition for receiving money for improvement of the criminal justice system, assume leadership and direction in reforming that system. The states must be made to develop and enforce uniform standards for policing, to reduce the amount of fragmentation among police jurisdictions and to stimulate the adoption of proven, innovative management and operational techniques. The states can provide the primary external force to end the drift and mediocrity that afflicts policing.

—Second only to the states in effecting permanent change in polic-

ing is the force of the new media. They should cover not only crime but the workings of the criminal justice system. The efforts of David Burnham of the *New York Times* aptly showed what one able reporter and one good newspaper could do when they exposed corruption and other problems of the police and the criminal justice system. It is not too much to say that there would have been no Knapp Commission without Burnham's reporting. Covering the criminal justice system can be as good a story and as legitimate a pursuit as covering the way Congress works or the Department of Defense administers military funds.

—Civilians must be employed to a far greater degree. The complexities of many of the problems that face larger police departments suggest that civilian professionals have much to contribute. Regrettably, discrimination still persists in the use of both professional and support civilian employees. The Fremont, California Police Department is now about 47 per cent civilian in make-up. This frees sworn police personnel for the more important functions which require their capabilities.

—The police have not developed as a profession. This reflects the relative lack of education, mobility, definition of role and closed attitudes that prevail in policing today. Lasting improvement in policing demands a more professional stance on the part of the police. An increased use of non-sworn professionals, better education and the opportunity for officers to advance through the ranks from one department to another can further the goal of a professional police service. And, of course, current obsolete civil service practices should be reformed.

—Police corruption must be faced as an ever present danger. The old "rotten apple" explanation for police corruption must be discarded. The federal government, the states and the press all can play a role here.

—Educational opportunities for police must be expanded and current curricula improved. The FBI training program, as good as it is, has never been adequately developed to serve the needs of top-level management in large U.S. police departments. There is nothing in this nation that resembles the police college in England which trains those police officers moving into middle- and top-management positions.

—Better education and professionalism presume the exchange of ideas and a willingness to adopt new methods of policing. This implies an attempt to diminish the current patterns of isolation that mark so many police agencies. And it implies the need for continued and increased research in policing. Areas for research are many. What tools can be developed to help mayors, city managers and budget directors better evaluate their police departments and hold police administrators more

accountable? How can citizens best be involved in helping to solve the problems of the police and the criminal justice system? How can police productivity be best measured? These are but a few questions for researchers. They, of course, must continue to test traditional methods of police operations and to seek innovative way of policing.

One of the most important challenges researchers face involves finding better methods for transfer of existing knowledge about policing. By 1984 policing could improve far more than it has since 1964 if a reasonable number of best current policies and methods could be adopted by the hundred largest departments in this country. It is doubtful if new knowledge developed about specific policing techniques and methods could have a fraction of that impact.

The outlook for much needed basic police change is discouraging. Badly needed improvements in the courts and prosecutors' offices are occurring even more slowly. Crime continues to increase. Violet crime increases even more rapidly. The tragic costs of crime in lives, suffering and property as well as tension and polarization will continue to grow until the states accept their responsibility to create a workable system. For five years the states have accepted federal financial assistance but have made little progress in upgrading and coordinating the many independent agencies which constitute the crazy quilt patterns of crime control within their borders.

After five years of the juicy federal carrot but extremely little use of the stick, there is finally some evidence of a leadership attitude at LEAA. Donald Santarelli, the administrator, has refused to approve funds for at least one state until more progress is demonstrated.

Even the planning which has been done at the state level has tended to be little more than review and processing of grant applications. Plans with teeth in them must precede progress in improved operations.

Many mayors and city governments have taken strong initiatives in attempting to coordinate the work of the police and criminal justice agencies. Their efforts have borne fruit and deserve to be applauded. In the final analysis, however, a disgraceful and avoidable level of serious crime will continue in our cities and beyond until state governments put public safety above the short range political advantage of letting mayors suffer after the consequences of the impossible burden they now carry.

END