

Congress on Crime

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LOOKING BACK now on the first British Congress on Crime, it is, I suppose, a bit of a marvel that it happened at all. The Planning Committee did not know how many people might want to come or whether an attempt deliberately to involve people from very different aspects of practical and academic work might prove an attractive proposition or, on the contrary, something that people would jib at.

We hoped that we might perhaps get 300 applications to attend. In the event, we accepted 500 from nearly 30 countries; but only because the pressure to get in was so considerable. Many more had to be turned down because there simply was not the space. And anyway too many cooks spoil the broth.

Even so, the congress was probably too large. We had hoped to break things down by providing group lectures and discussions each day. But some of the star performers got as many as a hundred people and that is more like a mass audience than a group. People had to choose one out of a possible 10 group lectures

each day. Since most of them wanted to go to more than one group, this did produce that degree of frustration and anxiety about missing something interesting that any congress needs to liven it up. The cardinal rule here is never to allow your customers to be satisfied, for satisfaction breeds boredom.

The plenary sessions the next day, during which rapporteurs reported back from each group, showed that there was indeed sufficient frustration to make the majority want to turn up. The three-quarters empty lecture theatres which are so common halfway through other congresses were avoided. On the other hand, the reporting back, skilfully done though it was, took a bit long. And there was a real language barrier. Some jargon is unavoidable. For jargon is just technical terms which often stand for quite complicated concepts that would otherwise take a long time to explain. But perhaps there was too much of it. It must be avoided another time, not by lowering the intellectual level of lectures and

discussion, but by remembering that the main purpose of such a congress is communication.

The keynote lectures demonstrated the complexity of studying criminal behaviour. Dr. Nigel Walker, looking at casual theories of crime, criticised what he called "monolithic" theories, by which one, or a number of, rather broad assumptions are thought to provide explanations of criminal behaviour. We all know how poverty or broken homes used to be considered as one of the main causes of crime. But Dr. Walker felt that even much more sophisticated hypotheses, such as are now put forward by various sociologists, attempt to explain too much by what are in the end too simple assumptions.

Not all theories are "monolithic". There are attempts to understand crime in terms of "multiple determination". In these studies, different psychological, social and constitutional factors and the way they relate to each other are examined. It has been found, for example, that drunkenness in the father might lead to criminal behaviour in the son *if* that boy was also introverted. Introversion by itself is not characteristic of delinquency. Nor would the fact of a drunken father by itself necessarily be enough to lead the boy to commit offences. But paternal drunkenness acting upon this particular character trait in

the boy might result in delinquent behaviour.

So perhaps, theories of multiple determination are more useful than monolithic theories. But measuring the factors involved is often very difficult and can lead to distortions. What is more, it may be meaningless to ask questions in relation to "crime" itself. This may embrace too wide a range of behaviour to lend itself to investigations. It may be more useful to find out why different *types* of people commit different *types* of offences. This involves classification, as does the matching of different types of offenders to different treatment possibilities.

In the end, however, even the concept of typology is rather static; and this led Dr. Walker to develop the notion of examining *careers*. We need to know not only about psychological, social and constitutional factors but, as it were, how one thing leads to another. A heavy drinking bout may be significant; but it is less so if it occurs after the break-up of a marriage. The notion of studying careers of the gradually developing life-style of people, introduces new dimensions which may ultimately help in discovering better preventive and treatment methods.

Mr. T. S. Lodge, in the second keynote lecture, pointed to the need to look at the penal methods as well as at the offender. Overall results of prisons and borstal do not tell us very much. A particular

type of person might do well at one borstal and badly at another. In the overall result rates, the bad might cancel out the good. Yet if our classification system improved, if more were known about what type of offender responds best to what type of borstal training, if one could match different categories of offenders with different types of treatment, then better results could be achieved.

This problem of defining much more closely types of offenders and types of treatment is perhaps the central research problem. To solve it, co-operation will be required from the prison or probation service. Innovations and changes in these services are always occurring. But in order to make the evaluation of such changes possible, they should be systematised and carried out within research designs. In some places this is already being done; and it should gradually become the rule rather than the exception.

In the last keynote lecture, Mr. R. L. Morrison turned to treatment and prevention. He emphasized particularly the notion of involvement. Much is sometimes made of all the difficulties in the way of a therapeutic approach: prisoners unwilling to co-operate, officers reluctant to enter into relationships, a general feeling of apathy and an unwillingness to budge from old-established attitudes.

But experience suggests that this picture is too pessimistic. Even very marginal participation in some programme of treatment or co-operation is enough in the first instance; after that, the individual tends to be carried along, despite himself, to the point where he eventually becomes fully involved. Merely by just going on with, say, group counselling, all concerned gradually become enmeshed in the process and consequences of participation. One of these consequences is that participants can become both agents and targets of change. A group in which offender X joins with others to change offender Y may be more effective in changing X; not Y.

In prevention, too, the notion of involvement is of paramount importance. In the last resort, this means not only the involvement of individuals and groups but of the community itself, in the widest sense. For crime is not simply a threat to society. It is a problem for which society, together with the individual, must share the responsibility.

These, briefly, were some of the main themes, with sub-themes running from drug addiction to company fraud (a lecture which must have been particularly topical since it was widely reported in the specialist financial papers as

well as in the *Times*). Those who want to know more about some of the interesting and varied group lectures will eventually be able to read the gist of them. There will be no orthodox Congress Proceedings (usually abominably dull) but a small book, written in the form of a continuous narrative, in which the various subjects that belong together are grouped together. This, we hope, will result in a reasonably coherent and readable whole. It is being published by Pergamon Press.

Mrs. P. Allen, social worker at Wormwood Scrubs, writes:

Recently a man waited three days and two nights in a motor vehicle in order to be the first to cross the new Severn bridge when it opened; few of us would go to such lengths for posterity, yet I am sure we all know or at worst are able to appreciate the real personal thrill that may be achieved from being part of a new and successful venture, and the recent British Congress on Crime (first to be held in this country) was no exception to the rule.

The congress, arranged to mark the centenary of the Howard League for Penal Reform and its parent body, the Howard Association, was planned in conjunction with the Institute for the study and Treatment of Delinquency and the British Society of Criminology.

It was designed to bring together three groups of people:

those involved in research into all aspects of criminology including law, psychiatry, sociology and case-work, those seeking to apply the principles that are being discovered and taught, and personnel engaged in the management and administration of social and penal services. To quote: "the idea is to take stock of what is known and what is not known, and to apprehend the frontiers of criminology so that progress may be made beyond them".

High aspirations you may think, yet the congress achieved exactly this. From the very start an atmosphere of participation and friendly interest was apparent and total strangers anxious to share facts and views would, without hesitation launch into discussions, so that one received new and diverse opinions from sources that normally one would rarely encounter. One afternoon at the start of the lecture, I had taken my seat in the Botany Theatre (University College had generously made over certain rooms to us) and I was quietly enjoying myself with identifying various distinguished members when a voice near me said: "You're surrounded by policemen, you realise that, do you?" I turned to find a detective superintendent whose name is famous and who incidentally attended the same lecture group as

myself the previous day and without more ado we proceeded to tear apart the subject matter of that lecture in which we both had been so interested.

The menu for the week was delectable.

After the opening session delivered by various speakers of international repute, we were presented with the choice of 10 subjects for the afternoon group lectures and discussion—I personally spent whole lunch hours in an agony of indecision for there were few of these 10 subjects in which I was not interested; however, compensation came the following morning, when it was the task of each rapporteur to report back to the general assembly with a precis of every group subject, and in this way appetites were assuaged. Hypotheses backed by statistical data of a high order (though the latter unhappily limited in some cases by lack of a current research programme) were offered to us by professionals and lay workers in all fields relating to crime.

Congress members (some 460) many from Europe and various parts of the Commonwealth, were now given the day off and the opportunity to visit an institution,

clinic, borstal or detention centre of their choice. This was very popular indeed and I personally was highly pleased to be given a view into the workings of the Home Office Research Unit, they took immense pains to clarify their work and ensure that we were left without illusion or disillusion, and I could not adequately thank them.

The closing day Dr. Gibbens summed up—not as one might expect, in a repetitive, perhaps dry and statistical vein but in an address which was both human and highly relevant; we responded accordingly. Finally, Mr. Hugh Klare whom one might describe as the perfect field worker, i.e. he had been responsible, together with his most able committee, for all the planning and organising of this undertaking, spoke to us in farewell.

For me, and I know many others, this congress was a success.

There is clearly much work to be done at all levels but if we are provided with the benefits of current information and relevant working concepts such as this congress sought to impart, it must surely ease the enormity of the tasks in hand.