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Policing in London

The Home Secretary placed in the Library today a summary of the proposals which Sir Kenneth Newman has put to him for future police strategy in London, a copy of which is attached. Sir Kenneth's analysis falls into two parts:-

1. The Problems

There has been an enormous increase in the demands made upon the police force in the last 10 years which has outstripped the substantial increases in police manpower, particularly in the last few years. These demands have included:-

- Greatly increased threats to public order. In the last 10 years events requiring redeployment of more than 100 policemen have grown from 1 per week to 1 per day in London on average.
- A considerable increase in the sophistication of some forms of criminal activity which has necessitated the formation of specialised squads.
- Growing non-criminal demand on the police, e.g., domestic disputes, fires, lost children, etc, take up as much as 70% of uniformed police activity, leaving of course correspondingly less for activities directed against crime.
- A vast increase in the social and political demand on the police which leads to senior officers having to contact as many as 40 pressure groups in each district.

The results of this increased pressure have meant a decline in police effectiveness against the most common kind of crime, i.e., petty larceny and street offences. In its turn, this has led to a decline in public confidence in the police. Although public trust in the police at a general level remains high, people no longer

believe in the capacity of the police to solve the crimes which most affect them; as a result, the acid test of confidence in the police, the willingness of people to cooperate with them, has in its turn declined.

2. The Strategy

Some of this can be solved by increased resources, and the strength of the Metropolitan Police is being increased this year. But as Sir Kenneth recognises, that is not the whole answer. There must be a more effective deployment of existing resources towards crime prevention and detection. What Sir Kenneth proposes is a redeployment of at least 650 officers from the specialist squads including those directed towards ~~law~~^{public} and order, and from traffic management towards highly visible foot patrols in areas where there is a high incidence of street crime and burglary. At the same time there will be an effort through better training and increased use of technology to ensure that the specialist activities including traffic will maintain their effectiveness despite losing manpower.

While Sir Kenneth's report does not use the phrase, what he proposes is a step in the direction of "Community Policing". The reasons are, however, ones of effectiveness rather than ideology. Sir Kenneth believes - as does the Home Secretary - that increased use of "the bobby on the beat" is the best way to prevent and detect the kind of crime which everyone in London knows is increasing.

Public attention will probably concentrate on this aspect, together with the role of the SPG (which Sir Kenneth says will be concentrated on anti-burglary patrols) and on accountability.

I will prepare for Questions tomorrow short notes on the line you might take in the light of the response to the Report.



24 January, 1983.