

## NOTES

## LIES, DAMNED LIES AND STATISTICS\*

## INTRODUCTION

In spite of the many cautionary clichés concerning the use and abuse of statistics, it seems to be fairly generally accepted that the figures relating to crime and delinquency delineate the true extent and significance of crime in New Zealand with reasonable accuracy. Thus every year, at the time of the winter solstice, a curious and rather primitive rite is enacted with the publication of the annual statistics relating to the offences reported to the police for the previous year. These statistics are generally greeted with cries of horror and much ceremonial breast-beating and almost invariably result in Government approval for a higher police/public ratio. Unfortunately most of this activity is based upon a thoroughly erroneous premise, for the criminal statistics are perhaps the most overrated and uninformative instruments ever to be thrust into the hands of a credulous public. As Thorsten Sellin has put it: "criminal statistics do not contain information about the criminal conduct that actually occurs".<sup>1</sup>

There are many sources of criminal statistics in New Zealand. Information can be gleaned from the annual reports of the Police Department,<sup>2</sup> from the Annual Statistics of Justice, from the annual reports of the Justice Department<sup>3</sup> and from the annual reports of the Child Welfare Division of the Department of Social Welfare.<sup>4</sup> In addition specialist figures can often be obtained from research reports and policy statements issued by various government departments. From the point of view of information concerning the so-called "state of crime" the figures produced by the Police Department are clearly by far the most valuable. They are as close to the 'source' as we can realistically hope to get; they are relatively unrefined and they are produced fairly soon after the event.<sup>5</sup> In addition they are very attractive statistics in that they appear to be clearly set out and easy to follow, and seem to provide a rough indication of both the state of crime and the effectiveness of the police force.

It is the intention of this brief note to show that this last impression is totally misleading. The police statistics are neither as clearly set out or as easy to follow as they should be, nor do they give any

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\* George Bernard Shaw (attrib. probably apoch.).

1. Sellin, *The Significance of Records of Crime* (1951), 67 L.Q.R., pp. 489-504 at p. 489.
2. Parliamentary Paper H.16.
3. Parliamentary Paper H.20.
4. Parliamentary Paper E.4. (Up to and including 1971.)
5. This is in decided contrast to the Annual Statistics of Justice which seem to have a 2½-3 year gestation period and which are often of more interest to historians than to students of current affairs.

indication whatsoever of the true state of crime or of police efficiency in coping with it. The justification for this note is to be found in the 1971 figures released by the Department earlier this year which will provide the source for the examples used throughout.

### CRIMES AND OFFENCES REPORTED TO THE POLICE IN 1971

Over the last five years the number of offences reported to the police in the twelve general offence categories used by the Department have increased considerably. (See Fig. 1.)

*Fig. 1. Crimes and Offences Reported to the Police, 1967-71.*

Offence Type	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971
Person	5,544	5,894	6,369	7,477	8,664
Property	80,971	89,913	91,254	99,759	118,127
Morality & Public Welfare	4,158	4,138	4,699	5,151	5,480
Public Order	9,351	10,318	9,849	10,633	11,294
Administration of Justice	1,005	945	984	1,239	1,501
Threatening	114	90	88	86	143
Drugs	107	300	202	408	740
Traffic	24,382	23,666	25,998	26,422	26,809
Gaming	243	172	747	256	233
Shipping & Seamen	236	265	242	300	206
Liquor & Licensing	9,606	9,562	8,751	9,138	9,529
Others	4,020	3,840	4,731	4,990	5,361
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>139,737</b>	<b>149,103</b>	<b>153,914</b>	<b>165,859</b>	<b>188,087</b>

(Source: Annual Reports of the New Zealand Police Department)

Tabulated in this way the figures are not particularly informative. By far the most dramatic way of showing the increase in reported crime is to show the annual percentage increase since, for example, 1967. (See Fig. 2.)

*Fig. 2. Percentage Variation of Selected Offence Groups Since 1967.*

Offence Type	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971
Person	1	6.3	15.0	35.0	56.75
Property	1	11.0	12.6	23.35	45.6
Morality & Public Welfare	1	-4.8	13.0	23.75	31.75
Public Order	1	10.2	5.3	13.6	20.6
Drugs	1	181.3	89.8	282.5	595.0
Total Offending	1	6.7	10.1	18.6	34.25

(Source: Annual Reports of the New Zealand Police Department)

This table shows quite plainly why people are upset about the increase in offences relating to drugs and those against the person. Fortunately this is a very misleading way of presenting the information.

Before considering why such figures are misleading it would be as well to outline the salient features of the police statistics for 1971.

Overall there was an increase of 13.4% in the number of offences reported. This is almost double the increase reported in 1970 which in turn was more than double the 1969 increase.

As Fig. 1 shows this increase has come about largely as a result of the increase in property offending reported. This is to be expected since roughly 62% of all offences reported to the police are against property and thus "it is largely changes in numbers of offences against property which determine the changes in the 'crime rate'."<sup>6</sup> In 1971 this category increased by 18.4% which accounts for roughly 82% of the total increase reported.

Within this general category just under half of the increase can be accounted for by an increase of 9,096 in the offence of theft. The bulk of the remainder can be attributed to the perennially fashionable offences of burglary, car conversion and false pretences. Few offences have actually decreased although, interestingly enough, receiving has remained fairly constant.

Offences against the person also showed a considerable increase in 1971. General figures for this category are rather misleading for the only offence group to increase significantly was that of "assault not otherwise specified". This group increased by 21.4% which is a higher rate of increase than that for the offence category as a whole. Offences against the person increased generally by roughly 16% in 1971.

The figures for the more serious offences against the person are difficult to summarise and interpret, the basic problem being that they are generally so small as to be prone to chance variations. Nevertheless, murder, assaults on the police and assaults on women and children all decreased in 1971. Conversely manslaughter, attempted murder and aggravated assault all increased.

The only other general offence category to increase significantly was drug offending. Apart from a brief decline in 1969 (see Fig. 2) this type of offending has been increasing in leaps and bounds since 1967. Nevertheless the actual figures involved are very small indeed and a good deal of caution must be exercised in interpreting them.

In 1971 only 740 such offences were reported to the police. This represented an increase of 81% over 1970. Offences concerning cannabis increased by 88% while those concerning other narcotics increased by 156%. More important, the largest increases seem to have occurred in the "dealing" rather than the simple "possession or use" offences.

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6. Roberts, *Problems in the Estimation and Interpretation of Crime Rates*, N.Z. Statistician, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1972), pp. 3-19 at p. 5.

With the exception of offences concerning shipping and seamen all the other general offence categories have increased. Nevertheless in most cases the increase is small and can be regarded simply as a continuation of the steady, unspectacular growth in reported offending which has been the feature of at least the last two decades. The only exception here being threatening offences which increased significantly in 1971. Fortunately the total of such offences reported is still only 143.

There can be little doubt that these statistics have caused considerable public disquiet. For example, a recent newspaper comment makes the point that:

“They confirm an atmosphere of lawlessness which is pervading our society . . . . There appears from the figures to be little respect for either property or person. Thefts are up, similarly assaults and the like.

Alarming too are the nearly doubled drug offences — from 332 (*sic*) to 640.

Where has society failed? Have we degenerated to the point where we accept the upward trend as being inevitable, symptomatic of the more permissive age in which we live? Has authority no influence, respect for others no meaning?”<sup>7</sup>

Fortunately the inadequacies of the police statistics render such prophecies of doom rather academic.

### THE TRUE EXTENT AND NATURE OF CRIME?

Although the figures for offences reported to the police are by far the most valuable indications that we have of the actual ‘state of crime’, there are several obvious deficiencies which must be dealt with in some detail here.

In the first place it is clear that no official statistics can tell us anything about the actual number of offences that are committed. A great deal of crime is obviously not reported to, or otherwise known by, the police. This “dark figure” of unreported crime will vary from offence to offence, from time to time and from place to place but it will always be present. Estimates of the true extent of unreported crime vary<sup>8</sup> and, although numerous attempts have been made to frame research projects so as to throw some light on this area,<sup>9</sup> it is true to say that “[w]e have no more than a few fragmentary approximations and can only make a more or less inspired guess.”<sup>10</sup>

The nature and extent of the dark figure is clearly important in relation to reported increases in crime. If we are ever to arrive at a

7. Editorial Comment, *Evening Post*, April 19th, 1972.

8. See, for example, those quoted by Biles, *Crime in Victoria*, in Chappell and Wilson (eds.) *The Australian Criminal Justice System* (Sydney: Butterworths, 1972), pp. 63-75 at pp. 63-65.

9. For a discussion of some of this research see Walker, *Crimes, Courts and Figures* (London: Penguin Books, 1971), particularly chapters 1, 2 and 4.

10. Radzinowicz, *Ideology and Crime* (London: Heinemann, 1966), p. 63.

proper estimate of the social significance of crime and of shifts in the 'crime situation', we must be able to say whether a reported increase is real or is simply the result of our delving deeper into the dark figure. At present it is impossible to do this and it may well be, for example, that the increase in theft reported in 1971 is simply a result of increased reporting rather than increased offending.

Of course it would be difficult to argue that most cases of a reported increase are simply the result of a better illuminated dark figure. In fact logic would drive one to expect that the dark figure is increasing for most offences, rather than the opposite. As cities become larger and more complex and as society becomes more anonymous and mobile it is probable that criminals too will become more anonymous. Nevertheless, with certain offences it is possible to see a direct relationship between police activity and increasing reported crime. The classic example here is perhaps drug offending. This is a form of offending for which the dark figure will be naturally high. Since it is "reported" largely as the result of the activities of specialist police squads, it is evident that the more time and energy the police spend on ferreting out drug users the more crime will be reported. This will occur regardless of any actual increase or decrease in offending. Such a process is evidenced by the proportionately greater increase in "dealing" offences in 1971, for it is precisely in this area that the police have concentrated their main attack. It is also evidenced by the extremely high clear-up rate for drug offences. At the end of 1971 only seven of the offences reported remained uncleared.

It is also worth noting that other factors apart from police activity will be important in this area. Thus, for example, in relation to crimes of violence it has been pointed out that as certain social groups become more affluent so they become less tolerant of petty violence.<sup>11</sup> In such a group violent behaviour may actually be decreasing anyway due to changing social circumstances but, due to these same changing circumstances, the reporting of violent offending may increase. Thus, paradoxically, crimes of violence may appear to increase in a society which is in fact becoming more law-abiding.

It may be argued that, even though our knowledge is inadequate in the ways mentioned above, we can still assume that reported and unreported crime will maintain some sort of constant ratio over time. Thus the figures for reported crime can at least be used as an indication of the shifts and trends in actual crime. Unfortunately even a simple assumption such as this is open to serious question. A very large number of factors indeed will influence the reporting of offences to the police. For example, an increase in the number of criminal abortions reported or detected could be the result of either decreasing public tolerance of abortion, the increased incidence of abortion, the employment of more police decoys, a change in hospital procedure or

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11. See McClintock, *Crimes of Violence* (London: MacMillan, 1963), pp. 67-68. See also Schumacher, *Violent Offending* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1971), p. 8.

the invention of a new abortion technique. In all these situations it is quite impossible to tell whether or not the actual incidence of the offence has increased from the raw figures of offences reported. Estimates of the state of crime based on reported figures are at the best educated guesses; at the worst they are irresponsible stabs in the dark.

A second obvious difficulty with the present police statistics is that they tell us very little about the 'quality' of offending or of any increase in offending. This problem can be discussed at two rather different levels.

In the first place, neither the general offence categories (see, for example, those used in Figs. 1 and 2) nor some of the specific offence types used really tell us very much about the nature of the behaviour involved. Thus the general category of crimes against the person includes murder, assault, bigamy and permitting a child to ride on a tractor. It does not include rape, assault with intent to rob, robbery causing grievous bodily harm, fighting or disorderly behaviour. Similarly offences against property include assault with intent to rob, giving a false fire alarm, theft, false pretences and being armed with a firearm with intent to break and enter. It does not include interfering with transport, sending a false telegram or contravening the Social Security Act.

Similarly, certain specific offence types can be so broad as to be virtually meaningless. For example, the category 'assault not otherwise specified' is so ludicrously general as to be absolutely impossible to assess. Even a category such as 'theft' covers such a range of anti-social conduct that it is difficult to take it seriously.

The problem here, of course, is that if the police statistics are to be of any value to us we have to be able to judge whether any change in offending is serious or not. The gross legal categories used at present do not enable us to do this. For example, in 1971 reported crime increased by 13.4%. At first sight this seems serious. However 82% of this increase can be accounted for by an increase of 18.2% in offences against property. Just under 50% of the increase in property offending came from an increase in theft. Plainly if we want to find out how serious the 1971 increase was we need to know more about the increase in theft. Unfortunately for all we know this increase could be the result of a rash of thefts from untended newspaper stands. If this were so then the 1971 figures take on a rather different complexion. It is in fact probable that the increase in theft was of this nature, for one thing serious theft tends to be the product of a fairly skilled work-force which by its very nature has a relatively inelastic supply pattern, for another the fact that receiving remained fairly constant in 1971 indicates that the extra thieving was not particularly lucrative. Nevertheless the simple fact is that we don't really know.

The figures for offences against the person are equally difficult to assess. The simple fact that such offences have increased does not

mean that the streets are no longer safe for respectable people. It may be that the upsurge in reported crime comes from an increased number of domestic disputes of various sorts. Since petty offences will generally be the most common, claims as to the 'seriousness' of increasing crime should be viewed with suspicion. This is particularly so when one considers the discussion of the dark figure earlier for it is evident that attempts to illuminate the dark figure will increase the crime rate by bringing more petty offences to the notice of the police. For example, it has been claimed that the development of the police Youth Aid Scheme has resulted in a greater willingness on the part of shopkeepers to report juvenile shoplifters to the police.<sup>12</sup> Clearly this will result in an increase in 'theft' but the increase will be of a non-serious nature in the sense that neither the victims nor the police will expect increased prosecutions to result.

One final point which should be mentioned here concerns police recording procedures. In many situations the conduct reported to the police will be ambiguous. For example, a fight could be recorded as involving either fighting, disorderly behaviour, assault or aggravated assault. The recording policeman has a very wide discretion as to how he reports the offence, and his report need bear no relation to the charges which are ultimately laid. Thus the 'seriousness' of reported crime depends to a considerable extent on a subjective assessment formed by a policeman whose information may be garbled and incomplete. Such is the stuff of criminal statistics.

On a rather different level the police statistics are deficient in that they give no indication of the 'crime rate'. In their present form the figures for reported crime exist in a vacuum; they are not related to anything except the previous year's figures. If we are ever to be in a position to assess the seriousness of crime in our society we need to know not only the real nature of the offending reported, but also the ratio that that offending bears per head of population. What is more, we need to know the rate per head of population 'at risk'. If, for example, in 1971 the general population over the age of 10 increased by 20%, the increase of 13.4% in the number of offences reported would in fact mean that there has been a decline in the crime rate.

Such a ratio can, of course, be calculated by using census data together with the police statistics. The point is that it should be something which is done automatically in every annual report presented by the Police Department. In addition the police are now operating a system of data collection which would enable them to present such rates for each police district. The problem here is in meshing the police statistics with the census data at the local level, for the census tracts do not coincide with police districts. Nevertheless the value of this sort of detailed information is indisputable and efforts should be made to obtain and present it.

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12. See the *Report of the New Zealand Police, 1970*, p. 18.

## DIFFICULTIES ENGENDERED BY THE PRESENT FORMAT OF THE POLICE STATISTICS

In addition to the abovementioned difficulties in assessing the true extent and nature of reported crime, there are several peculiar problems with the New Zealand statistics which result from the format adopted by the Department.

Firstly, commentators generally tend to rely on the column "offences reported" as being indicative of the real extent of crimes known to the police. This is erroneous for, on the one hand, it is clear that the police do not record all the offences they know about while, on the other, it is evident that many "offences reported" are not in fact offences at all. Any real estimate of the extent of crime must at least start by subtracting the figures in the "no offence disclosed after enquiry" column from the "offences reported" column. It would probably be better to go further than this and also subtract those offences "cleared by means other than prosecution". In this way we will be left with a figure for "crimes reported" which accords more with reality.

In most cases this procedure makes little overt difference to the initial figures; however in certain offence groups rather startling results can be produced. Thus in 1971 160 cases of rape were reported — incidentally this was 10 less than in 1970 — fully 67 of which were either cleared by other means (1) or no offence (66). Similarly of the five reported breaches of the Electoral Act none were. More seriously, in 1971 22% of the offences of ordinary assault reported proved to be either no offence or not to justify prosecution. Although this is not a particularly large figure it is worth considering how many of the 86,623 offences remaining uncleared at the end of 1971 might be uncleared simply because they are either not offences, or the offender has died or moved elsewhere, or the victim has lost interest in pursuing the case further.

Apart from this difficulty, which is not really the fault of the police statistics, it is evident that the figures themselves are poorly set out and often lacking in detail. If we are to get the full benefit of such figures it is essential that tables be given which relate this year's figures to the previous year's, that give the percentage increase in offending for each group, that express the amount of offending in one group as a percentage of total offending, etc. All this information can in fact be obtained from the present statistics but only after lengthy personal research. What is needed is a set of clear, comprehensive tables — perhaps modelled on those used by the Perks Committee<sup>13</sup> — which can help to indicate the true extent and nature of crime.

In addition, further information needs to be provided. As well as calculating gross ratios as mentioned above, it would be logical to

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13. See the *Report of the Departmental Committee on Criminal Statistics* (The Perks Committee), Cmnd. 3448, H.M.S.O., 1967. In particular see Appendix C, Table AA.



express offences such as rape, those involving motor vehicles, those involving publicans, etc., as a rate per head of population at risk. The gross figure for rape is useless unless we also know how many virile young men abstain from rape. Similarly gross offence categories such as theft should be broken down into discrete monetary units to give some indication of the nature of offending in this area. Finally, the column "offences cleared by means other than prosecution" should be broken down into the forms of action taken. In this context it would plainly be invaluable to know how many people were cautioned, how many offences were cleared by being taken into account, etc.

### **POLICE EFFICIENCY?**

It has often been claimed that because the police statistics give some indication of the clear-up rate they provide some measure of police efficiency. This proposition is very doubtful indeed.

In the first place some types of offence are much easier to clear up than others. This may be due either to the nature of the offence (assaulting the police, for example, is easy to clear, petty theft is not) or the seriousness with which the police and the community regard the offence (more effort is likely to be expended on murder than breaches of the Litter Act). In addition to this, many offences are only reported to the police once a suspect has been identified and in this case the high clear-up rate is spurious. An example here is drug offending where an offence is very unlikely to be recorded unless a prosecution is imminent.

Thus, as Nigel Walker points out, if one is "going to use clear-up rates as an index of police efficiency, it is important to exclude, so far as possible, types of offence which are usually (a) reported only when a suspect is identified (e.g. shoplifting) or (b) regarded as a mere nuisance by police (e.g. thefts from parked cars)."<sup>14</sup>

With the New Zealand statistics in their present form it is thus very difficult to get any real idea of police efficiency. Every year the Department in its annual report solemnly cites the overall clear-up rate but this is useless as an index. It would perhaps be better to select a few 'index' offences which conform to the criteria set out by Walker and attempt to construct an index of police efficiency from them.

One example of such an offence is simple robbery. The police clearly take such offences seriously and the circumstances of the case rarely point to a particular suspect. Unfortunately the figures for this offence are small and the clear-up rate fluctuates considerably. (See Fig. 3.)

As can be seen from this table the clear-up rate for offences of this sort in New Zealand is unlikely to provide a very satisfactory basis for estimating police efficiency. It would perhaps be better to forget our concern with efficiency. After all only a small part of police

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14. *Op. cit. supra*, n. 9, p. 33.

*Fig. 3. Robberies Reported to and Cleared Up by the Police, 1965-71.*

Year	Robberies Reported	Robberies Cleared Up	Clearance Rate (%)	Clearance Rate England & Wales
1965	56	30	53.5	36.9
1966	78	30	38.5	37.2
1967	103	42	41.2	40.4
1968	133	69	52.1	39.5
1969	119	62	52.2	—
1970	131	57	43.5	—
1971	284	139	48.7	—

(Source: Annual Reports of the New Zealand Police Department and, for column 4, Walker, *op. cit.* supra, Table 4, p. 34.)

work produces tangible results that can be measured in objective terms. If police efficiency is to have any meaning it must be measured in some other way than by the crime statistics alone.

### THE RELEVANCE OF ETIOLOGICAL FACTORS IN CRIMINAL STATISTICS

So far this note has simply been concerned to express and illustrate some of the traditional difficulties with the police statistics. Any changes advocated so far have been in relation to making the present system more comprehensible and informative; no attempt has been made to suggest that a wholly new approach to the presentation and computation of such statistics is needed.

Unfortunately merely tinkering with the statistics in this way is unlikely to achieve any really beneficial results. All the official crime statistics in New Zealand suffer from one central deficiency. Apart from occasional attempts to express the crime rate or the imprisonment rate per head of population, no attempt has ever been made to take the social realities of New Zealand life into account in assessing whether crime has become more serious or not.

If the study of criminology has shown anything over the last century or so it has demonstrated quite clearly that there are several important social processes that are inescapably linked with crime. Crime is essentially a normal part of modern society; as a society becomes more urbanised, more industrialised, more mobile and more heterogeneous, so crime increases. Similarly as the proportion of the population that is young, male and unmarried increases, so does crime. Any discussion of the crime statistics must take account of these factors in the same way that any discussion of increasing motor accident fatalities must take account of the increasing number of motor vehicles.

To put it rather crudely, it would be illogical — if not positively misleading — to claim that murder had doubled if this was computed

solely on the basis of the figures for one year before. To have any meaning at all this figure has to be expressed as a ratio. If, for example, murder has doubled but the population has trebled then the incidence of murder has declined and congratulations are in order. Similarly if crime has doubled — even if the ratio of criminal acts per head of population has doubled — yet the factors which are generally agreed to cause crime have increased threefold, then it is logical and realistic to regard crime as less of a problem than it was previously.

What we really want to know then is whether the crime rate that we have is more or less than one would expect for a society like ours. As one American writer has recently put it:

“If the ‘normal’ crime ratio could be determined, one which is tied to etiological conditions, the concept of morbidity could then be used to interpret the changes that occur.”<sup>15</sup>

With our present knowledge it would in fact be possible to calculate a ‘morbidity rate’ based on such factors as urbanisation, the proportion of young males in the population, the emergence of ethnically distinct minority groups and the geographical mobility of the population. All these factors can be quantified and related to the crime rate. In this way one would be able to get a crude measure of the ‘expected’ crime rate as against the actual.

Some analysis of this sort has, of course, already been undertaken in relation to Polynesian crime rates.<sup>16</sup> It being pointed out that although the Polynesian rate is higher than the European, this is only to be expected when one considers such factors as the youth of the Polynesian population and the unequal impact of such factors as urbanisation on such groups. Nevertheless this needs to go much further and the possibilities of making scientific computations of the sort suggested by the writer cited earlier<sup>17</sup> must be explored.

Clearly this sort of exercise is beyond the capabilities of the police, at least at present. Etiological factors must be selected, measured and combined into a ‘morbidity rate’, this must then be compared with the crime rate or with some form of index of crime. Ideally such a task should be carried out by the Department of Statistics or within some government agency responsible for criminological research and development.<sup>18</sup> In practice however both these

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15. See Rudoff, *The Soaring Crime Rate: An Etiological View*. J. Crim. L. C. & P. S. Vol. 62, No. 4 (1971), pp. 543-547 at p. 545.

16. See *Report on Crime in New Zealand* (Wellington: Justice Department, 1969), and also Duncan, *Crime by Polynesians in Auckland: An Analysis of Charges Laid Against Persons Arrested in 1966* (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Auckland University, 1970).

17. *Op. cit. supra*, n. 15; see in particular pp. 545-546.

18. For proposals for such an agency see Gibson, *Research as a Basis for Planning in Social Defence* (Paper accepted for publication in the N.Z. Jo. Pub. Admin. Vol. 34 (1972).)

alternatives are unlikely; the Statistics Department is one of the more under-nourished branches of government and the chances of a special agency being set up to undertake research and planning in the general social defence field are remote. It is thus likely that we will be encumbered by the criminal statistics in much their present form for a few years yet.

## CONCLUSION

This note has attempted to demonstrate some of the pitfalls and drawbacks of the annual statistics relating to offences reported to the police. Few would deny that crime has increased over the last few years but the problem is really to assess the extent of the increase and its true import. We know all too little about the extent of unreported crime, the effects of certain police practices and procedures and the true nature of crime in New Zealand to do more than draw the most tentative conclusions from what official statistics we have.

This does not mean that we should therefore ignore such statistics entirely. As they are the only official source of information we have, it behoves us to glance at them occasionally and even discuss their import in learned and lengthy articles. Nevertheless, when Parliament approves a new police/public ratio or discusses an extension or consolidation of police powers, it is as well to recognise the process for what it is. Whatever else such decisions may be, they are not founded upon hard, objective facts concerning the state of crime.

What is needed above all is a detailed, rational examination of our crime statistics and the basic assumptions on which they are collected and presented. With its national police force and standardised methods of data collection New Zealand is already in a better position than countries such as Australia. This must be built upon if we are to learn more about crime and devise effective means of combatting it.

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