

Australian Institute of Criminology

Crime Prevention and the Community— Whose Responsibility?

REPORT ON THE SEMINAR HELD
IN CANBERRA, JUNE 10-14, 1974

BY
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INTRODUCTION

Training Project No. 4 of the Australian Institute of Criminology took the form of a seminar on the subject of "Crime Prevention and the Community—Whose Responsibility?" The intention of the Institute in holding this seminar was to focus attention on the role of the community in the prevention of crime and to expose for closer examination some of the more familiar assumptions that were made when the subject of community involvement was under discussion. An attempt was made to obtain representation from all walks of community life. This proved to be rather more difficult than at first appeared but ultimately, the interests of police and private security organisations, legislators and ex-offenders, women's organisations, social welfare services, probation, parole and social work agencies, school officials, teachers and students were all brought into the seminar. There was one representative from India and one from Fiji. Finally, as a novel feature of this training project the Institute invited the schools in the Canberra/Queanbeyan region to send students and six high school students participated in the seminar. There was, therefore, a fair cross section of the social, professional, educational and general community assembled at the Institute for the study of crime prevention and the community.

The programme for the seminar was not formulated until the exact constitution of the seminar was known. To ensure uniformity of treatment and consistency in direction, one visiting expert was asked to be director of the project, to produce keynote papers for each day's discussion, and to chair the open sessions. Four consultants - one psychiatrist, one sociologist, one educator and one lawyer were invited to conduct the four workshops into which the seminar divided after each keynote address. However in addition to these proceedings the Project Director took the opportunity to involve different persons within the seminar with special expertise, or whose opinion would be of special interest to other participants and by varying this procedure day-by-day the open discussions tended to incorporate most of the concerns and points of view represented at the meeting. Workshops were then used to achieve greater specificity and to encourage detailed consideration of the subject matter.

As this report will show, the wide range of interests encompassed by the seminar was moulded during the week in such a way as to achieve a remarkable degree of consensus on the issues before Australia in its task of involving the community in the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders. There were different perspectives to reconcile. The term "crime prevention" had different connotations. For some participants it referred primarily to the practical measures necessary to ensure the co-operation of the public in protecting their own lives and property. For others, this term encompassed everything from effective child care and efficient education to a concern for neighbours, minority groups and the reintegration and rehabilitation of the offender. There were also different levels in the discussion of social controls and social values; both subjective and objective criteria were applied and the concepts ranged from individual and sub-cultural values to those of the wider society.

The duration of the seminar was too short for all differences to be resolved but this was merely a reflection of the true situation in the wider society where such differences subsist and become obstacles or tacit dividers in the attempts to obtain the kind of community cohesion implied by community development. The value of the seminar was that in this very short period it proved possible to rise above these differences and to achieve a measure of understanding and co-operation, demonstrating that even if there were differences there existed an even greater concern for the future of the wider society. What follows therefore is a brief summary of the conclusions

of the seminar and this is presented in advance of a full report (which would include all working papers and documents presented) in the hope that it will be of value to legislators, professional personnel and concerned citizens who are still struggling with the problems which confronted the participants in this seminar.

CRIME PREVENTION AND THE COMMUNITY—WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY?

The seminar began with an examination of the role of the community in crime prevention. It was thought that the term "community" as well as the term "crime prevention" presented problems because, in many urban areas, communities in the real sense of the word might not yet have been developed or may no longer exist. Urban centres presented a complex of sub-cultural situations within which it was not always possible to assume that because a neighbourhood group existed this would constitute a community. Cohesion, common interests and sufficient concern to act in unity were some characteristics of a community as understood in this connection and such bonds of social solidarity were not always evident in people occupying a common geographical area of residence or activity.

Whilst it was indisputable that the members of a society carried the final responsibility for crime, it was observed that the term "community involvement" could be interpreted in many ways not always or necessarily beneficial to society. Lynching and mob violence were obvious examples of negative community participation which could aggravate rather than improve a situation of rising crime and deteriorating order. The violent repression of acts of violence by extremist vigilante groups or private security teams or, as is the situation in some countries, the carrying of firearms by people who feel the need for protection in what they consider to be a lawless society were other examples of community involvement which might be less than desirable.

There was really no problem about controlling crime if liberty were sufficiently restricted. Crime could be controlled by formal and informal restraints on individual freedom. In countries where liberty was tightly controlled by law and where law enforcement was strict there was generally rather less crime. Similarly, crime did not seem to be a problem in societies which were closely knit and group orientated with common standards in custom, religion or political ideology. Such societies remained relatively free of crime through community control. The community itself prevented crime by imposing conformity, inhibiting deviance, encouraging the status quo and discouraging extremes of individuality. Therefore the problem for modern cities, in the view of the seminar, was not to control crime but to control crime whilst preserving freedom.

In making urban communities responsible for crime, the cities may need to be replanned and reorganised to assist in creating the desired levels of community interest and community identity. It was fully appreciated that community needs had not been overlooked by architects and planners in respect of shopping centres, schools, community centres etc. But such facilities did not necessarily create or foster communities in the sense of creating or fostering the kinds of cohesion needed to control crime and develop healthy, wholesome neighbourhoods or improved and integrated social life.

The "shift to the cities" was discussed in some detail. Whilst there was some support for the view that people, especially younger people, moved to the cities to achieve anonymity and comparative freedom from the social constraints of more tightly organised smaller communities, there was concern about the possibility of this being generally true as a motive for the urban drift. The benefits of health services, education and work were mentioned as other inducements and the seminar felt that it was very important to decide for purposes of planning whether people liked to be private and

undisturbed or whether they wanted to "belong" and share with neighbours. Probably people wanted both privacy and a bond with neighbours, in a fine balance which planners would need to recognise and allow for. However, crime was likely to develop more from an excess of privacy and separation than from an excess of social involvement and people should be better informed on the dangers of isolation in urban areas.

On community standards there was a feeling that individuals would resist externally determined standards of conduct whilst standards which arose from within the community would usually be more acceptable. However, this was an assumption still to be vindicated by future research. It was thought that this question should be considered not only in terms of what the community needed but in terms of what the community would be prepared to accept. In the development of standards and the shaping of new societies it was observed that crime need not always be regarded as a negative phenomenon. Crime itself could be an important factor in the process of social evolution. Nevertheless it was clear that excessive crime producing fear, insecurity, and unjustly diverting the benefits of production could not be regarded as normal in any circumstances.

The subject of crime in the context of a changing society was discussed at length. The problem of the law as a follower or leader of public opinion was considered and examples were given of outmoded laws and new legal developments in pollution and race relations. The observation was made that societies tended to decriminalise certain forms of behaviour or conduct because of changes in values; for example homosexuality, abortion and prostitution had been decriminalised in some places. Similar or other changes were introduced by technological change, as evidenced by the disuse of legal controls on horsedrawn vehicles and by the criminalisation of pollution.

The difficulty of evaluating the effectiveness of public participation in crime control was emphasised. Whilst it was assumed that public involvement increased efficiency and whilst this was necessary for its own sake in a democracy, it was necessary to look at different types of public involvement with a view to assessing their value. It was thought that, in general terms, the public was not adequately involved and current measures to control crime could not be said to be working effectively.

On the subject of decriminalisation the following observations were made.

(a) Decriminalisation, if limited to crimes relating to homosexuality, abortion and prostitution could be peripheral in relation to the great bulk of the criminal law and might only have a minimal effect. However an instance was quoted of one region of Australia in which it could be shown that the removal of public drunkenness and vagrancy from the list of prosecutable offences would release substantial police, judicial, and correctional resources for other uses.

(b) Decriminalisation alone was not sufficient and the diversion of some types of cases from the criminal justice system could imply a need for additional resources to be provided for alternative social and health services.

(c) Decriminalisation, if extended to the bases of criminal law, could be considered as a means of changing a society's fundamental values and reform on this scale was much more than legal. Here there were political,

social and ethical issues which should not be disguised as limited legal reform. The need for legal reform should be identified and the wider implications made clear for more general public discussion.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE WORK
OF THE PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Involving the community in crime prevention was not difficult to discuss in general but the participants sought to identify in more specific terms the opportunities for and the limitations of community co-operation with the professionals in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice. The seminar reviewed the question of community involvement in the operation of the criminal justice system at all stages of the prevention process, from informal controls of behaviour before crimes were committed to the re-integration of the offender. An examination was made of public participation in the work of the police, the courts, probation, parole and correctional services, welfare agencies, education systems and private security organisations.

It was thought to be axiomatic that in any democratic criminal justice system the police, courts and prisons could function efficiently only in so far as they were capable of involving the public they served. In many of these services the forms of community participation had been institutionalised already. Examples included special constabularies to help the police; prisoners' aid societies to complement the correctional systems; and juries, assessors and lay magistrates to bring the public into the work of the courts.

To find better ways of public participation the questions which needed to be answered were (a) How did a community want to become involved? (b) How could a community best contribute? and, (c) At what levels would such involvement be helpful and tolerable to the professional? It could not always be assumed that the public wanted to be involved and there were many cases of people deliberately avoiding involvement. There were also the types of public reaction already mentioned which were patently undesirable, such as mob violence and revenge or a disproportionate use of force. At the same time it was recognised that when police, prison officers or other officials called for public support their calls were rarely unconditional. There were areas of their work which they usually considered to be the preserve of the professionally trained personnel. It would be unwise to have public groups with little training interfering at purely professional levels. A balance was needed to achieve the best working relationships, a balance which it was not always easy to attain.

The importance of educating the community in the operation of the criminal justice system was discussed and it was agreed that there was a definite need for public education in this field. The community could not be expected to participate in crime control unless it was adequately informed. Educating the public was a long process however, which should begin with the education of the parents in the development of the principles which might help to keep children out of trouble and which should continue through the schools and community organisations, making the working of the criminal justice system both familiar and understandable.

Consideration was given to the role of the media as an educational tool but it was evident that this needed careful handling in view of the way in which the media tended to sensationalise criminal justice issues, sometimes oversimplifying and creating a distorted impression. Whilst parents and the home environment were seen as the primary source of education, the supportive, reinforcing role of the school teacher was emphasised. In fact, the school milieu reinforced by the mass media was combining to become the prime

educational force in society. Teacher training should, it was considered, make teachers aware of the fact that their responsibilities extended to giving children and young people an understanding of our system of justice. There was some disagreement whether courses on criminal justice as such should be introduced into school curricula and whether such courses, if introduced, should be compulsory or voluntary. Whether treated as a separate course however, or provided for in curricula or extra-curricula activity, it was abundantly clear that students were not now receiving adequate information on this subject and they needed more preparation for their obligations to society.

The need for public awareness of questionable business practices was also stressed by the seminar. Consumers were too easily exploited and in a modern complex society could not always be expected to know all the "tricks of a trade". They needed both official guidance and sometimes more official protection from the unscrupulous. It was also observed that the community had a role to play in the education and training of adult and juvenile offenders. It was noted that volunteers often conduct educational programmes within prisons and it was thought that such facilities could be extended. Volunteers could also be used to prevent crime in the streets and to improve social services with a crime prevention element.

The involvement of juries in criminal cases was discussed. Since recent research had suggested that juries tended to decide cases with reference to largely irrelevant considerations, there was a real question as to whether juries should be abolished or improved. The general feeling was that it would be a pity if this form of public involvement were to disappear completely. On the other hand improvements were definitely needed and some of these might be:

- (a) the use of trained foremen;
- (b) improved directions given by the judge;
- (c) trained panels of juries for specialised cases.

It was felt that juries should remain if only to share responsibility with the judge for the decision in some of the more serious cases. It was observed that the problem of subjective decision making applied not only to juries but also to judges. Not all judges always managed to exclude their personal feelings from their judgements however legally correct these might be. Nevertheless, it was becoming increasingly clear that the jury process and the use of juries in general should be reviewed and overhauled. Archaic practices should be removed if they had no relevance to the fair administration of justice.

There was a general lack of understanding and the seminar expressed general concern over the operations of private security companies. Even so, the consensus of opinion was that in present circumstances they were necessary. It was pointed out however, that such organisations provide services not provided by governments, and could in some situations develop a potentially repressive protective system for certain commercial interests. They were a valuable aid in preventing crime but legislation was needed to eliminate the less responsible or less qualified security organisations which might do as much harm as good.

In the area of industrial security, the involvement of trade unions was regarded as particularly important. Attention was given to the way in which unions protect the legal rights of members and become involved at times in disputes arising from the unexpected or inconsiderate introduction

of new security measures. It was thought that a co-operative effort on the part of unions and employers would produce a quite effective control of industrial crime which would be to the advantage of all. Such an approach to crime prevention with union participation would operate as a deterrent and not as a more efficient instrument of detection. Its success would depend upon mutual trust.

Reference was made to the present lack of involvement between industrial organisations and criminological research organisations. It was considered important that there should be greater co-operation between these two groups on the subject of controlling crime.

On the question of involving the public in correctional work and the re-integration of the offender, it was suggested that after a suitable period without further offending, a person's criminal record should be expunged. There was real awareness of the complexity of implementing this ideal. At least there should be an absolute obligation on police to regard records as confidential as from employers and potential employers, credit rating organisations and other business organisations.

It was noted that in some areas in Australia employment opportunities for persons with criminal records were very limited. It was observed however that opportunities in government employment for past offenders had improved in recent years.

It was observed that the community was less inclined to become involved with crimes such as shop-lifting and fraud which on one hand are rejected as being illegal and wrong, but on the other tended to be accepted or tacitly condoned.

Reference was also made to the steadily increasing size and complexity of law enforcement agencies. As a result, these organisations had become de-personalised and the individual in society often had difficulty in identifying with them. It was considered that a possible method of promoting community involvement in law enforcement would be to make these agencies smaller and more accessible, or at least more decentralised in operation thus establishing in the community a greater sense of identity and responsibility. Of course this would need to be reconciled with any necessary amalgamations of law enforcement agencies which might be considered necessary for purposes of economy, efficiency, or the more effective use of expensive equipment.

In general, with respect to the participation of the public in professional crime prevention work, it was considered by the seminar that volunteers had a definite role to play and that they should be involved in such positions and at such levels as they could best operate with professional advice and guidance.

THE COMMUNITY AND ITS VALUES

A study of the community and its values presented the groups with a number of problems, not the least of which was the wide range of meanings attached to the term and the perhaps inevitable tendency for the discussion to ebb and flow between the subjective and objective aspects of this subject. It was evident from the presentations made by clergymen, policemen, security employees, students and community leaders that there were many differences in the conceptions of basic values. Despite this, the group was able to reach a very creditable consensus. It believed that no society could deal with the question of crime without clearly understanding its own aims and principles and that no society could move to crime prevention work without enunciating its basic precepts and determining the kinds of behaviour which were generally intolerable.

It was observed that crime-free or near crime-free communities all appeared to have fundamental agreement on basic values even if they were able to occasionally accommodate variations in these fundamental precepts. In a pluralistic society however, and particularly in an urbanised setting, there was often a proliferation of value systems and a variety of basic principles which were often in tacit or express conflict.

There were various social controls which might be considered as value indicators. These were usually described as law, custom, fashion, and morals, all of which influenced our values in the home, in the schools, in business and in public life. The problem in a modern urban or complex society was that these did not necessarily coincide. Often the values of sub-cultures and primary groups with different customs, fashions and morals diverged from the expectations of the whole group: The idea that there were basic values for a total society which were supported by all sub-groups despite their differences was difficult to accept as mass society became more complex.

The seminar thought that it might be making too great an assumption to declare that organised society in Australia depended upon agreement on a system of basic values. Undoubtedly there were limits of behaviour upon which all Australians would agree but these were not always easy to distil from the various groups and sub-cultures which often disagreed on fundamentals. Nevertheless, the fact that more people observed the law than did not, argued for a general understanding on the most fundamental tenets of behaviour. This being so it seemed evident to participants that any attempt to accommodate all conflicting views, however contradictory, and to accept the influence of varied sub-cultures, however diverse, would be an exercise in social futility. Furthermore with such a complete relativity of standards it might only be a matter of time before communities disintegrated. Australian society may perhaps extol such values as tolerance, concern honesty and responsibility (and the seminar thought all of these important) but their practice in society left much to be desired and left in question the issue of their status as basic standards.

Perhaps the definition of values should involve both a rational and an emotional component. People could be over-concerned with the emotional pleasure of being tolerant, with the moral righteousness of being honest and with being responsible without appreciating the logical consequences. Toleration of the values of others was necessary but only if it stopped at the toleration of intolerance or at the acceptance of behaviour contrary to the principles of human rights to life and liberty. Similarly, honesty and responsibility had to be related to society's essential precepts, aims and objectives.

It was agreed that in modern public life in Australia the values of tolerance, honesty and the like are universal. These are values which are often beyond proof or demonstration and they depend on the belief system. They may be part of total values based on the Judeo Christian tradition, or on Polynesian, Asian or Indian creeds. Though so very different, these diverse religious groups often had quite similar or comparable standards of ethics relatable to the well being of society. It might be possible therefore to distil from these differing religious persuasions a common content of essential standards. These would certainly include tolerance, honesty, respect for others, a recognition of basic human rights and the values embodied in codes like the Ten Commandments. It was observed however that the pleasure-pain principle would be likely to interfere with the true worth of a value based solidly on a belief system.

The seminar was well aware that in its limited discussions, the questions had not been fully answered. The question remained: to what extent could diverse values be safely tolerated in Australian society?

SOCIALISATION

The term "socialisation" was taken by the seminar to refer to the process by which individuals in a community were persuaded or conditioned, or learnt or were taught to conform to the principles of the society to which they belonged. It was construed to mean the process by which people incorporated in themselves as they grew the standards and values, the styles and the attitudes of their society or perhaps their sub-society. The seminar considered such a process of socialisation in the basic tenets and values of a society to be necessary to the development of a society capable of determining its own future and reducing crime. In reaching this conclusion the seminar had taken full account of the possibility that western society should encourage its members to be different because it depended on innovation and competition for its progress.

The seminar considered the question of what kind of society Australians might want. Participants felt that this had to be decided first. However when this question was answered, it was still necessary to decide exactly how it was proposed to impose such views on its children through home training and the schools or on people through the various public institutions. In determining all this, Australia will need to decide how much deviation from its accepted values its people could tolerate.

In learning to understand and appreciate each other's values, people's standards are formed under the influence of tradition, the family, the media and the community. In the formative years these have tremendous effect. Therefore the media must not present views which are misleading, over-simplified or one-sided for the purpose of drama or commercial gain. It was thought that in the past they had contributed to the distrust of people and to the widespread questioning of society's basic values.

The seminar decided that people in Australia were being progressively subjected to new forms of deviation. Some participants argued that schools should be sufficiently diverse to render unnecessary the imposition of standards on pupils. They thought that if society was to encourage pupils to reach their potential in their own way it must be prepared to accept the varieties of behaviour so implied. Whilst the seminar accepted the need to ensure individual fulfilment it thought that such diversity should not be taken so far as to exclude or reduce the need for the positive socialisation of children in the basic values of the society to which they belonged.

In considering exactly what it is which socialises, the seminar could only touch on the relative merits of heredity and environment, or the influence of family, neighbourhood, school, chromosomes and genes. The question of exactly what causes people to conform or to rebel could not (in the present state of our knowledge) be precisely answered, but the seminar felt that it could say with some measure of certainty that positive influence included family life, school and the community. It observed that there were ideological societies which deliberately drilled into children from a very early age the way to behave. The Australian problem was how to reconcile the amount or the quality of socialisation it decided upon with the amount of freedom of thought and action which Australians considered to be necessary for Australian society.

The seminar believed that neglected children presented a very special problem. Having missed love themselves, they found it difficult to give love and affection to their own children. And so, generation by generation, a problem of unsocialised and perhaps cold-hearted and dangerous children

is created and grows to ever new proportions. Human behaviour could often be traced back to early experiences and there was no doubt that crime prevention had to begin in the cradle. Foster-care could be difficult, especially if the child had to be changed from one foster-mother to another and it was essential that a child have a regular mother or mother substitute. The seminar thought that the system of working mothers might be more costly to the nation than having them remain at home because all children needed a secure and harmonious relationship with and between their parents. Therefore the question of whether the mother should work or not, should never have to be considered on purely economic grounds.

A child's values derived from home influence and these could be either reinforced or weakened by peer groups. In at least one respect the seminar believed that this situation could be improved: parents could perhaps help to avoid the weakening process by identifying themselves with the school.

It was observed that if teachers allowed too much freedom of thought, pupils might derive little profit from their instruction. Authorities generally realised that in the early stages of education it was by process rather than content that learning occurred. As the child worked his way through the system, there was greater emphasis on content and there was perhaps a need for a better balance between these two.

The seminar then dealt with the problem posed by the possibility of a school being used to socialise children and thereby usurping the function of the parents. This was a continuing danger as the school became more important in the lives of young people. Perhaps this was an additional reason why parents should identify themselves with the school. With the help of parents, teachers may become more aware of the role they play in the socialisation of children, more especially problem children.

The participants recommended the following reforms to our educational system:

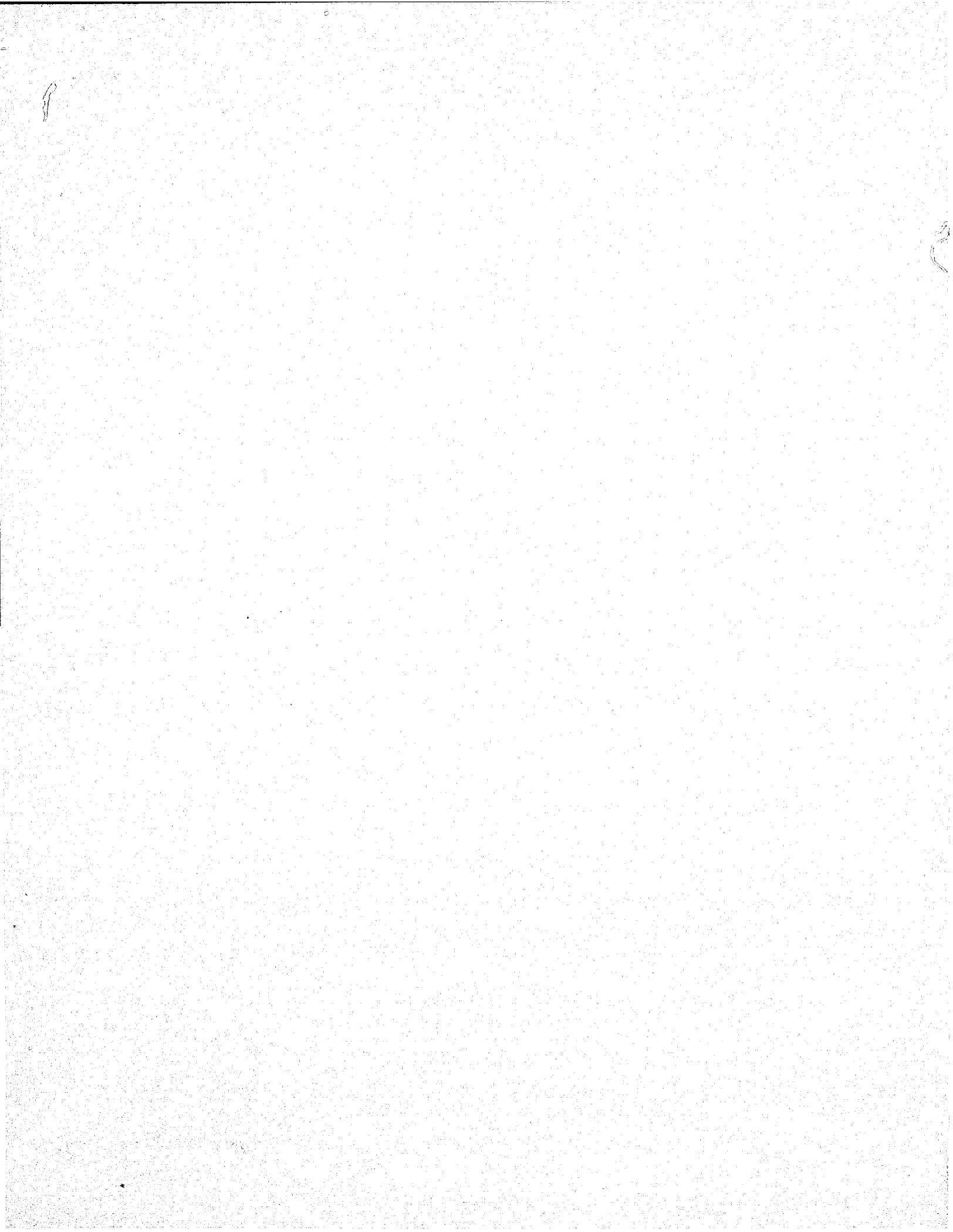
- (a) there should be an increase in pre-school facilities;
- (b) greater resources were required in the primary schools to enable teachers to cope with the maladjusted child;
- (c) formal courses related to socialisation and to problem children should be included in initial teacher training and later in in-service training;
- (d) with the advent of school boards, schools would be tied to local communities and the problems of cross-community travel should not be ignored by school administrative and government control bodies;
- (e) schools should so diversify their programmes as to enable pupils to pursue their own interests as a medium in which society's values could be allowed to develop.

Participants believed that socialisation meant more than a belief that people should be indoctrinated in certain values. They believed that it involved the means by which this was achieved or attempted. Though the word "indoctrination" was distasteful, the seminar believed that something of this kind always went on when there was instruction in the schools or at home. There could even be an indoctrination in confusion.

The seminar referred to the great sums presently being spent on education and it asked whether some of this money should not be used to find out where the country might have gone wrong in bringing up its children. Participants repeated that they did not know what causes people to feel discontentment or animosity. Similarly, they did not know what it is which makes people conform. They felt that the Australian problem was to reconcile desirable socialisation with the measure of freedom it wished to give its young people. Australia would need to decide where to draw the line between deviation and freedom.

Education provided an opportunity for recognising delinquency at an early stage but the seminar observed that this had not always been successful. Participants felt it to be important to observe that schools were not established simply to convey knowledge. They had always had and should continue to have a character building function. This brought up the subject of education for use or for its own sake. Whilst no one wished to deny the value of education per se the seminar felt it to be impossible to ignore the significance of education for use. It took account of the problem created in many developing countries where education unrelated to work opportunities had created an educated unemployed.

The seminar noted that much of what it had said of values could be reconciled with what it had to say of socialisation. Each individual must be allowed to develop his own potentialities to the extent that he does not interfere with the rights and principles of others. If it is true that law creates crime, it is also true that crime creates law. Laws must be constructed in such a way as to make it clear that they are for the benefit of all and that those who do not conform will always need to be dealt with. From the earliest age, the child must know right from wrong and that he will face problems if he does not know the difference.



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