



# POLICING 100 YEARS HENCE

## A View from the Future

Having a large police force is a temporary feature. They have no long-term future and no lengthy history. They are a symptom of turmoil and change. Settled societies do not need an identifiable external police force. People in settled societies police themselves through everyday observation and the reinforcement of norms. In a settled society life is very similar generation after generation. Misbehavior happens, but chastisement almost always occurs without the need for someone to come in from outside wearing strange clothes (a uniform) and having superior powers of arrest.

The police and all the paraphernalia that accompanies them, from prisons to panoptical surveillance systems, are all very recent. It is not just CCTV that is new; it is also the bobby on the beat. A couple of centuries ago there were almost no police, anywhere. London's metropolitan police force was not established until 1829. Before then just a few dozen local constables and a couple of hundred night watchmen would keep an eye on a population of a million people. The new police were required because that population was changing so rapidly. London was in turmoil and the night watchman state came to an end.

Before London grew so large so quickly the world's largest cities

were in China. There the general population carried out policing. There was mutual surveillance and mutual responsibility. Magistrates existed, but far fewer than today, villages organized their own ways of handling disputes, as they did everywhere else in the world at that time. People knew what to do because they did what had been done before. That all changed when population growth in Europe got out of control, people were forced far more rapidly than in China off the land into the cities, and eventually a police force had to be created – the key word being 'force'. The police held a monopoly on the legal use of violence. People resist state violence. Today it is mainly in China the USA and a few other most despotic countries that the state still officially reserves the right to kill – the death penalty. However many other states reserve the right to assassinate, especially if those killings are undertaken abroad. Only a handful of states have no armed forces, but others decade by decade are joining that handful, and a lower proportion of people in the world now kill each year than the year before; non-violence is growing. It is just a few who are violent.

Before the capitalist transformation began there were executions, but police forces were largely unknown. As that transformation subsides they are beginning to disappear again. For most of

us the police don't exist. We might very occasionally report a crime. Our purse is pickpocketed, a bicycle is stolen, and the police may record it as a purse is lost and a bicycle mislaid – if there is no hard evidence of theft – because they are rewarded if crime levels appear to fall. In Japan, where the slowdown in capitalism is most advanced, because no one would steal them, most people do not lock their bikes when they park them in city centres. There are now few police in Japan.

There are also very few police in the British countryside. Locals might complain about this and ask what happens if there is a crime. They are often upset to be told that they are committing the most crime in their local area. It is they who drink and drive, who speed on most journeys and break the law in doing so. Of course, most locals don't behave like this, but for the rest to behave well requires conforming to norms, not enforcement of rules by a woman or man in a uniform. The disapproval of your peers is and always has been far more effective than chastisement by authority.

Rules work when people don't see them as rules, but just as what you do. That is what happened before our population growth got out of control and it is what is happening everywhere where population growth has stabilized in the world, or is falling. The police are disappearing again.

When established traditions are undermined by rapid growth in human numbers there is no such thing as society, only people and their families. Societies take longer to form and reform. However the world passed the "peak-baby" point in 1990 (the year when more babies were born than born or since). Fertility has been falling worldwide since 1970. By 2010 most people in the world lived in areas where women were having on average less than two children in their lifetime. "Peak-25-year-old" is now. Almost everywhere fertility rates are falling so that the next generation can expect to see stability. Therefore there will be less and less need for the sound or sight of the police.

It is population change that creates the demand for policing. New people arriving in new areas where they are not known and there is much fear. In places with a high turnover of population where there is too little time to establish norms. Poor laws were created and tramping systems enforced in England in the past to try to control peoples' movements. Primarily people who had goods and property and feared losing it to newcomers created police forces. Policing in its broadest sense includes prisons, psychiatric high security units, detention centres, and any similar curtailment to freedom of movement.

While most people go for months or years not talking to or possibly even seeing the police, a small proportion of people in Britain get to see a great deal more of them. The police mostly drive around poorer parts of towns and cities. Sometimes they patrol on foot there, but usually in pairs, so they are concentrated in particular places and also at particular times - the times when and places where the young, drunk and bored often are.

There are different kinds of police. The ones you see in uniform but also many in plain clothes. There are separate transport police, City of London Police, and then there are police secrets and secret police. There are also private police forces. Hundred of thousands of people now work as security guards. Thousands of doors are guarded that had no security just a couple of decades ago, especially in London. Millions of CCTV cameras covering public places have to occasionally be monitored, but how many thousands of people are whiling away their lives watching others? It's a secret.

Meanwhile there are not enough cameras where they are really needed, in police stations, police cells and the back of police vans; and access to what they show is not freely available. No police officer has been successfully prosecuted for killing anyone in custody for over 30 years. Yet over 5000 people will have died in custody in the UK during that period. Police, smothered or strangled and beat many of them, but apparently not one of those deaths was a murder, was planned, was meant, or could have been avoided. They occurred in police stations, prisons, and detention centres. Some of those killed were children, and black people are much more likely to die in custody. See: <http://www.inquest.org.uk/issues/home>

Most people in the UK have very little to do with the police. They live in a kind of police-free Utopia. Just a few have a great deal of interaction and the police, who in their turn, interact mostly with those few. But there is one group of people who fear the police more than any other, and the police have a name for them – the illegals. People who have no rights. People who will be detained if they are caught or who will be prevented from entering if they are found trying to enter the country, even if their reason to try to enter is to claim asylum. We have a special 'border force' to deal with illegals. We never used to have such a force. It is new. It was created because of turmoil. Go back just over a century ago and we didn't even have any form of passport control. We had customs officers; we controlled goods and trade – but not people. There was a brief period of less than a century in length, between the abolition of slavery across the empire in 1833 and

the start of passport controls at the end of World War One, when anyone was free to come and go as they pleased.

Today people die when private security guards try to silence their screaming as they deport them by plane. They die trying to ride on the roofs of trains through tunnels to avoid the inspectors. They die when their cuts on the razor wire turn septic but they have nowhere they can turn for help. They die when they drown and they die when they hand themselves in because they cannot take any more. But the reason they cannot get in is the police, and the reason they have to live in hiding once in; is the police acting on orders from Home Secretaries, elected by only a few of us – the quarter of the UK electorate who voted in the current government. Until recently almost all politicians agreed with the Home Secretaries, even if they were not of their party. Almost all wanted it to be made harder for refugees to travel to countries in the North of Europe. The rapid change in the opinions of many during 2015 shows just how different the future could be.

What are the police trying to protect? What is so precious? Is it the land behind the wire? Is Europe bursting because it is so full of people that it can take no more? Is there no space in the UK for any extra families because people already here are having so many babies? No, its none of that. Population in the UK would fall if it were not for immigration from the rest of Europe. Population in Europe is beginning to fall because for decades people in almost every part of Europe have been having fewer and fewer children. Hardly anywhere do women have on average two children anymore. Almost everywhere it is fewer than that and so almost everywhere population will fall when the elderly die.

The police will not go quietly, but the UK Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 shows one way in which they are beginning to both disappear and spread. Huge numbers of people are now required to in effect become police officers including anyone on the governing body of an educational establishment with more than 250 students [see schedule 6, section 26: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/6/enacted>]. They have to have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism". So who is it that causes most terror to a few people in the UK? Who frightens the life out of refugees? Who scares young black men incarcerated in cells? How can the terror they cause be reduced? And will writing in an anarchist magazine help prevent people from being drawn towards wanting power over others they do not know? We will find out in a hundred years hence.

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Danny's most recent book is the 2015 revised edition of: *Injustice – Why social inequality still persists* (Bristol: Policy Press).