

PRIVATE SECURITY AND SOCIAL CONTROL:

The Private Security Sector in the United Kingdom,  
its Commercial Functions and Public Accountability.

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For my Mother and Father  
(and their Headlines from Blackpool).

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the growth and significance of private security in the United Kingdom. It details the broad commercial functions and lack of public accountability of the private security sector and draws out the implications for civil liberties and public policy.

This is a subject which has been seriously neglected in criminology, sociology and related disciplines in Britain. This thesis is the first (publicly available) criminological study of private security in Britain to bring together such a range of material and concerns. It draws upon original 'case-study' observational field-work and on interviews with a wide range of respondents, in private security, the police, Parliament, journalism, trade unions, civil liberties groups and academia. Extensive literature review and collaborative work with various involved parties also support the research.

An Introductory chapter provides background to the research and outlines the structure of the thesis. The second chapter presents two 'case studies' based upon the observational field-work, discusses aspects of methodology and draws out those points which broadened the nature of the research project and those which have particular relevance for subsequent chapters. The next chapter discusses the range and activities of the private security sector.

The chapter on the issue of licensing examines 'causes for concern', present arrangements for self-regulation, the role of the professional Associations and of the Home Office, considers the experience of other jurisdictions and generally presents the case for public regulation and accountability.

A theoretical chapter charts the conditions conducive to the post-war growth of private security, takes issue with previous theoretical accounts and develops an analysis in which political relations with and within the state are forefronted. A concluding chapter offers cautionary comments on the limits and desirability of some possible future developments and adds thoughts on one possible avenue for policy development.



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PART 1

CHAPTER 1

Introduction:

Focusing and Blurring: An Introduction to a Study of Private Security as an Agency of Social Control, its Commercial Functions, Public Accountability and Relationship to the State

"One need only pause for a minute to see that although in areas like mental illness the private sector might genuinely displace the state, this would be an impossible outcome in crime control. For the state to give up here would be to undercut its very claim to legitimacy."

(Cohen, 1983:117)

This thesis started out as a straightforward observational study of private security 'at work'. It ended up as a somewhat more ambitious examination of the range of activities within what I came to call the Private Security Sector,<sup>1</sup> an exploration of issues of accountability and an attempt to develop a new theoretical account of the phenomenal growth of private security and of how it is accorded legitimacy within the state without detracting from the legitimacy of the state itself.

I came to this study with a criminological interest in what is broadly termed social control (c.f. Cohen, 1985). From an original interest in industrial sociology I had moved through under-graduate and graduate work on the 'underside' of industrial relations, looking at the 'under-workings of the work-place' (South, 1978 (a)), to a recognition that there was another little-noted side to this area apart from workers' involvement in the Hidden Economy, industrial sabotage, work-place resistance and so on - this was the dimension of control.

Initially, the area of 'social control at work in the work-place seemed not merely under-developed but virtually barren.' However, at the same time as my own interest developed some of the original hidden economy writers began to indicate the significance of areas of commercial justice (Ditton, 1977) and of private security (Henry, 1978). In a co-authored critique of some of this early work (Scruton and South, 1978/79) I began to explore one arena of what we referred to as private justice. By this time I had already embarked on what had been conceived as an ethnographic study of private security workers.

Informed by a continuing interest in the traditions of the sociology of deviance, influenced and stimulated by the tension between Interactionism and the New Criminology and with supervisory guidance from an anthropologist keen to apply the theory and methods of that discipline to industrial societies, the subject of private security,



(after a brief flirtation with the idea of prison guards), seemed ideal for some form of observational study.

As I indicate in Chapter 2, this proved a good starting point for what turned into a different kind of study. The observational work began to raise questions - as field-work should - about broader features of the private security enterprise. It also confirmed the value of the field-work per-se.

As a system of social control with strong similarities to the police, private security nonetheless remains unique by virtue of its private status and many other characteristics. For example, despite the heterogeneity of functions across the private security sector there is a strong homogeneity in terms of occupational values shared from low-grade operational staff to the most senior members of the board. These values are reinforced by a variety of factors which I shall identify in Chapters 2 and 5 particularly. But most striking from fieldwork was that this is a business with confidence and optimism. Uniquely, when other enterprises are sorely beset, even in the service sector to which the present government pins such hopes, the private security business is expanding rapidly and significantly (cf. Chapter 3). Sociologically this has a strong significance. Workers' attachment to the values of their occupations and goals of their organisations may be undermined where they see their industry as in decline or stagnating. In private security, workers can not only feel that they are doing a 'good and useful' job, supporting the police and the status quo, but also that the evident demand for their services and success of the industry indicates public approval and demand.

At the same time, these reinforced occupational values and the sense of worth, common from guard room to board room, bolsters the sense of a strong boundary between the occupation and the rest of society that requires the private security service. This affirmation of boundary, contributed to by a host of features of private security such as the uniform, the secrecy of undercover work, the accountability to clients, and so on, was made clear throughout the field work. Thus although the description of the breadth of the private security sector in Chapter 3 and the broader analysis of Chapter 5 are essential



complements to the fieldwork of Chapter 2, the analysis of the former required the framework of ideas and directions of enquiry derived from the latter. The fieldwork, for example, stressed the importance of 'boundaries', both within private security and between it and society. This theme is now taken up empirically and theoretically throughout the thesis.

Similarly, the recognition that certain features identified were occupationally specific, for example, long hours, low pay, little training, lack of impact of unionisation, etc., suggested, among other things, that these would also be found in private security in other countries and that legislative responses in other jurisdictions would have had to deal with parallel problems.

Hence, although a survey of private security in practice in other countries could not be attempted, fieldwork conclusions strongly suggested that there are enough features of private security that are occupationally specific to make reference to other models of licensing and regulation abroad, a sound exercise. In other words, examining other models of licensing in other countries would be of relatively little value if we could not take it that they shared at least some strong common ground in their coverage.

As field-work continued, a literature search progressed, slowly picking up the sparse and disparate studies available in this subject area. By the time that an opportunity arose to work with other researchers developing a policy related interest in this area, (cf. O.C.P.U., 1978), and to subsequently assist and gain access to the files of Bruce George M.P. who was attempting to introduce a Parliamentary Bill to provide for the licensing and regulation of private security, my aspirations for the research project had grown considerably. Although two books, one by a lawyer and one by a political scientist (cf. Draper, 1978; Bowden, 1978) added substantially at this point to the little that had been written about private security in the United Kingdom, (cf. Wiles and McLintock, 1972; Bunyan, 1976; Henry, 1978), a full and detailed treatment from a sociological and criminological perspective was still unavailable and seemed to validate the re-orientation of the thesis.



The significance of the expansion of private security had been evident to various representatives of the police service and the Police Federation for some years, and periodically various media reports had, and continued to focus on either 'heroic' or 'sinister' aspects of private security in operation. In other countries policy debates had flourished for decades, or at least a few years, resulting in various schemes for licensing and regulation of certain aspects of the private security sector. Meanwhile, the fruits of pioneering work by Shearing, Stenning et al. in Canada and Spitzer and Scull in the U.S.A., were just beginning to receive attention, (cf. Shearing, Farnell and Stenning, 1980; Shearing and Stenning, 1981; Freedman and Stenning, 1977; Stenning and Cornish, 1975; etc.; Spitzer and Scull, 1977 (a), (b)).

As I began to reorganise the thesis, the observational field-work which had generated questions about legitimacy, 'hidden' services such as undercover work, and 'where did private security come from?' became the pivot for the broader study. It was to be framed by an historical investigation of the lineage of private initiatives in policing and social control from medieval times, through the 19th Century development of the 'new' police to the post-World War II period. This would bring the history up-to-date and the description of the range of activities and breadth of services within the private security sector would naturally follow. Continued engagement with policy relevance and theoretical explanations would be reflected in chapters on accountability and regulation and on critique of other theoretical positions and development of a new account, one which, in particular, moved away from the North American bias of the most sophisticated offerings available and took into account the specificity of the U.K. situation.

In the event, the sheer length of the various drafts of this ambitious project necessitated yet another reorganisation. Yet in a sense this has clearly been for the best, for the thesis as it is presented here is a rather more 'honest' presentation, unfolding, as it does, in the way that the research developed - albeit now with the history sections omitted.



One final point needs to be made about how the thesis progressed (however slowly). Although elements of the theoretical analysis were proposed at an early stage (cf. South, 1978 (b)), the development both of theoretical propositions and of the arguments for a system of regulation has been sustained through a lengthy period of literature review, dialogue with other researchers and interested parties, and personal involvement in raising issues around accountability, regulation, low pay, civil liberties, unionisation and lessons to be learned from comparative studies.

Whilst a study of this area which began now would have far less difficulty in conducting and presenting a 'literature review' of some worth and validity, nonetheless, relative to the body of work on other agencies of social control (such as the police, institutions of incarceration, mechanisms of decarceration and diversion and so on), there remains a general paucity of material with the thematic coherence which would make a conventional literature review worthwhile and useful. It has therefore seemed more appropriate to refer to that literature which has an informative or incidental bearing on the subject at those points where its relevance is most evident. Debate with the literature that is more sustained and substantial in its treatment of the various issues taken up in this thesis, is principally found in Chapters 4 and 5.

However, in what follows I can initially 'set some of the scene' about ideas which helped to shape the thesis by outlining some of the general debates and reference points to which the thesis relates. I shall then briefly review the chapter structure of the thesis; what the thesis is not about; and, finally, its intention to locate the private security sector within the social control continuum and relate it to broader relevant developments.

### Some General Debates and Reference Points

What would be an adequate definition of private security? Perhaps at one level simply a good description of it, covering how and where it operates, how big it is and so on. But a rather more sophisticated enquiry might ask about its relationship to other social institutions,



for example the police, the state and so on. Exploring these avenues might raise questions about underlying features of the phenomenon - its legitimacy, its 'Weltanschauung', its deeper mechanisms and functions (in the senses developed by Foucault, 1977) and even, beyond the face value of the terms, what can be said about the privatisation of that security which all members of the commonweal quite naturally desire for themselves, their families, friends and communities. In the following chapters I shall attempt to present empirical and theoretical accounts exploring such diverse questions. Here I can only offer some initial reference points.

Defining private security might start by asking how it defines itself. One of the most articulate, vocal - and relatively liberal - spokespersons of the private security guard, alarm and transport industries, is J. Phillip-Sorenson of Group 4 Security. Speaking at a Cambridge University, Institute of Criminology Cropwood Conference in 1971, (cf. Wiles and McLintock, 1972), Sorenson defined private security services as operating:

"almost always in private industrial and commercial premises, behind the traditional and legal boundary of the factory fence, which the police cannot lawfully cross unless by invitation or in other special circumstances. Our principal task is to prevent loss and minimise risk to people and property in private places and we have no function in the preservation of law and order in the public sector."

Building upon Sorenson's statement, Garner (1978) offers a "workable definition of the private security industry" as:

"firms offering services or products designed as protection against fire and/or theft primarily in the private sector of property where the police have limited access."

(p. 72)

Having offered her compromise definition, Garner then goes on to note several very pertinent problems with it. First, the commercial term 'firms' may exclude 'in-house' security which constitutes a separate department within larger organisations, servicing the organisation with private security services but not offering them for hire to others. A focus on private security firms or the 'industry' is then, too narrow. Secondly, Garner suggests, the range of 'products' to be included poses a problem. The example of curved mirror manufacturers



is offered at what may seem a mundane level, but which in fact represents a highly profitable industry in itself. Is this part of the private security industry because their product is often used for security purposes? Similarly, Garner asks, although lock and key manufacturers are obvious inclusions in any definition, where does one place the services of the 'heel bar' key cutting counters which have proliferated? (Garner, *ibid*). Thirdly, even the term 'services' must come under scrutiny for its vagueness. This poses a problem for Garner in the distinction between protecting property and guarding people. Perceptively, she hints at one solution to this dilemma at the levels of theory and dehumanising practice, when she observes that:

"the guarding of illegal immigrants at airports, undertaken by Securicor, does equate people with property and treats them as commodities not persons."

(*ibid.*)

A fourth confusion arises over determining where public and private territorial limits are drawn. For example, in the Prevention of Crime Act, 1953, a public place is defined as:

"any place to which, at the material time, the public have or are permitted access, whether on payment or otherwise."

(*ibid*:73)

Thus private security guards working in shopping precincts find themselves working in a privately-owned building and space but in a public place (*ibid.*), an anomaly which is a source of some legal confusion and which has implications for the role of private security in those functions which Sorenson refers to, regarding "the preservation of law and order in the public sector," (cf. Stenning and Shearing, 1980, (b): Shearing and Stenning, 1981, 1983).

If the task of defining what private security does and where, is difficult, open to debate and in need of clarification, then the related question of how big 'it' is - logically - becomes even more of an obdurate problem. Bowden (1978), for example, concedes that it is extremely difficult to estimate the size of the private security 'industry' (let alone the make-up of what I refer to as the rather broader private security sector). However, one can at least, he



suggests, be "a good deal more precise about the logistical capability of the larger commercialised companies," (ibid:255). Where such precision is actually to be found remains unclear unfortunately, for Bowden then resorts to the estimates of capability provided by Bunyan (1976) - which were certainly open to some question as accurate for the mid-1970s. This is not to be critical of Bowden, rather to take the first opportunity (which I shall repeat!) to emphasize the dearth of information available in this area.

In 1978, a report on The Private Security Industry was prepared by a working group of the Outer Circle Policy Unit and submitted to the Home Office as it considered a Green Paper 'Discussion Document' on the subject. The report discussed a wide variety of issues related to private security but observed that "the problems are created not by the existence of the industry", since it is no affront to any formal constitutional understanding, and indeed obligations remain on the public to help to 'maintain the peace'. Rather, problems stem from:

"its size and pervasiveness, and the gradual assumption of quasi-public duties and the claim to authority implicit in the wearing of uniforms. The security industry has become in effect an auxiliary of the police in crime prevention and an important exception to the general trend of regarding the police as exclusively responsible for the prevention of crime."

(O.C.P.U., 1978:9)

I shall take up several of these issues later (particularly in Chapter 4), but here, considering the latter points, perhaps private security could be construed as an affront to certain informal 'constitutional understandings'. Could then the nature of "general" expectations about policing, provision of security and crime-prevention, provide clarificatory and conceptual leverage?

In an essay on private policing in the USA as a suitable case for research, Becker (1974) asked if we could use the idea of 'sponsorship' as a basis for distinguishing between private and public forms of policing? This proposal excludes vigilantes and voluntary deputies who are unpaid, although the distinction between the two is still clearly between private and public spheres. But convergence and overlap render "such a simple distinction (as) not possible" Becker finds.



Examining the nature of services performed, Becker concludes that:

"at best private and public functions seemed to be turned around from traditional images. Thus we find private police performing the more aggressive crime control and apprehension functions, while public police perform more prevention, order and maintenance and community service functions . . . The area in which private police seem to be taking over is that of theft prevention, protection of private premises and the types of more minor crimes that used to be curtailed by the presence of policemen on the beat."

Thus shifting bases of role and responsibility, whilst analytically very useful in addressing the changing division of policing labour, (cf. Chapter 5), do not really provide a clear definition of the two policing/security forms or one which helps us to better understand their development and practice.

To move beyond the narrowly didactic approach to the elusive research subject - e.g. private security can be defined in this way because it differs from the police in that way, it performs these services for these interests, it is such and such a size with so many employees and so many armoured vehicles, and so on, - I must briefly refer to some broader sources of theoretical influence and relevance.

#### A New Criminology with an Old Focus?

The mythical, but often assumed, unilinear march of theory in criminology and the sociology of deviance (Young, 1981:250), has only relatively recently moved on from the situation where, as Spitzer (1975:638) writes:

"prior to the 1960s, the subject matter of deviancy theory was taken for granted and few were disturbed by its preoccupation with 'dramatic' and 'predatory' forms of social behaviour."

After the labelling and conflict theorists of the 1960s (and early 1970s) had reappropriated the rationality and humanity of the deviant, occasionally to the point of panegyric, the 'materialist romanticism' of many writing in the wake of the New Criminologists (cf. Taylor, Walton and Young, 1973; 1975), reawakened a corpus (or corpse?) of interest in the control agencies engaged in what Spitzer refers to



(without so much as a nod towards Lemert, 1971) as "deviancy production". As Spitzer contends:

"The changing character of 'problem populations' is related to 'deviance production' in much the same way that variations in material resources affect manufacturing. Changes in the quantity and quality of raw materials influence the scope and priorities of production, but the characteristics of the final product depend as much on the methods of production as the source material."

After the defining and etiological descriptions of deviance-

"These methods comprise the third element in deviance production - the development and operation of the control system. [Our] theory must explain why a system of control emerges under specific conditions and account for its size, focus and working assumptions."

(ibid.:640-1)

The emphasis upon locating systems of control, and their discernible features under specific conditions is one prescription for broadening the enterprise. Yet still, as Edwards and Scullion (1982:322) have noted, "systematic attention to the controllers of deviance has been rare." Plummer, (1979:110) has persuasively argued that it is not the province of the sociologist of deviance to be overly concerned with the agents of control, for the subject of the deviancy tradition is properly the study of the devalued groups who are controlled. More surprising, argue Edwards and Scullion, is the claim that can be made that the 'New Criminology' "has ignored agents of control," especially,

"given its central concern with locating deviance in a social and political context in which power is crucial. Yet detailed attention to the activities of controllers is rare . . . a new criminology is still a criminology."

(1982:321-3)

### Foucault: A New Vision of Social Control?

In recent years the work of Michel Foucault, arriving from outside the boundaries of new or conventional criminology (or sociology, history and philosophy, for that matter), has provided a major and significant stimulus to the study of systems of social control. But importantly, Foucault's work offers several key themes which resonate strongly with some of the concerns which emerged out of the New Criminology debates.



For Foucault (1977) contemporary 'complex' societies are best characterised not in terms of their economic system their political structure or their social composition, but in terms of the 'mode of power' which pervades and thereby dominates them. Hussein (1978) captures part of the thrust of Foucault's thesis with both clarity and brevity:

" . . . the mode of action of power in disciplinary societies takes the form of the creation of a norm and the institution of procedures to rectify deviations from the norm. Therefore, 'At the heart of all disciplinary systems functions a small penal mechanism' (Foucault, 1977:177). However, there are important differences between judicial penalty and disciplinary penalty. The former operates by referring to laws and judicial texts, the latter by referring to observable behaviour."

(Hussein, 1978:937)

The private security sector works precisely within a regime of, and with the *raison d'être* of applying a code of, 'disciplinary penalty'. Revolving around 'protection' and 'surveillance' - and thereby also and crucially, protection from surveillance and intrusion in numerous forms, - its own mode of action must continually refer to "observable behaviour" and, by extension and necessity, the detection and/or anticipation of the unobservable. Given this, this thesis is informed by, and draws, not only upon developments in the broadening of criminological studies and concerns but also upon the suggestive work of Foucault and debates it has generated and coincided with; (see for example the essays in Fine et. al., 1979; Cohen, 1979).

One key question for Foucault has obvious centrality here. Again Hussein (op. cit.) summarises neatly: "what means", Foucault asks, "do disciplinary institutions employ to secure discipline?" It is not necessary to detail here Foucault's exposition of the three principal means - (1) hierarchical observation, (2) normalising judgement, (3) examination: insofar as they are central to the practice of the private security sector their significance should shortly be apparent. It should suffice to emphasize here, my shared conviction that the power of organised observation is crucial, by noting Foucault's contention that: "The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation" (1977:170).



## The Private and the Public: A Blurring of Boundaries?

The distinction between the 'private' and the 'public' spheres, (and the implications of 'privatisation' of arenas of production, exchange and governance, e.g. health, justice, policing, within the latter), is becoming increasingly complex in modern western societies. Understanding where the public/private divide is clearly in focus or is being blurred is of considerable relevance to studies of social control, (cf. Cohen, 1979; 1983; Bottoms, 1983).

As one starting point, Williams (1976:204) offers the following definition of 'the private':

"Private, that is, in its positive senses, is a record of the legitimation of a bourgeois view of life; the ultimate generalised privilege, however abstract in practice, of seclusion and protection from others (the public); of lack of accountability to 'them'; and in related gains in closeness and comfort of these general kinds. As such, and especially in the senses of the rights of the individual (to his private life, or from a quite different tradition, to his civil liberties) and of the valued intimacy of family and friends, it has been widely adopted outside the strict bourgeois viewpoint. This is the real reason for its current complexity."

In the chapters that follow, it is worth bearing in mind the equation of 'the private' with 'lack of accountability'. However, of more specific concern here is the nature of the private and the public in relation to systems of justice and security.

In a slightly weary tone, the American political scientist, Hanna Pitkin (1981) has observed that:

"The prevailing disillusionment with established leadership and institutions produces not protest but withdrawal into privacy, yet privatisation manifestly is not providing the comfort and security we seek. And all that anyone seems able to muster for calling people back . . . is the familiar and incompatible pair of devices: the exhortation to civic duty, and the appeal to self-interest. Neither seems to be doing much good"

(p. 327).

Privatisation (in both commercial and psychological senses) promotes insularity and isolation, paranoia and prejudice, subverting any sense of 'social comfort' or 'comfort with society'. The policing



institutions declare their limitations (and their own insecurities) and appeal to a shared civic responsibility for the management of the contemporary social malaise. At the same time governments have been elected on the strength of comforting promises and strongly populist platforms, self-interest is taken seriously and the privatisation of services is embraced, resonating with criticisms of the public sector. Within, and reflecting, such changes, the police and their role are changing. As the French legal theorist, Gleizal (1981:362) remarks:

"The police are being transformed. Their aim is no longer solely the maintenance of law and order . . . , but also now to assure citizens' security. The police not only should exist but should also be liked."

Both the police and private security sector are increasingly 'image' conscious; they present themselves not simply as 'doing the job' but they also demand that they should be acknowledged for it - for their contribution; they "care" and should be given some credit for it. Furthermore, the public should acknowledge their own responsibilities and contribute more to the policing and servicing of their communities. This is a further source of confusion around the boundaries of public and private arrangements for policing and security.

Approaching the concepts of the private and the public is evidently not straightforward. Sennett (1977:16) has presented a conception of the "geography" of the public and the private. According to this view the private is "in here", personal, intimate, protected from intrusion by others - a space in which we are "free to be ourselves", (cf. Pitkin, 1981:328). The public is "out there", "impersonal, distant, formal" - ready or liable for "publication", for openness and exposure, (cf. Sennett, 1977; Pitkin, 1981). This sort of distinction certainly meshes with much that is common-sense, yet, as Pitkin responds, what then is to be made of that expansive, intrusive phenomenon at the heart of the capitalist economy - the 'private enterprise'? Within the equally common-sense frame of economic imagery, the "'public sector' is divided from [the] private on the basis of ownership, and public means, roughly, government, the state" (Pitkin, 1981:328). In terms of social interaction (and withdrawal from it), economic behaviour, and the ordering of society through means of government and so on, there are ample sources of confusion



about the boundaries and permeations between the private and the public.

Pitkin's erudite opening-out of the private/public distinction also considers Hannah Arendt's (1958) conception of 'the public' as synonymous with 'political' public life in the sense of partaking in actions in a community of peers. While, here, 'the private' exhibits a tension between its historical connotation of the status of the 'deprived' (think for example of low 'rank') and its additional association with 'privilege', and the "advantages of withdrawal". The distinction drawn by C. Wright Mills (1959) between "personal troubles of milieu" and "public issues of social structure" offers a further valid and suggestive dichotomy.

The dilemma of approaching what is now obviously a difficult distinction, cannot be resolved here by the offer of a 'correct' definition - a subject in itself for a different kind of thesis. For present purposes, this broadening of conception, and its corresponding blurring of lines of distinction, is intended to forewarn and fore-arm in anticipation of the following discussions of the tensions, symbiotic relations and compromise between 'private' and 'public' institutions, actions and philosophies. I return to this issue in Chapter 5, but the focusing and blurring of the private/public spheres is central to the general account of private security presented here.

### Outline of Chapter Structure

As I have noted, (with the omission, for reasons of space, of several chapters on the history of private policing initiatives), the thesis structure as presented broadly follows the way that the research developed. Two phases of fieldwork, (reported in Chapter 2), provided me with both covert and overt experience of working in private security companies. This sensitising period (coupled with background reading and discussions with 'significant others') raised questions (which I note in Chapter 2), broadening the nature of what I was aiming to investigate. Most profoundly I realised that medium-sized guard and patrol security firms were but one aspect of a much wider, though less visible range of security services. This in turn



suggested that, if the undercover activities of the 'ordinary', 'respectable' firms raised questions about civil liberties issues, then the activities of the less visible agencies might well raise even more. Thus questions about the accountability and legitimacy of the private security agencies (or sector) coincided and resonated with the recurrent public issues of licensing and regulating private security.

In Chapter 3 I attempt to chart, on a broader and more detailed scale than has been available before, the activities and breadth of the private security sector. This account is unique in the very wide range of sources that it has been able to draw upon and its attempt to relate to other bodies of work in criminology and the sociology of law on policing and private justice. Chapter 4 takes up the matter of the accountability of the private security sector, again drawing upon diverse sources, engaging with past and current relevant debates, and attempting to consistently argue for a system of safeguards ensuring the regulation and accountability of the private security sector.

During the time that I have been doing this research, presenting papers and writing up this thesis, the significance of private security has been noted by a widening number of other academic (and media) researchers and commentators.<sup>2</sup> Much of the resulting work has been illuminating, some rather less so. But in particular, the development of theoretical accounts of the growth, expansion and significance of private security has produced a number of sophisticated analyses. Notably the various works of Shearing and Stenning, Spitzer and Scull, and Weiss (see bibliography) have contributed much - not just to our understanding of private security per se, but also through relating to and engaging with other work on various dimensions of social control. In Chapter 5, I review some of the key contributions of these authors, engaging in critical debate with their positions, in an attempt to develop a theoretical account of the private security sector which has some specificity with regard to the U.K. but which still relates to consanguine developments in other western societies. The Conclusion, Chapter 6, reiterates some points and adds cautionary warnings about others.



## What the Thesis Does Not Cover

I would claim that this thesis presents a more comprehensive and critically researched picture of the breadth and significance of the private security sector than has been available heretofore - at least for the U.K. It still does not, however, definitively answer some of those 'basic' questions that I referred to earlier such as 'How big is it?' This question could have been answered with cynical and polemical 'guesstimates', but such a resort would be both sociologically and politically dishonest and dangerous. Statistical information on private security in the U.K. is virtually non-existent, (cf. Chapters 3 and 4), and even in other countries, where licensing and/or other registration procedures have existed for some years, information of this order is very sparse. Even with the resources of a major ten-year project on private security in Canada, Shearing and Stenning (1981) must observe that:

"In presenting the following brief survey of international data, we should caution the reader against drawing any but the most tentative conclusions comparatively. Despite serious efforts to improve matters in a number of jurisdictions (notably the United States) current statistical information on the size and growth of private security remains very crude. Estimates of expenditures on private security, for instance, vary wildly and standard categories for determining the number of persons involved have not been developed sufficiently to support comparative analysis across national borders"

(p. 198).

Like Shearing and Stenning (et. al.), I had originally felt that it would be necessary to attempt some degree of international comparison. However, it quickly became clear that, unlike the comparison of legislation, the information required for comparative analysis of trends in employment, labour turnover, expansion of companies, foreign ownership of companies and so on, was simply unavailable. In the event such an exercise would have been precluded by space (and time) considerations and by the likely contribution of the end-result to the overall project. Hence, in discussing legislation, licensing and controls for private security (Chapter 4) I have found it worthwhile to briefly refer to some international models (partly on the basis of conclusions derived from the fieldwork reported in Chapter 2); but for the rest the study principally confines itself to the U.K. experience.



I have already noted that this thesis does not cover the history of private initiatives for protection and security that have generally thrived in place of, or even alongside more clearly 'public' initiatives. Nor does it address those private statutory forces which exist somewhere between the private sector and the police, although usually bearing some clear mandate from some form of public authority or body. It is, however, important to briefly refer to these private statutory forces for several reasons. Partly because they represent another apparent anomaly in the division of policing labour; partly because they are a frequently forgotten but nonetheless important part of our apparatus of 'everyday' ordering of life and protection of public and private property. But, in addition, it has been suggested that these forces are:

"an alternative model at least for the manned security services . . . , organised along the lines of the ordinary police forces, but employed and financed by a private or governmental body other than the local police authorities."

(O.C.P.U., 1978:11)

Usually oriented in their training toward local functions (e.g. docks/harbour police), these forces have a policing responsibility for private property which nevertheless, anomalously, sees a lot of public traffic. In certain cases ordinary public or council employees, such as park employees, have been incorporated into official constable status forces, such as the Royal Parks Police. Their powers are legally constituted within specific Acts of Parliament, which can bestow minimal responsibilities or powers as extreme as those of the Atomic Energy Authority Police with the right to carry guns. Cooperation between such private forces, created by legal statute, and the ordinary police is clearly eased in that they "share a common legal status, similar procedures and have no constraints on the exchange of information"(O.C.P.U., 1978:13).

Such forces are generally controlled under their empowering legislation by local authorities or else ultimately, at least in theory, by section 7 of the Police Act, 1976, which imposes the relevant intent of the Act or allows for the regulatory intervention of the Home Secretary. Their duties may often be less of a 'police' status and more, apparently, similar to private security but they are



distinguished from the latter by a legal status (however mundane their responsibilities), a formal legally constituted system of accountability and a contractual responsibility to more readily answerable 'private' employers than non-accountable private interest. They are hence considered, for present purposes, to be phenomenal forms of the system of public policing, whilst I shall concentrate here on private forms of policing, security and surveillance whose function and accountability are wholly privatised.

### Conclusion: Focusing and Blurring

There are difficulties in delineating the divide between the private and public spheres of modern life - and indeed this has certainly been no less true historically. These difficulties carry over into the study of inter-locking systems of social control. The highly suggestive work of Foucault (1977) and Cohen (1979) clearly influences my perspective here and in what follows. But whilst some aspects of social control in practice may seem self-evidently 'in focus' - for example, the work of the police - increasing the magnification with a view to seeing what else may be happening can frequently produce an illuminating 'blurring effect'.

Topically, for example, there is currently much talk of inter or multi-agency strategies to respond to a variety of social problems. Commentary on these trends has almost exclusively focused upon the participation of public sector agencies; on aspects of their enthusiasm or resistance, and so on. This is a consequence of one particular sort of focus. But with a different perspective, a search for some blurring of the boundaries between various agencies across the private/public divide would expect to find it in this kind of development, if nowhere else.

The present Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police is a man who knows more than a little about strategies and deployment of resources. In a speech given at the opening of the International Fire, Security and Safety Exhibition at Olympia on 15th April, 1985, the Commissioner, Sir Kenneth Newman said that he was engaged "in a long-term effort to promote police/public cooperation - cooperation that will be



continuous, structured and effective." This required "a multi-agency approach. The security industry was one of the most important of these agencies" (Metropolitan Police, 1985:2).

I do not believe that Commissioner Newman intends to turn over the files of Scotland Yard to agencies working within the private security sector. I do believe that whatever their differences in the past, as Newman intimates, police, private security - and other agencies - have to learn to live together. That is a reality here and now. What developments might follow can only be influenced if we keep them in sight.

## Chapter 1 - Notes

- (1) Although I first used the term 'private security sector' in a paper delivered to the National Deviancy Conference in 1978 (South, 1978 (b)), and at the time thought it a possibly original, though obvious, neat and accurate term, I subsequently found that it had been used in passing and without fanfare by Joseph Thurston, President of Community Guardians Assoc. Limited in an address to a Canadian Security Conference in 1973, (Thurston, in Jeffries, 1974:40). At the same time as I was writing, O'Toole (1978) published a book with the title: The Private Sector: Private Spies, Rent-a-Cops and the Police Industrial Complex, which I only discovered a few years later. No doubt many others have seen the heuristic potential of this term and I make no claim to its originality only to its utility.
- (2) Nonetheless the field remains small and my dialogue with others interested in the area has often had to rely on transatlantic correspondence and travel. On one occasion I was in Toronto to present a paper on youth culture and on arrival was told that my only free morning had been eagerly hijacked by researchers at the Toronto Centre for Criminology keen to share ideas. On another occasion, in the hallowed cloisters of an Oxford college, a visiting American, presenting a paper to a colloquium on the history of 'private policing', left his pontificating hosts slightly taken aback that he should be searching for some Ph.D. student from Middlesex ("where?") that he had been corresponding with.

My own feelings of isolation in carrying out research in this area were considerably mitigated by various contacts and friends that I made through 'snowballing' from the initial suggestions and introductions offered by my supervisors. I am very grateful to them and to all the others who have helped in the preparation of this thesis. They are, as the saying goes 'too numerous to mention', but if the result ever sees publication then I shall be faced with the invidious task of 'naming names'.



PART 2

CHAPTER 2

'Private Security at Work; Statics, Mobiles and Control':  
Two Case Studies

1. The Observational Research: Its Role in the Development of the Research Project and Some Brief Notes on Methodology

"A continued caveat, or warning, prefacing virtually every field-study [of police agencies, is the claim] that the study is only exploratory, the conclusions are only tentative and are based on one case, and so forth."

(Manning, 1972; 243)

I can at least claim to have looked - very briefly - at two case studies, but the rest of the continued caveat must stand . . .

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The essential starting point of the research project reported in this thesis was the intention to carry out a period of observational fieldwork. The limited aim, until I was just at the threshold of entering the field, was to present an account of the workings of private security organisations, their growth and lack of accountability. In the period of setting up the fieldwork, entering into a short initial period of observation, following up further reading and making new contacts, the 'limited aim' sprang apart.

From a sociological and anthropological point of view the field-work was seeking to explore a variety of areas. Perhaps most centrally it was concerned with aspects of the occupational culture. This was a concern reflecting several interests: in the sociology of work and occupations, (cf. Hughes, 1958) - how people 'do' and 'get through' their jobs; relatedly, the sociology of deviance - particularly in occupations and industrial roles, (cf. Bryant, 1974; Taylor and Walton, 1971); and in the debates about 'working class images of society' which Lockwood's seminal article had generated, (cf. Lockwood, 1966; Bulmer, 1975). I sought therefore to explore the nature and consequences of shift-work; relations with families and friends; the relationship of the occupation and its values to the broader 'Weltanschauung' of the workers; the negotiation of formal understandings about wage/effort commitment and the informal manipulation of the timed routine of work; and also the impact of low pay, poor conditions and low unionisation, all of which preliminary reading suggested would be important variables. A key conclusion drawn from examination of the latter three features, for example, is



that without strong, established and pervasive channels for the expression of dissatisfaction through unions or other representative bodies, the manifestation of discontent with the job for many of what I refer to as 'peripheral' workers (cf. Mars and Mitchell, 1976) is demonstrated in an unusually high labour turnover. This occurs despite the confidence of the industry and security of job prospects.

This chapter therefore reports the exploration of these interests, ideas and themes. However, as it unfolded, the observational research became, initially intuitively, and later formally, an exercise in providing a backdrop to, and second a context for the development of, more intriguing questions about the wider dimensions of the private security phenomenon. As I shall indicate initial findings were rapidly able to raise such questions about history, wider operations, relationship to the police and (fashionably at the time) to law and the state.

The research project therefore developed to investigate some of the hidden history and continuum of development of the private security sector; (limited by space, the early pre-twentieth century history is now reported in South forthcoming). Subsequent chapters explore the private security sector and aspects of its development, especially in relation to what I describe (in Chapter 5) as the commercial compromise of the state. In this chapter I present a 'take-off' point reporting the initial phase of research which prompted the broadening out of the very subject matter - and hence analysis - of the thesis.

This chapter therefore reports not a true ethnography in any sense, but perhaps what could be claimed to be ethnographic vignettes of various occupational roles, activities and aspects of the sub-culture of private security workers in two medium-sized companies.<sup>1</sup>

The first case-study involved covert participant observation for just over three and a half weeks, which was actually a fairly intense immersion because the shifts were 12 hours long and I had few days off because I was new and therefore had to 'learn the ropes'. This was followed up with two return visits, one on leaving and one to socially 'drop in', and a follow-up interview - of interest but no great



success - with one friendly co-worker. During this period, cycles of 12 hour day and night shifts were passed through, and a more advanced and intensive 'on the job' training process than is usual was experienced because I was placed as an assistant controller at the 'centre of operations'. The second case-study involved open observation and 'hanging around' with workers in another organisation spread over nearly four months.

The purpose of the case studies as presented here are four-fold. Firstly to give a flavour of working in the most visible areas of private security. Secondly, to thereby provide an account complementary to the macro-analysis of the division of policing labour in western industrial societies offered in Chapter 5. Thirdly, there is the hope that the case-studies and the points that they raise will be seen in relation to the issues of low pay, unionisation, the structure of the work-force and the domination of the business by powerful, large firms at one end with small firms at the other, and a division of functions across the spectrum - which the discussions of the development of private security and proposals for licensing and accountability address in Chapters 3 and 4. And finally, hopefully, like me, the reader will begin to wonder about the genealogy of these pseudo-police; in short, 'Where are they coming from?'

#### Orientations and the Choice of Method

Early on, in attempting empirical research on building and kitchen workers (South, 1978 (a)), I had been struck by Lockwood's observation on the dubious validity of investigating 'class consciousness' (and such matters) through the responses to questionnaires, and political attitudes "from the point of view of the statistical correlations between [a respondent's] graphically recorded replies to nine questions . . ." (Lockwood, 1975; 248).

More closely related to the subject matter considered here, Reiner (1978), commenting on his own methodology in a study of the police and attitudes to unionism, notes that:



"There are two major pitfalls that attempts to understand and explain attitudes through interview or questionnaire can fall into. The first is excessive idealism . . . The opposing danger is that of excessive materialism."

(p.17)

The first is the result of 'ideal typification' and the second problem results from interpreting 'correlation as causation'. Thus, "ideas are correlated with structural positions - say attitudes to unionism with rank . . ."

"In either case," notes Reiner, "the complex process of social interaction in which ideas develop is reduced to a simpler relationship, either one of logic or a simple reflection of material circumstances" (p. 17).

Such problems follow from the limited track that this particular methodological approach can run, produced by its formality and its structured nature. It limits and forecloses the development of a picture which attempts to relate action to consciousness outside of the frozen interview moment. As Reiner observes:

"The problem is that interviews (even in a longitudinal study) cannot trace the process of social interaction in which ideas develop, as men with various initial orientations to a situation encounter circumstances and other actors that have the power to frustrate or satisfy these expectations. All that can be done is to reconstruct a plausible account of how present ideas, and their relationship to other ideas and to material factors, could have developed. This account can be supported, but never conclusively tested, by statistical relationships and insight gained from the statements made by the actors. Thus no account can be considered final."

(ibid.)

Concurring with Reiner's concluding statement, I believe that the pursuit of the 'final account' is, sociologically, a fruitless quest. Instead, I have sought in this thesis to present a 'rounded' account of the private security sector based on a broad, if imperfect, 'cross-gridding' of evidence and method of investigation. From the beginning, as this intention began to find form, it has had implications for the methodological starting point of the project. Thus, the pursuit of approaches to the subject from beneath in terms of its hidden history (now excised from this thesis), from the policy



front in terms of its accountability and from above in terms of trying to develop a theoretical understanding of the division of policing labour, meant that there was little time left for as rigorous a use of observational methods as I would have liked.

Although I engaged in both open and covert observational research I shall here just briefly discuss the issue of covert participant observation - partly because it is sociologically contentious in terms of its ethics, and partly to try to explain why it, and the observational approach broadly, seemed more appropriate in this research than other methods such as survey or structured interviews.

### The Choice of Method

The very limited use of covert participant observation reported here cannot really warrant a long-winded justification of the method. However, reference to established debates might help to clarify my own position, both in adopting it and in defending its place in the repertoire of sociological methods.

The collection on Social Research Ethics edited by Bulmer (1981) must surely cover most of the major viewpoints on this issue and comprehensive coverage and references are best sought there. But Bulmer's introductory essay to this volume essentially hinges on a contrast between an attack on covert observation by Kai T. Erikson and a defence from Jack Douglas. I would like to draw out a few points from both of these positions which I considered, (albeit then in a less informed manner), in deciding to embark upon some period of covert research for this particular project. These considerations, it will be evident, were less matters of weighty ethical reflection and more concerns of immediate pragmatism.

One of Erikson's objections is that: "Covert observation is liable to damage the general reputation of sociology and close off further avenues for research." (This and succeeding quotes from Erikson and Douglas are found in Bulmer, 1981:3-12).

It seems to me that there always have been and always will be certain



avenues of research where it is made clear that the sociologist has no right-of-way and is unwelcome. Of course, even in the most forbidding territory the open-observation approach may get the researcher a guided tour and pleasant lunch, but the 'locals' will talk to you as the visitor you evidently are. Indeed, I was warmly entertained at the training centres of both Securicor, on a private floor atop a hotel in Richmond, and Group 4, at their private country house and hotel. But there is, of course, no such thing as a free lunch and public relations is the pleasant name of this pleasant way of spending a day. On the other hand, a covert approach might bring the threshold problems of being a 'newcomer', but at the same time, there is a great difference between being an outsider passing through and an insider settling in.

It was precisely because initial reading and preliminary contacts indicated that private security was generally disdainful of sociologists, journalists and most enquirers that I was persuaded that the recommended strategy of my anthropologically-trained supervisor was at least a good means of getting some general sense of the insider's perspective - rather than the simple public relations position.

Ironically, though I did not know it at the time, this decision also reflects other issues which Erikson raises in support of not doing covert research:

" . . . Most of those who get involved in covert observation are graduate students. Since covert research poses serious ethical problems and often results in personal stress for the observer, it is unreasonable to use a method, the burden of which will fall upon those still dependent on their academic elders."

I certainly experienced some stress, both ethically and arising from the social and physical context in which I worked (on which more below). But the drift of Erikson's argument here seems unrealistic and somewhat patronising. It is comforting that supervisors should be urged to reject some methods in order to protect the mental health of their students. On the other hand, many students might find it galling to have an alternative methodology dictated where s/he (and the supervisor) felt another method to be more appropriate and valuable in the particular circumstances.



More closely in tune with my instinctive feelings at the time were the (subsequently 'discovered') arguments developed by Jack Douglas in his Investigative Social Research (1976), and these also relate, not incidentally, to the rationale behind the research project as a whole. As Bulmer summarises:

"Douglas explicitly disavows ethical judgements upon the methods he uses, and does not discuss 'the tortured moral arguments' over covert methods. His reason for doing so is that '[a]ny one who really knows what goes on in American society, and who has any sense of fairness and practicality, will immediately recognise that all of our [research] methods are by comparison still genteel and relatively harmless'."

(Bulmer, 1981:10, quoting Douglas, 1976).

In approaching this research project and the initial method I considered my own crude perspective, (running along these lines in relation to western societies generally), to be especially pertinent in the case of a subject that inevitably prompted reflection on the ethics of the private security enterprise and what I already knew of some of its more dubious practices, (cf. Bunyan, 1976; Kakalik and Wildhorn, 1972; Task Force Report, 1976). Contemplating research on the world of private police (as the available U.S. literature consistently called them) and private detectives (as I fancifully began to think), it had already occurred to me that at least one useful:

"model for investigative social research is provided by 'spies, counter-spies, police, detectives, prosecutors, judges, psychiatrists, tax-collectors, probation officers . . . , investigative journalists' and others, who all seek to uncover, for various purposes, different aspects of the workings of modern society."

(Bulmer, 1981:10-11, quoting Douglas, 1976)

I stand by this 'model' and most especially its utility in investigating these other investigators and other cases where the name of the game is not openness but privilege, surveillance and secrecy.

While the debate will doubtless continue I have little space to pursue it here. I must conclude therefore by citing support - both general and specific for the ethical perspective that I have held to through the research reported here. In Galliher's (1973) important essay on



'The Protection of Human Subjects: A Re-Examination of the Professional Code of Ethics', he draws attention to the eloquently put position of Rainwater and Pittman (1967):

"Sociologists have the right (and perhaps also the obligation) to study publicly accountable behaviour. By publicly accountable behaviour we do not simply mean the behaviour of public officials (though there the case is clearest) but also the behaviour of any individual as he goes about performing public or secondary roles for which he is socially accountable - this would include businessmen, college teachers, physicians, etc.; in short, all people as they carry out jobs for which they are in some sense publicly accountable. One of the functions of our discipline, along with those of political science, history, economics, journalism and intellectual pursuits generally, is to further public accountability in a society whose complexity makes it easier for people to avoid their responsibilities."

(My emphasis)

Focusing more specifically on agencies and occupations within the division of policing labour, Holdaway's account of his own covert research within the British police argues that:

"Research and my previous experience of the police demonstrated the power of the lower ranks, not least their resistance to external control of their work. Any effective research strategy would have to pierce that protective shield if it was to be successful. This much is true of research on many organisations; however, the necessity of covert research is strengthened by the central and powerful situation of the police within our social structure. The police are said to be accountable to the rule of law, a constitutional feature which restricts their right of privacy, but which they neutralise by the maintenance of a protective occupational culture."

(Holdaway, 1981: 64)

Private security are also, of course, accountable to the rule of law. But they too have an occupational culture and image-making machinery which erect protective shields; these also 'neutralise' - or at least reduce - the effective accountability of private security. But it is the final point of this part of Holdaway's argument with which I shall conclude this section. It does not justify all covert research, or even 'open' research where all the aims are not made absolutely explicit, - not even where the subjects are powerful or secret groups. Nor it is directly translatable from the case of the police to private security, for the latter has a more heterogeneous work-force and,



hence, occupational cultures. But in essence it is a valid guideline for research on certain institutions in modern society:

"When such an institution is highly secretive and protective its members restrict any right to privacy they already have. It is crucial that they are researched."

(Ibid)

2. Trusty Security Services: In Control - "the centre of things", (Trusty Sergeant)

Trusty Security Services are a medium-sized but expanding company based in London, with main offices in parts of West London and a depot in North London. One of the West London offices is the operational headquarters while the other is principally used for recruitment, interviews and some public relations administration. This latter office was my first point of contact with the company - a lack-lustre suite of offices above a shop just off a main road.

Initial Recruitment

First impressions count, and those of the prospective employee are guided by being urged to 'browse through' some introductory publicity about the company. Like myself, hoping to find the right things to say, many are probably drawn to reading the brief introduction written by the Managing Director:

"The police are slowly gaining ground against the law-breakers but the cost of crime is still too high to say nothing of nearly £650,000 lost daily to industry through fire and other hazards. 40% of firms hit by a serious blaze are forced permanently out of business. With a smaller force than he had 50 years ago the Metropolitan Police Commissioner reports forceful entries in non-residential buildings to be increasing, with £100,000 in cash from properties stolen in London every day. Good citizens take sensible precautions to protect their homes and families. Good corporate citizens, business firms, public bodies and the like are increasingly helping police and emergency services by avoiding preventable risks. Hence continued growth of commercial security companies. By their presence they deter trespassers and help to reduce accidents. If danger from either threatens they take immediate action and ensure too that the proper authorities are summoned without delay. A good security guard is not an imitation policeman, still less an amateur soldier, he is a vigilant and effective lookout."

(My emphasis)



Although this was the first security job that I had gone after, I was at the time and for a short time after, an avid reader of the publicity materials put out by private security companies. As my notes from the time indicate, Trusty trod a well-worn path in what they referred to and what they did not:

"Much is made in all the publicity of the fact that the economic situation means industry cannot afford these losses. The insurance is much more expensive just for starters. They manage to suggest indirectly that they are an effective adjunct to the police who desperately need help due to shortage of manpower and the growth of crime, growth in population, . . . in violence and general decline in public order. All these fearsome talismans are used by P/S to explain their continued growth in terms of the rhetoric of prevention. There is no suggestion here of detection or intrusion - it is rather more a matter of being an effective lookout service to prevent things 'getting out of control'."

(TSS fieldwork notes)

Of course, first impressions can also be misleading.

At first contact Trusty emphasized their concern for the good of the security industry and the public, and hence their public image. Within this they make much of the necessity of screening and vetting applicants. This company is also involved in recruitment services for 'temp' workers and this they suggested, not only allows them to recruit more reliably from a wide range of potential employees, with 'access to specialisations (- unspecified -) unavailable to other firms', but also gives them a deeper, more credible experience of following up character references and histories. Here the brochure is cited:

"We require employer and personal references covering up to 15 years and a senior executive checks these in writing and by telephone rejecting all applicants in all cases of doubt."

The labouing of this point seems largely for effect. It may hopefully deter some with an 'undesirable' past from proceeding with their application rather than having that past raked over. For others, impressionable in other ways, it may induce some respect and regard for the professionalism of the company. The efficiency of the actual vetting process may, however, serve to diminish some of that respect and regard. In my own case it took the company just over



three weeks before they took up my references. I have learned that this is far from uncommon in the private security business, yet by the time that my references could actually have been properly checked I had left the firm having worked for nearly one month in their control room. By that time I could have had access to a variety of files and routines - and disappeared.

### Pay and Conditions - the Consequences of the Promises of Security

There are two conflicting promises of security which contribute to the determination of wage levels in the industry. One is made at the level of selling the service, the other at the level of trying to keep the work force.

Given the nature of security work - principally guarding other people's property and money - it is obviously helpful to the psychological selling of the service if clients are convinced that the security staff employed are scrupulously honest and of the (relatively) highest integrity. Most reputable firms, including Trusty, say that they will look into the 'personal circumstances' of their employees on a regular basis as a security check. In practice however, it seems that few companies do, although some of the major firms, (notably Securicor) will seriously compile information about the family home, hire purchase or other financial commitments which might lead employees into temptation. Therefore, at the same time as having to sell their services at competitive rates (and therefore having to keep costs down), Trusty and others must also be reassuring to their clients about the high standards of pay and conditions of their staff:

" . . . staff costs, our biggest single outgoing, are rising, as sizeable operators we shall continue to offer competitive rewards."

In fact, at Trusty and throughout the private security industry (Chapter 3), workers remain poorly paid, (Williams et al., 1984). The hours are consistently long and arduous, usually twelve hour shifts, with some of the smaller firms routinely operating 18 and 24-hour shifts. Given that in most basic security jobs comforts are limited to a kettle and a radio (both of which the guard may have to supply),



it is rather difficult to say that conditions are strikingly good. Holiday entitlements and pension schemes are hardly universal. This is where the other promise of security is frequently advanced by companies, suggesting perhaps an occasional underlying contempt for workers that put up with such poor conditions. Static site work (basic guarding on one site), is commonly described by security management, and even by some workers, as an easy and a secure job. It is on these grounds that it can be more appealing to some, and excused by others, when compared to other service sector occupations where better pay and conditions might be found. Of course, increasingly, as unemployment rises but private security continues its recession-resistant expansion, the attraction of security as a secure job will genuinely increase, and prospects for the improvement of pay and conditions in non-unionised firms diminish accordingly.

### Delivering the Goods. . .

Most security companies make some claims about providing formal instruction and 'on the job training tailored to the needs of the assignment under the supervision of an experienced officer', (Trusty brochure). Now it can be said that everyone does receive some form of training insofar as they are told, however briefly, what they are expected to do, when and where. What seems extremely rare is any fixed period of formal instruction. I went straight into a fairly responsible job as an Assistant Controller, working on the communications panel, and was expected to pick it up as I went along, with Robin showing me the ropes as things came up. I learned that the static site guards spend most of one night with one inspector or supervisor who is supposed to know the site. This covers where the key points are - the points in the building where keys are fixed and which are part of the system of checks that a guard is completing the assigned patrol. I shall explain some of this routine later. The experienced supervisor will also point out all the significant nooks and crannies of a building, the location of fire doors, the various routes for patrolling and so on. Perhaps this does constitute a 'fixed period' of formal instruction, but it hardly corresponds to the public image that companies seek to convey.



From the point of view of efficiency, many companies and their clients are mutually dubious about the value of any in-depth training. What unites them is an interest in business-like questions about whether the job gets done well or not. Embraced within this consideration, and beyond the importance of training, are matters like staff discipline, backgrounds, capability of the company and expertise available.

One popular image of the private security industry, based upon the visibility of the contract guard companies discussed here, is that it is rigid, regimental and para-military in its discipline. Like many other firms sensitive to such portrayals, Trusty is insistent that it operates on industrial not military lines. "We offer sound administration and high commercial standards - quite simply we deliver the goods," (Trusty brochure). Indeed this particular company was managed very efficiently, and like all security firms of its type, its staff would be turning over at a much higher rate if any seriously regimental discipline was forced upon them. Nonetheless, the company does operate with a quasi-police hierarchy of ranks and, in this regard the backgrounds of the senior staff are of interest. Nearly all of these, including those at executive level, have some kind of military background. The majority of the supervisory staff (around eight) had been members of the police or armed forces, and most of the older personnel working on a stable basis with Trusty had also done their National Service and talked reminiscently of its camaraderie.

This said, it is true that Trusty does not see itself as operating in a 'quasi-military' style in the way that some companies, such as Securicor may have been seen in the past. It is less clear however, in what way it sees its hierarchical ranking as reflecting a more familiar or less threatening industrial model of workforce management and discipline!

It is at this level of the perception of appropriate 'ordinary' workplace discipline and expectations of workforce behaviour (however often these are confounded), that the connection is made between the employment of a supervised and disciplined workforce in the security field in order to be an active force in the supervision and



disciplining of workforces and workplaces in other fields. As Trusty's brochure puts it:

". . . we maintain a continuing routine liaison with customers so that all occurrences are automatically brought to their attention. Besides noting cases of trespass, fire and so on, these observations cover such items as faulty keys, broken window catches, unlocked doors, frayed power cables, overflowing cisterns, insecure fences, appliances wrongly left running over night and unextinguished lights. Such information is of continuing help in improving management disciplines. As part of our service we can install television photo-scanners which are increasingly used in crime and accident detection and prevention. Finally, the prominent display of our signs on customers' premises is enough to deter many vandals and trespassers."

(My emphasis)

Thus, as a principal aspect of the service of private security, alongside the crime and accident prevention/detection functions, there is a great emphasis placed upon the familiar elements of the incremental tightening of workplace discipline; (I shall broaden the discussion and analysis of private security's employment in monitoring and regulating the workplace and workforce in Chapter 3, cf. the use of 'snowflake' notes, Chapter 3, pp. 119-20).

Clearly in this commitment to improving the conditions under which management discipline can be made more effective, companies like Trusty share the same operational rationale and ideology as those major or small specialised firms which also offer services screening employees, planting undercover agents in the workplace, and all of whom seek to elevate the minor infringement of rules to the height of the real problem - the subversion of efficiency and discipline and the need to counter this everyday laxity and the personnel and conditions which contribute to it.

It is, of course, unrealistic not to emphasize that some of the basic pay-offs of security guards' work are a wholly commendable social good. The prevention of fire, crime, accident and potentially expensive damage for which consumers, insurers, members of the workforce and others must ultimately pay, are all valuable contributions. It is also commercially understandable that clients should be urged to consider "the costs and consequences of undetected



electrical faults, of leaving fire doors open, windows unfastened or water leaking . . ." (Trusty brochure). But equally, it is only realistic to also emphasize where, within the security mentality, these practices necessarily lead, how they are carried out and the remedies thereby 'logically' following.

### Getting into the Job . . .

The backgrounds of senior staff at Trusty (which are fairly typical for private security), and the assumptions and world-view of the pervasive security mentality, are a necessary backdrop to my account of how I could get into a fairly central and key position in a security firm, in a covert participant observer role. Whilst trying to minimise fabrication and outright lies to the very minimum, I had to be able to present myself at any interview capable of first, explaining my past which was recently dominated by being a sociology student at university. Second, why I should be wanting to work in private security and why they should believe that I did. Third, I had to set a date for leaving after my covert research, without the personal and professional problems which the ethical and methodological literature warns about.

I picked out the advertisement for a job as an ordinary security guard (with scope for promotion etc.) from the local job centre. Nervous and apprehensive about trying to 'infiltrate' a private security organisation, I spent time preparing for the interview, working out and rejecting a variety of approaches that I might take. I finally formulated what my field-notes refer to as a 'cover story' (the subject matter is conducive to encouraging the researcher to occasionally think like a character out of the Private-Eye genre). After four years of university and with only casual labouring jobs through summer and winter holidays, my sources of appropriate references were limited. The solution was to 'confess' that I had been at university and had a degree but that, as this was evidently an over-qualification for the job that I was applying for, I could be clear that I only wanted the position for a short time because I was intending on a career which would use my degree. This career path had to explain why there was a certain point of departure, explain an



interest in security type work and, hopefully, commend me to the interviewers, without going over the top.

I therefore suggested that I was thinking of applying to join the Prison Service at Assistant Governor grade in the Autumn when their recruitment and examination scheme would re-commence. Getting used to shifts, discipline, uniforms and acquiring a sense of the working of security made working as a security officer look like a good apprenticeship.

The interview room was a largish office with two desks, one for the interviewer and one for an absent secretary. Dominating one wall was a large map of London with coloured pins stuck to it. Although this office was not an 'operational' one, the map gave it a clear connection with the 'real work' of the organisation. On it the interviewer could later outline the types of services offered and in what geographical areas of Greater London. The map looked 'business-like' and professional and being guided over it, however briefly, was obviously a part of the recruitment 'rite de passage'. Whether one was bored or interested by it did not matter, the point was that one's attention would be drawn to it and made to take note of it, and the service and professionalism that it represented. Indeed, a significant element of this process of 'rite de passage' was being offered the chance to take up the notion of performing a "public service". This was explained in the sense of the organisation 'working in a supportive capacity to civil police and other services, working in the cause of prevention and detection of hazards and on behalf of the Crown (i.e. government premises) and business'.

The public image of the company was impressed upon me immediately. "We don't use dogs and we don't handle money transit," said my interviewer. "We have a low-intensity approach to our jobs" but he also emphasized that the company was by no means "low-key in [its] approach to the sophistication of [its] operations," which seemed to be principally a reassurance that their communications equipment was not antiquated.

I was perhaps rather brightly dressed for this kind of interview not



possessing a suit in London. I therefore appreciated the tact of the interviewer, who probably thought that I had never owned a suit in my life, when he broke off from asking me some vague questions to tell me that the uniform had to be dry-cleaned regularly, but at the company's expense. They also, he continued, provided a free shirt and tie.

The interview went well and my prospective entry into the prison service was viewed highly favourably, although a joke on the telephone to a colleague at a different office brought the comment that Assistant Governors are glorified office-boys. Out of this regard for my 'intentions' and following a couple of telephone calls, it was suggested that I might like to take a job in the company's control room - "the centre of operations".

After the telephone calls and once past the stage where it was decided that I could be "just right for their vacancy", then the interview naturally became more informal. Being 'welcomed in' I was immediately being given tips on how to 'ease' the job that I was going to be doing. "The big problem", I was told, "is that you get a massive inflow of calls from guards going on duty at the same time as receiving all the calls of those going off duty. . . you just mark down and time those going on and then assume that those who have been on their assignment for the past twelve hours would definitely have gone off. The only ones to check are where somebody hasn't checked on." This in fact turned out to be useful advice - my first piece of knowledge of the occupational culture. It induced considerable guilt!

I left the office realising that I had been very lucky. Although I had anticipated getting an ordinary static guard's job and therefore much of my 'approach' to the project was organised around the idea of that role, I could see that the control room would offer a good opportunity to observe private security at work more broadly and from its heart - at the point where patrols and management met.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, I had quite liked my interviewer who, for whatever motive, seemed to have gone out of his way for me. It was true that they obviously had an unfilled vacancy in the control room that they were keen to find someone suitable for, but my 'suitability' was largely a fabrication. It had worked, it had been believed and had got me my



job. But relief and elation were definitely tempered by a bad case of participant observer's guilt.

### Doing the Job. . .

The Control Centre of Trusty is in an old building close to Westminster and the river. I arrived at 9 o'clock on the appointed day of what was termed my "induction". The entrance door is electronically controlled with cameras surveying the pavement, nonetheless I spent ten minutes pressing a door buzzer that did not work. I was eventually admitted and met by the Personnel Director and a secretary. There were several forms to fill in and one was handed over with the advice that the Personnel Director was required to give me this by law. Subsequently studying it I could find no clear evidence of how it related to the law, its clearer purpose was to impress employees with the confidentiality of the firm's work. This is suitably stressed in the contract which is signed (an ethical and legal problem that I am now more keenly aware of). Signed up and photographed, I was then fitted with my uniform - a cap, jacket, a pair of trousers, a tie, three shirts (police-uniform style; blue with epaulettes), a torch and a whistle.

The control centre struck me at first sight as fairly unorganised, this impression perhaps being underlined by the contrast between the administration staff wearing ordinary 'civil' clothes and the uniformed staff of the control room. The uniform/non-uniform divide was also accentuated by the lay-out of the premises, with the administration downstairs and the control room and its facilities upstairs. Very quickly staff from one territory began to look out of place in the other, although with greater familiarity this division would probably have blurred a little.

My introduction to the administrative staff was in humorous circumstances. There were only five staff in these offices and most were crowded into one office when I met them. Someone had been messing about and had turned various pieces of furniture upside down - a chair, an ornament, a clothes stand and so on. As things were righted I noticed that one of the pictures on the wall was upside



down. 'Obviously', the joke inevitably ran, 'I would go far in this business'. All of this was quite a contrast to the impression that the staff in the control room made. Presumably intending to impress, the atmosphere here was of sober purpose. The individuals and their job demanded respect, and if I was to work well with them in the same job I should understand this from the start. 'Atmosphere' is the right word - whilst I was there for my first few introductory hours, movement and speech were rigid and clipped. The air was still heavy with the night shift's cigarette smoke, not yet cleared by old and inefficient filters and the more frequent opening and closing of the electronically operated door as management and others made their respective checks and enquiries.

The work of control, as it was explained to me, seemed to basically revolve around filling in several different types of report form to facilitate cross-checking on the patrols, particularly the static guards. The use of ticker-tape clocks that the guards carry was briefly explained, how these are checked on by random visits of inspectors, and how patrols are also cross-checked by telephone calls from the static guards themselves. These are noted and entered into 'the books' so that the inspectors can then subsequently check back against the control room books the timings that they have on the ticker-tapes from the guards clocks. But it was the business of radio communications that was stressed as the "really fascinating" and major purpose of the control room. I was told that I would have to learn the NATO radio alphabet (Alpha, Bravo, etc.) as this was mandatory under British radio-communications licensing law. I was quite ready to be impressed by this unforeseen requirement of specialist knowledge, and, to be honest, in nearly a month I never did become 100% proficient in radio procedure!

The shift system initially appeared quite complicated. Theoretically, it works on a 21-day rota of 7 nights working and 2 days off, then 8 days working (including 1 as stand-by) and 4 days off. In fact with a shortage of control staff we all worked extra overtime shifts. The length of the working 'days' and 'nights' was 12 hours; "a good alarm clock", I noted, "is a good investment in the security business - at several levels."



The following day was my first actively in uniform and I immediately experienced the feeling of being 'set apart' that wearing a uniform brings. Sociological reading apart, I also quite swiftly felt rather than simply understood, how the shared uniform contributes to feelings of solidarity and camaraderie among the work group. Whether riven by personal antagonisms or criss-crossed by friendship alliances, the fact of the shared uniform gives that group the basis for a common front and common identity. This is clear from studies of the police and armed forces but I would also suggest is strong in more mundane occupations such as security, commissionaires, traffic wardens and their like. According to my field notes I felt a definite personal embarrassment travelling to work on the tube in my uniform which only passed after a week or so. Joining others in the control room, entering into the working-home of the uniform, brought some strange sense of relief. Such feelings can reinforce at an individual level the general pervasive respect for seniority which the company seeks to cultivate. The members of the rank structure at different levels above basic grades contribute to this, for they too, whilst occasionally mocking the farce, also seek the entitlement they are brought by seniority.

The question of 'entitlements' - both formal and informal - was repeatedly linked to a notion of one's 'responsibility'. This was a quality which, it was tacitly made clear, would be noted and rewarded - or in its absence, reprimanded, although Robin often stressed that rank was not really "pulled" so long as "everyone keeps to the team." Team analogies, I realise now, bring a prompt smile to the face of any sociologist (or psychologist) of work. My notes written that night have the ring of stone-faced discovery: "This sort of analogy is commonly employed to encourage commitment and a sense of belonging." Some serious reading in industrial sociology followed. But with some previous background knowledge of the divisive world of building sites and 'workplace crime/deviance' I was not slow to pick up on the nature of commonly expected entitlements in private security. These were kept very much on the quiet, hidden behind references to responsibility and seniority, but basically dependent upon fitting in and being trusted. They amount to nothing sensational, but as part of the very relationships of the work culture people valued them, and



were correspondingly cautious and secretive about them. The most obvious entitlement (their word), or more colloquially perk, that I quickly picked up on was free transport for senior staff using company cars (and some of its petrol) when these were supposedly 'in the garage'.

Age was an immediate barrier to negotiate, especially as it was only slowly made clear to other staff why this total novice had been placed in the control room immediately. A vacancy was a vacancy, and a pain in the neck, but surely it should have been filled by someone with some experience? Robin asked almost immediately how old I was (I was 23 at this time). Later on in the morning, Ben, one of the schedulers who worked out shifts and patrols commented: "You are too eager boy." The 'boy' bit was to put me in my place, but the reference was at least part of a joke. I was guilty of a little eager initiative, I had opened the electronically controlled door prematurely before a senior staff member who was on good bantering terms with the control staff actually wanted to leave. I had hardly noticed how my action had slowly fixed attention to me until Ben made his comment and then Robin added, ". . . they said he was clever." This hardly induced paranoia, but I decided that being a bit slower on the uptake was probably a good idea.

I had been anxious to appear competent as soon as possible and capable of handling all the ongoing activities - answering the telephones and the radio, monitoring the door, filling in the variety of forms and so on. However, I was quickly assigned to, and now happily embraced, a role which was designed to disabuse me of over-confidence and yet which allowed me to be consistently, if peripherally, involved in the social and work-related to-ing and fro-ing. As the most junior member of the control room staff I was to make most of the tea! Taking on this kind of vague servicing role in an all-male work group does not emasculate because its potential 'feminisation' would simultaneously produce an intruder and outsider. This would be fine if the work group were seeking a scapegoat, but fortunately in this case they were not. The service then has to be cajoled and asked for in good (masculine) humour which necessarily reinforces inclusion within the very 'working together' of the work group. I began to day-dream on



the tube of 'South's sociological theory of the tea boy as unremarked but powerful cog in the machinery of the masculine work-place'. Remembering the building sites I soon abandoned the 'theory' but assignment to the role at Trusty was a nice piece of methodological serendipity.

Negotiating slow adaptation to new jobs versus showing eager aptitude is, of course, a familiar problem to note. The instance referred to above was by no means a unique experience for me. On other occasions with Trusty, (despite my newly-resolved caution), and in observation of training periods and work-group socialisation with other firms, I observed many similar examples of such light-hearted, and more heavy-handed, braking of eagerness. Cain (1971) in her study of the work socialisation of police constables describes a comparable situation. There she noted that, "the experienced constable can show the recruit how to write a report and other technical aspects of his job" (p. 93). It is accepted that developing the set of "craft skills" rather than "universally applicable principles" necessary for dealing with the public for example, can most successfully be accomplished by picking up tips from experienced men (cf. Cain, *ibid*). During such tentative learning, "instances of light-hearted ridicule of over zealous recruits" are frequent.

At the same time, the promise of 'good material' can bring with it some praise and special attention from management. On this score one factor can intrude that clearly differentiates private security companies from the police. In relatively new, expanding and medium-sized firms the higher ranks and management may be 'first generation' or stretched thin. In these circumstances it is natural that firms should be seeking to establish the continuity of career mobility for some suitable staff from 'the ranks' up to higher management.

This point was brought out by an enquiry by one of the senior managers as to whether I had "the aptitude", as he put it, to pick up the control room work straight away. This he did by addressing almost everybody else in the control room without directly looking at me. My university background and prison service intention was explained to him and suddenly he was sitting half on the desk next to me, talking



to me and wishing me "the best of luck". Subsequently, he and another manager mentioned the good career prospects offered "for a bright lad" (etc.) in security. "Think about it . . ." I was told. Perhaps caution was not enough, a demonstration of relative incompetence might yet be required. As it turned out this would not require much fabrication. Juggling all the calls, report sheets and other bits and pieces when they all came together - as they tended to - proved a pretty demanding job.

The breakdown of the day had most impact, in the first few days. From 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. 'juggling' is an appropriate metaphor for working on the control desk. Picking up telephones that ring as soon as they have been put down, handling radio reports at the same time if the other controller is simultaneously more busy. I began to wonder why there were only two controllers doing all this. Surely there would be less room for mistakes, greater efficiency and so on, if we simply had one more person working the desk? Of course, not only did cost militate against this proposition but, as I soon found out, this early morning hectic ride through all the sites with calls from guards clocking on and off, and making other reports, slowed from mid-morning onwards. After lunch-time, and especially between 3.00 p.m. and 5.00 p.m. many sites began to telephone in with different shifts checking on to new and odd schedules. Whilst some site guards may have to make periodic 'reports-in' during the day, depending upon the assignment, many were not expected to call in at all during daylight jobs, unless there was a specific incident to report for 'the books'. But between 5.00 p.m. and 7.00 p.m. more and more sites were signing off whilst the evening and night shifts were signing on. The frantic activity by this time brought a mellower tension - less that of the start of the day and more a gratefulness that it had all to be done with quickly because it would soon be time to go home and the control room had to be cleared before the night shift came on at 7.00 p.m.

This kind of diurnal round - long days and nights governed by routine - is founded upon and generates its own codes and regulations. I shall have more to say about the informalities of the work routine later, but will first mention the formal codes of the work routine, pertaining both to its broad outlines and its minutiae.



The General Instructions for duty control staff are more complicated than for ordinary uniformed personnel, but the latter are left in no doubt - at Trusty and all similar 'respectable' firms - that they are "on duty" and will "follow regulations" which have a ring of authority to them designed to convey a "sense" of authority to the guards. The sought-after ethos is one pervaded by efficiency, sound image, responsibility. Static site guards are required to be actually on-site five minutes before starting time. They should always let control know if they cannot make it to the assignment; book on duty as soon as arriving at the site; carry their identity card; always be wearing their uniform and do so neatly, and so on. Whether they are taken seriously or not, regulations about the wearing of the uniform include the occasional instruction reminiscent of police and military rules. The most obvious example is the instruction that the uniform jacket must be kept fully buttoned except when "the dress of the day is shirt-sleeve order".

The duties of the Controllers are set out in an appendix to the Operating Manual. The Senior Controller (Robin) and his Assistant Controller (Me) are the essential key links between the static guards, the mobile patrols and the shift inspector and supervisors, and in the event of any really serious incidents with senior management. Everything that happens, reports and the absence of reports, is supposed to be recorded in the appropriate place: the Occurrence Book, the Radio Log, the Duty Sheet or on one of the additional different forms provided. Messages from customers, the police or elsewhere are also supposed to be noted in the Daily Occurrence Book. This literally covers all daily occurrences related to operational and connected activities on a 24-hour day-to-day basis.

Guidelines direct that the following should be recorded:

- (a) All incidents occurring on static sites and where reported to the controller by the security officer on site. The incident is to be recorded fully, including detail of action taken in dealing with the incident and an additional cross-reference will be made to the relevant incident report form.

- (b) All incidents which occur on mobile patrols and customers' premises are to be reported and recorded as above.
- (c) All incidents which occur as in (a) and (b) and which are reported by the customer to the controller.
- (d) Messages from controllers to members of management, either of some matter of fact or happening, or a request for advice concerning a problem.
- (e) Messages concerning operational procedure from security officers to members of supervision staff or management.
- (f) Any other matter.

"It is imperative that every incident, every telephone call that is received from customers, police or other sources is recorded in the Occurrence Book." The advice given is that the recorded message "should create a word picture of what has happened in the mind of the reader," and "failing to do this could lead to a breach of operational commitments." On this basis I suspect that Trusty are asking for a rather higher degree of articulation than most of their staff were either inclined to or even able to give.

Disparagement of the security staff is not intended here, for Trusty were paying average rates for what seemed a very capable work-force. They were not however paying for people who were particularly enthusiastic about writing a multitude of reports. At the same time while some staff may have been reassured by the presentation of 'report writing' as presenting a "word picture", others were clearly less happy about "the kiddies eye-view bit". Pompous and patronising language became a familiar hallmark of the literature that I came across in Trusty and other companies.

For several reasons the most important piece of paper to be filled out is the Duty Sheet. This is a combination document used to determine who was actually on duty during particular shifts, what check calls were made, by whom, what they reported and so on. It is also from



these sheets that the numbers of hours worked by staff is taken so that pay can be calculated. Guidance to the controllers stresses that the names of officers should not be recorded until they actually arrive on site and check in and not be recorded as assumed to have arrived by the time that the job is scheduled to start. However, instructions regarding the procedure for recording static site check calls were rarely carried out to their bureaucratic letter: an easing of work routine found common in other companies and noted in various studies of civil policing forces. On the other hand, the occupational culture of the control room at least was one which took its professionalism seriously and where it resorted to modification of formal procedures it was with the assurance that the essentials were dealt with and that only the unnecessary was given short shrift.

For example, static site check calls are always to be recorded no matter how empty of content or perfunctory the action. Here rules and practice coincided because Controllers do recognize that it is their job to know the status of each site, to be alert to the timing of calls and not to miss any. This psychological investment in the job is more than 'professionalism', it helps keep concentration alive through the long twelve hour shift. At one level the emphasis that a missed call could mean a lost life, is taken seriously. But the regulations lose adherence where they demand that:

"where a call is not made on time, the officer concerned should be telephoned immediately and if ten minutes after his check call time no contact has been made, then the shift inspector, shift supervisor, or mobile patrolman, whoever is most available, should be requested to visit the site involved . . ."

If this procedure were followed then there would be constant demands upon the senior and mobile staff to visit 'late' sites. There are many good reasons why a call might be late, and less acceptable but accepted ones to do with laxity or forgetfulness (meaning falling asleep). Usually therefore, unless it was a case of a guard who was always punctual in calling in, a check call could be up to an hour late before the required action was taken. That this is accepted informal practice, contrary to regulations, is confirmed in that Inspectors and Supervisors also view it as an acceptable practical negotiation of what actually happens on the job.



Mobile patrols report their arrival at and departure from sites by radio or else contact control at thirty minute intervals, but they, far more than the static guards, can be elusive, especially on night patrols. Their relatively higher place in the formal and informal hierarchy and closer and more frequent contact with Controllers and Supervisors helps them to exploit their relative freedom, so long as they do not go over unwritten limits of periods of unavailability and not being quite where they are supposed to be. Negotiating the latter point is helped by a recognized and informally sanctioned manner of carrying out patrol assignments directly contrary to the procedure that most security companies say they adopt. I shall explain the technique of 'jumping' calls shortly.

Effectively, the principal checks on the work of the Controllers are made by other Controllers. Sergeants (Supervisors), Inspectors and management naturally check on what is relevant to them and what is happening overall, but the basics of how the job is being done by one shift are most readily apparent to the next shift of Controllers. When one senior Controller hands over to the next, they have to discuss the "ongoing situations" at various sites to see if there are any problems, go through the Daily Occurrence Book for major items and to check for management instructions. Everyone is of course eager to complete this business as fast as possible so that the outgoing shift can get away home. However, the image of how management throughout the industry would like to imagine such procedures are followed is conjured by the language used in standing instructions. These are couched in quasi-police/military terminology, so that, for example, where a security officer has not arrived on site at the right time then Controllers are advised that ". . . effective immediately, the following procedure will be actioned as notated . . ." It is almost as if a stereotype drawn from media images of high-powered intelligence agencies competes with a more mundane everyday practice. A fascination for television police and spies suggests that such imagery does have its impact, but it is negotiated, drawn upon and used as a resource in making sense of the job and giving the passage of long hours extra value and frisson. At the points where people are tired and want to go home or sit down with their first cup of coffee, or where the same old thing is happening again ("Oh Charlie's late



again . . ."), then the managerial imposition of such action-orientation is ignored; it is recognized as absurd.

For the static guards the end of shift is supposed to be completed by the preparation of a Shift Report. The company, like others, assures clients that they will receive "complete reports" where appropriate suggesting remedial action to be taken where any "incident" has occurred. The guards do prepare their own short reports and throughout the shift the Controller will have recorded the events of the past twelve hours. But collation of 'complete' reports is, in practice unlikely unless something fairly significant has happened. What is more likely to be passed on is the short memo or notice of some relatively minor problem or infraction ('snow-flake' style, Chapter 3:120). At one and the same time, this provides convenient feedback and delivers the security service of monitoring and reporting on the workplace and workforce of the customer.

Clearly this sort of account of how routine procedures are followed through is to some extent generalised. It must be remembered that, as in any working organisation, there are a variety of working practices; I can report here only the dominant impressions and generally followed practices, but my notes on the writing-up of the Daily Occurrence Book do confirm the measure of different, individual approaches to formal procedures. Explicit organisational rules directed control staff to record every event in the D.O.B. in order to subsequently allow the duty Sergeant/Supervisor to familiarise himself (there were no women supervisors) with developments and to allow the managers to keep 'up-to-date'. An informal disinclination to record everything is unsurprising. As my field notes record however:

"this could not be categorised as an 'organisational' system of negotiation of such rules for it is basically a matter of differing discretionary practices and degrees of laxity on the part of the individual controllers and supervisors."

One Supervisor, who had previously been a Controller was renowned for being meticulous in noting all details of all 'occurrences', whilst the Senior Controller on my night shift would be more likely to say, "Oh, don't bother with that one - it won't come back . . .", if the incident did not seem likely to be one which would recur. Such decisions, I noted, could easily look fairly arbitrary from the



outside but were, I learned, based on long experience of the business and the present job.<sup>3</sup>

It seems a common feature of occupational cultures that routine is both respected and derided. It provides 'rules of thumb', ways of 'getting through' and still 'doing the job well'. Yet it can be extremely boring, is based on predictability and in order to make continued sense to the old hands and be assimilable by new recruits it cannot be modified too much. But for all that, the occupational culture leaves psychological and social space which its own consensus and conditions of routine guarantee will be filled by the non-routine, by the unpredictable and by the humorous. As the graffiti high up on the toilet door attested, the seriousness of the security mentality was as open to token subversion as any other professional sense of self importance. In large letters of alarm, followed by small and neater lettering, a long-standing legend read: BE ALERT!! . . . the world needs more lerts . . .

Having outlined some of the basic routines and procedures of the job, in their formal respects, I shall next discuss some of the more informal aspects and understandings of the occupational culture, continuing to refer to the 'formal' as and where this is negotiated and modified by the 'informal'.

In a way, the control room and the staff who are generally there (not just Controllers but also Supervisors) represent the 'centre' not just organisationally but also psychologically. For various reasons, to do with their time sheets, new assignments, periods of stand-by duty and so on, some of the static guards will return to the control centre after their shift or filling-in. If not a return to 'home' this is at least a return to base, marked by a cup of coffee, a biscuit and a bit of gossip. Not incidentally, time sheets are also haggled over and occasionally 'amended'. But most of all it is the mobile drivers who return to control to put their feet up and work their accepted petty time-fiddles. There is much manipulating of the system of triple checking which is coordinated from control. Here the Senior Controller and liaising Supervisor, in this case Robin and Ron, had more or less complete control over the time and pay sheets, including



who could get off a bit early among the drivers whilst still being timed as on patrol.

The novelties of the little additions to routine and the little fiddles that subtract work time are among the principal highlights in the management of this particular job's monotony. In general, neither by night nor day does anything happen that is sensational or wildly exciting. But if something does happen it is swiftly jumped onto. As much as anything else it is the occasional 'incident' that reinforces the seriousness and importance of the 'policing' image that the security staff can conjure up of themselves and their organisation. On one night for example there was a report of fairly serious vandalism at a school patrolled by the company. The mobile patrol there reported-in that he was chasing a gang of youths around the school grounds. Whilst in this instance the Senior Controller and present senior staff were at first slightly sceptical about the report - apparently the guard was known for calling in false alarms - nevertheless the tenor of the reaction in general was that the lazy guard should not have contented himself with merely scaring the youths off but should have actually got out of his van and apprehended them, turning them over to the police. The report turned out to be genuine and the subsequent conversation about it, while remaining general and in the main directed at the 'laziness of the guard' nonetheless retained within it the explicit idea that it had been the guard's duty to act in a real policing role and arrest the youths, despite company guidelines advising against such potentially dangerous actions. From management down to some of the guards with familiarity with the armed forces or police service, there was some discomfort with their legal position as empowered only to the same extent as the ordinary citizen. Thus, informally at least and without too much seriousness being attached to it, this particular security guard was nonetheless not really fulfilling his duty. He was doing something else, he was merely being what the company's brochures suggested that he ought to be, a deterrent, a scaring watchdog making the appropriate report. Implicitly and informally, what the backgrounds and/or aspirations of many key security staff suggest is the duty to go beyond that role and actually play a more determined interventionist role in the potential policing aspects of their job.



I am not alone in having detected this sentiment. The enthusiasm for the role of the security patrol as part of the fight to keep the streets safe has also been noted in an insightful paper by Flavel (1973:11). This reports on research conducted in the early 1970s on two private security companies in the Bristol area:

". . . apart from the impact of burglar alarms . . . on the operational priorities of the civil police there were some areas in which the operational circumstances of contract security directly influenced its selective impact. For instance, some mobile security guards (patrolling beats in radio equipped vans) believed that, apart from the protection they provided for the premises they visited, they also had an increasingly important role in policing the streets during the night. Some believed that the police actively took into account their presence in certain parts of the city when organising their own patrols. Particular patrolmen would report to the company's control room any 'suspicious circumstances' they noticed in the streets and such messages would invariably be passed on to the police control room for their attention."

### The Uniform and Uniformity

The uniform in particular seemed to symbolise so much of this world-view. Wearing it initially, I felt an intense shyness about its visibility. This soon passed but I remember hiding it beneath an enveloping great-coat on the tube journey to and from work. Once in its right setting though the uniform was indeed a source of uniformity and consequently of identification. I began to feel how the very nature of the uniform can be an incredibly powerful mechanism for inducing solidarity. In this sense, the uniform helps to set up the parameters for both internal and external identification of the role with colleagues, which excludes even sympathisers.

This significance of the uniform has, of course, been well-noted in other studies of policing agencies. Indeed such an understanding guided the very formulation and unfolding of the public policing role. It is no deep insight to recognize the capacity of the uniform to change character. And just as for the public policing establishment it can be viewed as a symbol of the strength of institutional resolve, so in the private sector it is a symbol of representation of fundamentals - of the authority of ownership, the custodianship of property. It devolves a status of being 'in the right' whilst on duty



or patrol. This, for the police or private security, is the formal public front behind which lies of course, the hidden occupational culture, the relaxation and the informal. Silver (1967) notes an early remarking of these two faces from a journalistic account of 'The Police and the Thieves' of London in 1856:

"Amid the bustle of Piccadilly or the roar of Oxford Street, P.C. X59 stalks along, an institution rather than a man. We seem to have no more hold of his personality than we could possibly get of his coat buttoned up to the throttling point. Go, however to the section house . . . and you no longer see policemen, but men . . . They are positively laughing with each other!"

(London Quarterly, 1856:93)

If this was the impression of a contemporary observer of the 'new' police still in relative youth then it is testimony to the shrewd vision of the early conceivers of the public image of uniformed policing forces. Thus, Mannings' (1979:46) comments regarding the original thinking of Peel and Mayne when considering the design and function of the Metropolitan constabulary's uniform remain apposite with regard to both police and private security today.

"Concern for the collective appearance, and for appearance as seen in written rules detailing dress, is indicative of the considered administrative attempt to use appearance as a general sign of moral conduct, or a short-hand or synecdoche for character."

This short-hand is of course somebody else's script and the uniform as symbol is still an artificial one, constructed and amenable to deconstruction. Wearing a uniform does not necessarily impose appropriate character. Subversion of standardisation and resistance to uniformity are fairly ubiquitous human characteristics. As Joseph and Alex note in their classic article on 'The Uniform':

"variation from uniform standards stems in part from the ludenic element in man which finds expression through many media, not the least of which is personal adornment or self-enhancing modes of dress."

(1972: p. 724)

Deviation from standard uniform style, or simple discomfort in it as in my case, is wholly unsurprising. But individual feelings about, and adjustment to, the uniform are only a half (and perhaps the lesser half) of its impact. For the designed purpose of the uniform is not



just to represent an ideal character, but to construct the foundations of a group or organisation of such characters, identifiable no longer as individuals but as bearers of the uniform and all it symbolises.

"Because of its identification with a group, the uniform assumes the properties of a totemic emblem and embodies the attributes of a group. In a sense the uniform becomes the group, and it, rather than the group, is often the focus of thought and affect. Thus, an individual's behaviour may reflect favourably or unfavourably upon his uniform rather than upon his group and, in extreme instances, one may 'disgrace the uniform'. Reciprocally, the uniform may enhance or denigrate the honour of its wearer."

(Ibid: 720)

Clearly then, there can be a tension between individual and group member's senses of self. Regardless of enthusiasm or discomfort, being the wearer of a uniform and bearer of what it symbolises is up for individual negotiation - if only in the extent to which it can be held to express the individual's commitment to, and as a part of, the group. Functionally, the uniform may serve "to bind the wearer to his (or her) peers and to separate him (or her) from outsiders" (ibid:721), yet still one may feel acutely conscious of the very imposition of the uniform and the regulations that surround it. For example, at Trusty the whistle chain has to hang from the shirt pocket over the tie so that it is visible and then clipped behind. The chain hangs there as a gleaming symbol of a claim to authority. The necessity for overall smartness is repeatedly stressed and the keywords 'public image' invoked as if synonymous with the similarly embraced and espoused notion of 'public service to the community'.

Uniforms and ranking structures are surface level phenomena, beneath and behind them lie other work-group dynamics. There are other means by which cohesion is maintained, formal and informal standards regulated and dividing lines drawn between co-workers. For example, to some extent (and as found in numerous other work settings), co-workers controlled and disciplined each other over certain matters. Rank was not really pulled but was ever apparent and formally and informally recognised. At the same time, this was not necessarily the expected source of 'being pulled up' for something. The lateness of colleagues might well be reported upon by co-workers of equal rank. Sometimes there seemed to be in such behaviour a degree of hypocrisy



which in the right conditions might spill over into self-righteous denunciation, but this was probably largely attributable to the particular ways in which some people got on together - whilst others clearly did not. But certainly the seriousness of this 'I am reporting you for your own good' morality and its attendant subscription to a petty bureaucratic mentality could seem jarringly at odds with those deviations into light banter about television and pornography which engaged all, including those with an allegiance to higher virtues.

Obviously, in these - and consistently in more general circumstances - I had to consider my relative position in the 'team'. For, despite the formal and informal recognition of the rank hierarchy, it was the team analogy that continued to be stressed as the real measure of effective working relationships. As newest member of the team I was also potentially the most marginal. Mars (1972:7:21) points out that limited period of service is a significant factor in contributing to marginality whilst status in the group is influenced by "the relative seniority in the team vis-a-vis new inductees." Thus:

"the newest members in a team always remain marginal until their mantle of marginality can be in effect taken on in their turn by even newer arrivals."

(Ibid.)

In a variety of ways long-established workers emphasized their familiarity with the dynamics and responsibilities of the team, thus declaring the autonomy and exclusivity of the teams collectivity. The acceptance and authentication of this state of affairs by more marginal and junior members of the team - (although the latest, I was not the only relatively new person) - affirmed the prestige of climbing the levels of team stratification. And, if the benefits of prestige were somewhat nebulous, there was at least some significance attached to the slight but real material 'pay-offs' arising out of the system of obligations in which (moral high-mindedness apart) one entered as an equal upon passage from newcomer apprenticeship to accepted status.

While I do not have the space to develop such an analysis here, the tensions and contradictions of negotiating full acceptance into the



group might be illuminated by reference to the ideas of status passage, (Glaser and Strauss, 1971) and Van Gennep's (1960) description of Rites de Passage. Such 'rites' mark the development of status changes and significant time passages. Roughly three stages of these rites of passage could be delineated: those which mark the superceding of one status, those which cover the period between past status and that which is aspired to, and those which mark adoption of and absorption into a new status. In a work setting this process is partly measured by all concerned by the demonstration of increasing proficiency in tasks undertaken and the progressive taking on of further tasks. Higher status and its recognition means of course that some tasks can be delegated to others still in their 'apprenticeships'. But getting into the job entails learning what is routine practice and, to be 'part of the team', understanding what this 'means'.

### 'Working the Night'

The meaning of the job, its routine and the occasional deviation which smoothed its reproduction, seemed most open to exploration during the night shifts. There is something about night work, its atmosphere and the occupational culture of night-workers, which lays the world slightly bare.

The twelve-hour night shifts can often seem intolerably long; perversely, just occasionally, they can seem to pass with comfortable speed and ease. At Trusty the control room managed the night hours with a skeleton staff, two controllers, one or two supervisor sergeants, mobile patrol staff passing in and out and, of course, the static guards spread across parts of London. There are no senior management present, although they are 'on call', and the supervisors are supposed to be constantly moving in and out to visit groups of sites to check on the guards and the 'status' of things. There is then a fair amount of movement and activity against a background of well-established and familiar routine. While it is never forgotten that staff are on night-duty, somehow the lawlessness of the night still corrupts in little ways and the small fiddles of the job come out.



Early on, the practice of 'bouncing' the check-calls just before and after midnight, was partly explained to me (see also the Sparrow Case Study below). The mobile units were supposed to drive their routes in spirals so that they would spiral into a call site at the heart of their operational circle and then, supposedly, spiral right out again to call at a site quite some distance away from the centre of the circle. This should be repeated continually so that the patrols would be spanning the operational circle but working on an unpredictable time schedule and ensuring that they would never be out of one area within the circle for too long a period. In other words, if they did three calls in one area together just because they were close together and then moved out to do two or three calls closer to the periphery of the operational circle, then they would not be back into the centre again for some considerable length of time. This procedure was intended to prevent anybody intent on a break-in into one of the patrolled premises from being able to work out a safe and predictable period of time in which the premises would not be visited. A secondary purpose was to keep the mobile patrols busy and 'on their toes'. So much for the theory. In practice, calls that are close together are often 'bounced' and visited one after another. This comes about for several reasons. First, it makes life easier, everyone knows it does and, so long as the right people are involved, this is something that it is difficult to begrudge. Second, there are times when it is an organisational necessity. When the company has over-sold and thereby over-stretched its services, there can simply be too many visits to fulfil according to strict procedure. In order to get them all done at least once, let alone twice or whatever is contracted for, and still allow the patrols a little free time, bouncing becomes an informal organisational adaptation to organisational demands. Third, bouncing can occur because there are three ways of checking up on it, and all are fiddleable and are fiddled. There are time checks when patrols report in; there are the drivers time sheets which the drivers themselves fill in and there is the radio call sheet. Over time, cooperation has developed to bring these into line as and where necessary.

The fiddling of clocks and routes to 'make time' is widespread throughout the industry - an irony that struck me more and more as I



came to discover the link between security and the imposition of workplace discipline and regulation through history (cf. South, forthcoming). Similarly, the life-line and heart of the enterprise - the radio link - was used to arrange rendezvous between mobile patrols for coffee and a chat, and to exchange pornographic magazines, to discuss personal favours and to remind about arrangements made. Despite contravening licensing laws about the use of the airwaves, quite a lot of banter crosses them through the night, in particular using a strong West Indian accent which seemed a strong and persistent theme for jokes despite the popularity of several Afro-Caribbean guards and the disavowal of racist intent by several of the key team members.

The fatiguing length of night shifts over twelve hours, heightened across the shift-cycle by also trying to fit in family and social life, and combined with other points of shared identification, contributed - at least for those regularly around the control room - to the beginnings of some sense of 'occupational community' (cf. Salaman, 1974; Banton, 1964). Quite a few social activities were shared by those operatives who shared shifts. A few of course, had been friends before the job, but others had developed close friendships within the company since joining it. One week much talk centred around Paul, who was one of the mobile drivers and others on the same shift who were all going up to St. Albans for a family party being given by Paul's in-laws. It seemed that most of the key people on this shift had met Paul's family several times and would therefore be very welcome to stay for a day or so up in St. Albans. On another occasion, Robin (my Senior Controller) and Jack (one of the Supervisors) agreed to do some cash-in-hand work for Trusty, painting the hallways on their Friday night off. With some of the cash paid 'up front', they got the job done and had the opportunity to then go out on the town for a free night without their wives, meeting up with some of the other lads at a Soho pub (I was semi-seriously invited but declined).

I shall take up the theme of the over-spill of work-relations into social life in the 'Sparrow Case Study' reported later on in this chapter. I shall also discuss night work in that context, but before



leaving the subject would just refer to a few other observations about its particularity.

When comparing it with other studies of night-shift work, the marginality of private security as an occupation is emphasized by the preponderance of studies of eight-hour shifts and absence of attention paid to the strange significance of doing the extra four hours of the routine private security shift. The chemical workers in Nichols and Beynon's (1977) Living with Capitalism, for example, complained of being out of phase with public transport, 'making a car a virtual necessity'. Now while finishing a security shift in a town or city at 7.00 a.m. means that you generally cannot complain about the absence of public transport, having worked a twelve-hour shift for less pay than chemical and other night workers makes that little comfort. Private security workers usually do not get special rates for night-work, and certainly not the high salaries that Gallie's (1978) resentful refinery workers feel cynical about as a 'pay-off'.

Of course, the fact that there is an increase in shift- and night-working across the manufacturing and service sectors generally (Wrench and Stanley, 1983), means increased demand for 'support' services, such as security, to correspondingly expand to cover such shifts. This may result in some moderation of the (perceived) unusual nature of the hours worked. Alternatively, it may serve to sharpen sensitivity about the poorly paid, labour-intensive characteristics of private security guarding which demand twelve-hour - and longer - shifts.

Whatever the longer term trends, night-work will retain its peculiar distinctiveness. As Wrench and Stanley (1983) note:

"Some authorities stress the qualitatively different world of night-work, describing it as more democratic and comradely and less stressful than day work."

Both junior and supervisory staff that I talked with and accompanied, remarked in semi-serious ways, how they all got on better on nights than on days. This surprised me as I anticipated (and at first personally felt) some stress relating to being virtually completely out of synchronisation with the rest of the world. The shared context



means that there is some degree of suspension of day time 'standards'. But this democracy of the night is founded not only upon "comradeship" in an abstract sense, but also upon the material impact of the work conditions. The cold if you are doing an outside patrol, the noise if you are guarding a 24-hour working-factory, the tiredness that disruption of regular sleep patterns brings - all contribute to this feeling of people being a bit more equal. At Trusty it was very noticeable that the mobile patrol guards returning periodically to Control or talking over the radio made cheeky (and mildly abusive) comments to Supervisors at night that were simply not heard by day. But this, of course, is not unrelated to the organisational context, for fundamentally we are still talking of an organisational hierarchy and the night-time absence of senior management also plays its part in contributing to the democracy of the night.

To conclude this short case study I wish to emphasize both some aspects of specificity and also refer to some points of a more generalisable nature which will find resonance with points to be made in subsequent chapters.

The strengths and weaknesses of the observations that can be made on the basis of the Trusty case study are largely related to it being based on a short but intensive period of covert participant observation in one enclosed setting. Whilst contact with others in the company was limited almost exclusively to those who regularly passed through the control room, the sacrifice of breadth at least gave some sense of depth. Working at the heart of the company, within the organisational space designed to impress customers and staff alike with the purpose of the organisation, placed me in a far more 'concentrated' atmosphere than I could ever have experienced as a static or mobile patrol guard. Not only was the experience of working with a variety of people usefully sensitising, but the experience of working in a physical and social space designed for, and to symbolise, security work was acutely felt.

The security of the entrances, the layout of the control room directing attention to the technology of communications, by which means the operations map, and all it represented, centrally placed



across the wall, might be protected - all contributed to the symbolic signature of sober purpose in the control room. Subtly, the physical dimensions of the work environment have their impact upon those who work within them. As Edelman (1978:6) astutely observes:

"Such arrangements typically represent themselves as technological aids, and their focus upon technique blurs awareness of the constrictive assumptions about values that they promote."

For staff in the control room, the social space in which they work can promote a sense of difference in their feelings about their job, its pace and urgency, seriousness and responsibility, in relation to 'the world out there'.

### Pace and Urgency

Whatever the realistic understanding about the general monotony of the job, there remains in the control room - and in the occupational culture of security more broadly - an undercurrent of feeling that the pace might (and should) 'hot up' at any minute. Staff need to be ready to take urgent action! Yet this semi-serious wishful thinking usually only comes close to realisation when the check-in calls are made and more rarely when 'an incident' is reported. For much of the rest of the time, after the appropriate entries have been made in the duty books, action books and so on, casual conversation, humourous badinage, the exchange of newspapers and pornographic magazines and the making and drinking of tea and coffee predominate. But still, to emphasize the point, there is a slight tension in the room; what I can best describe as a practised alertness which kills or at least mutes conversation when an unscheduled report crackles over the radio. Such a reception contrasts bizarrely with the not infrequent cavalier treatment of the report made. Perhaps such an attitude reflects, in part, the release of some of the tensions within the small enclosed room. Perhaps too, it is a measure of relief that once again nothing really serious has happened.



## Seriousness and Responsibility

On the surface, serious attention is usually paid to the bureaucratic requirements made by time and paper. The clock demands a routinised schedule to be followed as it is worked through and whenever, for whatever reason, it is interrupted, then it must be recorded in the appropriate place. The seriousness of conforming to this operational code of practice is strongly impressed upon the trainee control staff. However, just as it does not take long to get the hang of the basic procedures, nor does it take long to realise that their meticulous pursuit is, at least, not total. Laziness, forgetfulness, or suspicion about the dubious nature of a report may leave incidents partially or wholly unrecorded, and of course, late check-ins (and even completely missed check-ins which have been 'checked out' by sympathetic supervisory staff) may go unrecorded with a nod from the senior controller and/or inspector. Further, the responsibility and integrity of authority which senior staff emphasize as theirs by right of service can be paternalistically negotiated and even compromised in return for junior staff being less than scrupulous in recording the movements of the Inspectors, Supervisors and others with 'long service'. This is not to say that everyone connives at petty corruption in this way, rather that, realistically, it is not uncommon.

## The 'Work-Space' and its Relationship to the 'World Out There'

As I have noted, the wearing of a uniform and its accoutrements immediately produces a feeling of being set apart by virtue of the ascription of an authoritative role (be it real or imagined, or partly both). But in addition to this, the spaces in which one does a job also bestow a sense of self and relationship to the rest of the world.

For the lone security officer patrolling an empty building at night, anybody else that he/she encounters is an intruder - in essence a criminal having broken the law by entering onto private property with deliberate intent. The attitude of the guard is likely to be apprehensive but hostile rather than gently enquiring (even if he/she takes no personal direct action without police support). The mobile



security patrol in a car experiences a fairly unique version (shared with police car patrols and other radio-controlled vehicles such as taxis) of the syndrome which Edelman (1978) suggests may influence motorists generally, a feeling of alienation as "psychological isolation" from one's immediate surroundings "occurs in spite of total visibility" (p. 7). Such a feeling, coupled with the restive watchfulness of the bored patrol staff, does not, from observational and other gathered evidence, contribute significantly to 'chasing' or 'making' incidents out of innocent misunderstandings (e.g. by lost 'trespassers', drunks, playful children, etc.) or even lies (though this is rather more difficult to pin down); it does however seem to promote and compound the already established sense of distance from the same mundane plane of general activity as 'the public'.

It would be difficult not to develop some sensitivity to the space in which one works after several twelve hour shifts in the small control room. Even to the extent that it is something that comes to be taken for granted, it is never truly experientially forgotten because leaving the control room just to go to the toilet is viewed as a break from the four walls as much as anything else. But the feeling of enclosure and removal from 'the outside' is difficult to convey about a job which can sound not dissimilar to "just sitting in an office for twelve hours" or indeed "doing a shift on a telephone exchange." In fact the uniforms, the nature of the job, the ethos of the security business and the mock-pretence of police-work importance which can be played up, all contributed to some sense of difference with respect to other 'ordinary' occupations. In addition, in the control room, the physical space itself played a defining role.

Hopefully, it is not too fanciful to attempt to convey some sense of this by quoting Edelman's (1978:6) suggestion that one particularly alienating modern phenomenon, taking its form:



"both as the use of space to constrict perception and as alienation of people from others, occurs in the 'war rooms' and operations planning rooms of military bureaucracies. If others are dots on a map in a context that highlights their aggressive potentialities, they become these aggressive characteristics, and it is easy to plot preemptive strikes or chemical warfare against them, even while, in a setting a few blocks away in which people discuss common cultural interests, it is just as easy to plan the exchange of artists, ballet companies, and symphony orchestras with the potential bombing targets."

(pp. 6-7)

This is not of course to suggest that security staff in the control room feel so remote from everyday life or normality that they spend their time planning World War III on the pin-board map of London. However, the atmosphere and layout of the control room (indeed its very name), are conducive to talking with conviction, contempt and moral righteousness about criminals, fiddlers, scroungers and trouble-makers, whilst working in an industry which harbours and exploits a high percentage of tax-dodging moonlighters, for a company which happily paid two senior staff cash-in-hand to paint part of the building, and elsewhere finds examples of dishonesty, cut-throat competition, 'sharp practice' and 'short-service' (cf. South, 1983; Chapter 4 below).

In the next section I report on a period of open observation which also marks the broadening of my perceptions of private security as an occupation and which, in confirming some ideas, discrediting others and raising new questions, helped to broaden the nature of the research project overall.

### 3. Sparrow Security Limited: Statics and Mobiles - "Out There . . ." (Trusty Sergeant)

Sparrow, being a smaller outfit than Trusty, was a little more informal and parochial in its habits. The converted house, which housed ground-floor shop premises and in the upper storeys the offices of Sparrow, nonetheless retained the vague layout and atmosphere of a house. It was much more common at Sparrow to find guards crowding into the kitchen/recreation area or sitting around the control room or one of the offices waiting to be directed to changes of assignment for



the day, night or week. New and changing contracts, and the need to cover for staff who were ill or who had left, often necessitated this beginning of shift (usually nights) changing around.

In this period, during summer early evenings, the guards viewed this time as paid but 'free'. Be it ten minutes or a couple of hours of waiting around, it gave time to read the paper, have a chat and joke, a cup of tea and a moan. But interest in 'the job' and the company was also strong in such discussions, noting new contracts and sites to be started, as well as anticipating a new expansion of the building with extra offices, a large room for training and meetings, and more space generally.

Like Trusty, and most reputable companies, Sparrow operates twelve hour shifts. Arriving just before 6 p.m. I would hear with some consistency, the by-now familiar night-shift workers' lament. Whether on balmy summer evenings, or on frosty winter nights, they were always "just going" to work, as "everybody else is just coming" home. While this arrangement undoubtedly suits some people who choose private security work and prefer the night-shift, the majority were less enthusiastic. Some were simply resigned, some slightly resentful and feeling 'hard done by' but understandably on those warm summer evenings nearly all would rather have been doing something with their kids, walking in the park with their girlfriends or wives, playing football or cricket, or sitting outside one of the pubs by the river having a drink. Evidently, there were a number of openings for the establishment of rapport between the observer and the workers.

Introduced to Sparrow as an open, interested observer actively doing research on the workings of the industry, I felt that I was once again 'lucky' in finding a company that was genuinely interesting. Overall there was nothing remarkable about it in the way that it operated: it was and is just like other small, relatively localised (in this case South-West London) companies, at least in its actual operations. But it also had a clear individuality about it, a parochialism and paternalism which allowed an unusual forthrightness from management, supervisory staff and guards. It would be misleading to suggest that there appeared to be anything sensational to be forthright about, and



perhaps this is why the 'openness' was tolerated. But the closed insularity of many security companies, contrived as it is, seemed far more low-key at Sparrow.

The company was formed in the late 1960s, has employed at various times between 100-150 staff and was the kind of company that is confident of its ability to enjoy safe and sure, but unspectacular, growth. Of the two founders and directors, George had worked in middle management for a large national security company, but like his co-director Arthur, had a background of working for most of his life in the plain-clothes side of police work. Both had risen to the lower middle ranks, Arthur coming straight from C.I.D. to starting up Sparrow. As a pair they had a good double-act going, 'naturals' in public relations and strong on the skills of impression management as might be expected from their training. Not unrelated to this was a fairly strong degree of cynicism about certain other companies in the industry. These they characterised as being 'top heavy', with upper management who were simply interested in profits. Without too much prompting this was readily (and fairly regularly) turned into a critical analogy of what was wrong with the Government (any government) and its reliance on a largely unnecessary bureaucracy.

The almost maverick-like quality of Sparrow's "straight-talking" approach came across clearly in an early, introductory interview. "No dogs", the directors said, "they're trouble and they're not necessary . . ." - end of issue! But the strength of the implied criticism of companies that do use dogs was loud and clear. I raised another matter. The company operated just one mobile patrol, and this was in an unmarked car. Leaving the car unmarked left it free for other work, they explained. I did not pursue this point at the time but discovered later that the company undertook some under-cover work for which staff might have need of a vehicle. The advertising of the presence and services of the company would be undesirable in such work. Apparently dismissing this issue as secondary, George and Arthur were more keen to explain that Sparrow did not yet feel able to expand the mobile patrol side of its service and that they did not want "to be dishonest to their clients" about their capabilities. Willingly expanding on the edge in this comment they cited the well-



known fiddle of 'bouncing' calls made at sites, but described a version of the practice which I thought few firms would try so crudely:

"Well, when you're supposed to be doing two calls per night, one before twelve and one after, you might fulfil them - at five-to and ten-past (twelve o'clock)."

This sort of practice they told me, with this still unfamiliar (though self-interested) candour, is known to be common throughout the industry. Coming down to the bottom-line of pragmatism, Sparrow "try to keep clear of that side of the business - too many problems."

### Racism and 'Joking Relationships'

Having become sensitive to a fair degree of racism at Trusty, however 'playfully' expressed, and by this time having encountered racist sentiments elsewhere in the private security world, Sparrow again seemed, at least initially at odds in its aspirations and practice. For good, no-nonsense, pragmatic reasons, the senior management at Sparrow declared that it encouraged a 'non-racist' policy of recruitment and promotion. It had indeed placed some young and bright ethnic minority staff in middle-to-senior supervisory grades. At the time of this observational research, two out of five senior supervisory personnel were from second-generation ethnic minority backgrounds, one Asian and one Jamaican. The firm had just lost another "extremely able" and highly praised Asian junior supervisor, at sergeant rank, who was described as being "excellent Inspector material". Both the remaining officers were extremely keen and serious about the job - and grateful for its opportunities and "security". Moreover they specifically addressed the question of discrimination in conversation and in their work, asserting that they themselves tried to be as impartial as possible in supervisory matters. Caught however in a somewhat invidious position, they could sometimes seem to 'over-compensate' producing an inverted racism where, in particular, Asian workers are picked on as "sometimes" the "stupidest people we have to employ" as the Asian supervisor himself actually said!

On closer examination, whatever the espoused policy of Sparrow, the



prejudices of the white-dominated security mentality with its insularity and xenophobic conservatism, conspire to condition working life in private security. Two examples may be offered here. The company refused to employ anyone who for religious reasons wore a turban. This, it was argued, was not a matter of prejudice, it was simply the case that "you cannot wear a uniform cap over a turban." It was impossible, from this point of view, to conceive of the metal badges which distinguished the caps being fitted to dark coloured turbans! Here blinkered obstinacy hinged on the detectable underlying sentiment that 'if they won't conform, there's no place for them here - sorry!' The company management genuinely believed that they were in no way being discriminatory, after all - 'one of their best supervisors was Indian'! More familiar from the Trusty case study was the place of racism in joking relationships (Bradney, 1957). As I became accepted by the work culture I was increasingly privy to the informalities surrounding the formal procedures.

Like all other security companies, Sparrow suffers from a high degree of absenteeism, both regular and occasional "cry-offs" and, of course, a regular turnover of staff. The control room maintains an Excuse Book with an ambiguous semi-formal/semi-informal status, recording most reasons offered for not being able to turn up for an assignment - 'cry-offs' or 'blow-outs'. Excuses with either a degree of familiarity or novelty, formed the basis of some fairly harmless and organisationally useful running joke routines. However, the end result of what amounted to consistent re-definition of some people's excuses could be profoundly negative for their credibility. The basis of much of this excuse re-definition was in translating the account offered into the pseudo-accent and pidgin-English of mock-Indian to create a dialogue with other 'joking' partners who played the roles of the sceptical security controllers presenting a world-weary 'heard-it-all-before' perspicacity which could clearly see through such transparency. The playing out of such 'humourous' re-definition effectively devalued accounts and excuses, no matter how valid, until the accountee was prone to be labelled unreliable.



## 'Core Workers', Reliability, Paternalism and the Integration of Social Life

Again similar to the Trusty case-study, was this reduction of an employees' worth to vague standards of reliability and service. This clearly followed at Sparrow from the inter-play between management and the irreproachable reliability and commitment of the control staff. George for example, was frequently offering homilies to those in the control room about the desirability of a strong service ethic, the importance of quality, high standards, loyalty and reliability. His approach was highly paternalistic but sincere in its appreciation of the sacrifices made by control staff who often demonstrated their loyalty, reliability and so on, by working extended shifts or taking on the assignments of absent staff.

Not surprisingly, where any evident sense of occupational community spilling over into the social exists, it is found (as at Trusty) revolving around the control room. The control staff, some of the senior and longer serving guards and the two directors, all mixed socially to varying degrees. George drew this to my attention after a few days of getting to know people. Arthur, his co-director and Gerry, one of the controllers, were both keen water-skiers and pursued their hobby together on free days, taking their respective families with them to the coast: "After all," said George, "they're the only people they see," implying that the work-demands were such that it was difficult to build a substantial social life outside the company.

Another facet of social bonding within the company came to light as I got to know Sam, informally the most senior supervisor in the company, the one who had undertaken most of their undercover work assignments and a key figure in the social network of the company from the top to the 'middle' levels of those who had been with the firm long enough to identify with it. Visiting a series of factories early one Monday morning, Sam breathed deeply and said he was still waiting for his head to clear. He, Arthur and a few others in the company, were 'Antelopes' he explained. He expanded in response to the expected look of slight bewilderment on my face. This was a Fellowship, not like the Freemasons he insisted, more a social club. They had all just returned in the late hours of Sunday night from a long weekend of



heavy drinking and "singing the old songs" in Brighton. "It's only a Butlins hotel" commented Sam, "but we've been there before and we know it - they know us - and it's a really good weekend . . ."

On another occasion, a discussion with Sam about the future role of women in the expanding security business also highlighted the commonplace practice of security staff undertaking plain-clothes work at social functions and how wives may not only be 'married to their husband's job' but also expected to actively participate in it, both socially and in providing some occasionally necessary work-related back-up. Sam had, he said, no objection to women working in the security industry:

"After all, they're certainly ideal for some jobs. Where it's a matter of just sitting around, checking bags and being polite - in the entrance to a building say . . . But we don't get or take a lot of that kind of work and men can do that job as well as others . . . But guardettes (sic) will grow! We use our wives and girlfriends when we need them - like if we're doing conferences or dinner-dances for business - wives go along to deal with the ladies."

Such social affairs are also, Sam pointed out, "a good night out" for the security staff; "you can grab fifteen minutes here and there for a dance . . . if you're not doing it in uniform of course!" Such occasions are frequently provided with security in both uniform and plain-clothes and obviously, while uniformed guards are supposed to stand out, those in plain clothes are supposed to be less conspicuous. Here the presence of "our good ladies" connects in working practice both the social and the occupational dimensions of the job and perpetuates the traditional sexism inherent in relationships where women are 'married to their husbands jobs' (Finch; 1983).

This kind of cross-over of the occupational and the social, even drawing family life into the job, served in turn to draw closer together the key 'core' workers (cf. Mars and Mitchell, 1976). These core workers were not simply the higher echelons but the key, "reliable" figures throughout the hierarchy, barring only ad-hoc groupings of casual workers, newcomers and the disinterested ordinary guards who simply "did their job."<sup>4</sup> "Where can you get reliability these days - name one place!" Arthur was fond of saying as he literally and metaphorically patted his loyal core workers on the back.



The notions of reliability and loyalty, at Sparrow as at Trusty, really stood for a whole series of values based on the demands the job could make; readiness to be 'on call' for irregular hours and willingness to sacrifice leisure, family and consistency for example. Stanley, one of the Controllers, asserted that working for the company had changed him. He used to be a welder but got "really fed up" . . . it didn't mean a thing to me anymore." So he joined a security firm as a guard, "for a complete change," but admitted that he joined with the idea that "probably a lot of these others do . . . that you go on, you have a sleep through the night and do what you want to do through the day." Stan obviously had some ideas about a cushy job by night and some moonlighting (sunlighting?) by day as a welder. "But it's not as simple as that." He now really enjoyed his job as a controller, feeling he fitted in and was part of the team. Far from having a lot of spare time he was now quite willing to sacrifice the limited time-off that he did get when necessary, despite having a young family. Using an idiom in a way that it took me a while to work out he declared, "We're all wankers here . . . where would you get wankers like that anywhere else, eh." The expression, echoed by others, referred in this context to the idea that it was a good team of people who knew they were daft to work such long hours for the company but they liked it and felt good about being loyal. The classic features of paternalism are alive and well and entrenched in the security industry (cf. Newby et al, 1978).

### Reliability and the Scheduling of Assignments

Whilst reliability has a conceptual significance as the foundation of a body of values, it also of course has a very practical significance. The planning of assignments, in advance wherever possible, and the payment of an attendance allowance are designed to avoid 'blow-outs'. Weekly time-sheets are prepared on Wednesdays for the week ahead, "So a guard knows what he is doing well in advance and can ask for a change in advance." However, if the guard has accepted the timesheet and 'blows out' of one slot then he loses his attendance allowance for all his days of that week. Friday is notoriously the worst day and night for blow-outs, which can mean supervisory staff and controllers working through weekends even when their own shift cycles should have



finished Thursday evening. One weekend that I was there for example, the control shift were working until 1.00 a.m. on the Thursday, back at 9.00 a.m. and working on and off throughout the weekend covering for blow-outs. Not surprisingly frustration does surface around this issue, although it is displaced away from the company and the conditions in the industry and onto the unreliable guards who do not turn up. The company response has been to get into the Services Resettlement Programme, seeking a higher quality of staff from ex-armed forces personnel; people in short who are used to the "necessary discipline and reliability." Currently serving forces personnel were already being used on a part-time basis, working during their leave, though I was never able to find out if this was strictly on or off the books. The practice was only mentioned to me because although these staff were reliable! - should they be suddenly recalled to duty, as occasionally happened, the company was left without cover at very short notice.

To their credit, part of Sparrow's inculcation of the ethic of duty and responsible behaviour was a serious attempt to provide some elementary training in basic law (as relating to security duties, powers of arrest, search etc.) and first-aid and by giving various 'pep talks'. Additionally, the company maintained a training index, essentially a cross-index of guards who had previously trained and worked on certain sites. So that when one site is "unfilled" and none of the available stand-by guards have knowledge of the site the schedulers and controllers can start to juggle round the assignments to fit people into sites that they have knowledge of. This, it was explained, can be very important for customer relations. For example, one large U.S. company apparently had the habit of telephoning through at odd hours to leave messages for various executives in their south-London based subsidiary. Humour and pride were attached to the idea of the U.S. executives developing personal telephone relationships with the regular guards on the site, and to the fact that it was picked up on very quickly if there was a new site guard on duty who was unfamiliar with the procedure.



## Images of Guarding and Guarding the Company Image

Regard for procedure and routine, for protocol and the image of the company, are essential complements to the qualities of reliability and loyalty. In general they distinguish the 'good', potentially 'core' group member from the more common casual worker in security. But throughout security, at Trusty and at Sparrow, routine and procedure have both their formal and their informal sides.

My notes from one night accompanying a supervisor 'training' and showing a new guard over a large office site, emphasize that the main recurrent point of conversation was not about fire risks or the possibility of break-ins, but that walking miles and miles of corridors repeatedly through the night is very tiring. Perhaps the supervisor stressed this so that the new guard could find no excuse for skipping parts of the building after having made this discovery for himself.

On another night visit, attention was drawn to the overwhelming proliferation of "office porn", commercial calendars advertising the services of various firms by contriving to associate them with pictures of naked women. "Pictures of naked men probably couldn't do the same job," I suggested, but irony can easily be lost at 4.00 a.m. Enthusiasm for knowing the location of every calendar on the patrol - and probably those not on the official route - was however, related not just to crude sexism but also to the breaking up of monotony. The discovery of a new pin-up calendar or magazine was a real treasure find, and the permutations on looking at only January to March on the first patrol, April to June on the second and so on, or not looking at other months at all until they came around, seemed well developed.

Concern for the image of the company also straddles the formal and the informal, both in action taken to remedy problems and in potential, but hopefully unrealised and undiscovered, consequences. On one night-shift when Winston, one of the sergeants, had started off a new guard on an office and chemical laboratory site we were called away to take another new guard to a hotel site just north of the river. The intention was to come back to check on the guard at the chemical



laboratory later, during Winston's round of check-out calls on other sites. The hotel was being renovated and refurbished and the initial furniture and fittings removal job was a large task. The removal firm was therefore working through the night and Sparrow had been hired to provide a guard to watch over the rear entrance that they were using to ensure that nobody else came along and started removing things. Winston however was clearly struck from the start by the inappropriateness, as he saw it, of the man to be put on this new contract. The job could potentially lead to further lucrative contracts with the hotel and others in its chain, so the first impressions presented to any management supervising the removal were considered paramount. In short, Winston's opinion was that the new guard simply was not bright enough to do the job.

In the car, driving up, we stopped at a set of traffic lights behind a Securicor van and Winston remarked pointedly, "They're a difficult lot to get into . . ." Driving on and arriving at the hotel it did indeed become clear that the new guard would hardly generate confidence in the company. It was extremely unlikely, I noted later, that he would have gained employment as a security guard under any half-way adequate system of licensing, examination and training requirements. Winston was genuinely agitated as the man mumbled to the removal men and then the hotel's management representative, whittling away the company's credibility. After seeing how big the job was, the number of people coming and going, how many rear exits there were and how bared wires left hanging from removed light sockets constituted a fire and electrocution risk to just about everybody, he decided that this was definitely not the man for the job. Reporting to Control he suggested that he send the man home in a taxi and take over the job himself. The management of the hotel were evidently relieved, but this piece of 'good' management also had negative management implications for the rest of Sparrow's operations for that night. A fault not of Winston but of the company and its structure, these themselves being reflections of the shortcomings of the industry overall.

With Winston staying on at the hotel this meant that spot-checks could not be made on other sites that night. Further he was unable to return to continue the briefing and training of the new guard started



off at the chemical laboratory. The inability to cover for the hotel guard or for Winston left a new guard in the position of being responsible for a laboratory complex that he did not know, aware - as had been emphasized to him - that he was surrounded by highly inflammable chemicals. As it turned out, one other supervisor, in a private car, was able to fit in one visit to this site, but supervisory coverage of the depth that the company itself feels necessary and which it advertises, was just not possible.

Despite Sparrow's eventual ability to provide some slight back-up supervisory coverage, the events of this night pushed me yet further into querying why private security services seemed to be accepted at face-value. There was no statutory requirement or system for regulation, training or accountability. Clients, public and government seemed to regard them as legitimate adjuncts to, or replacements for, other 'public' services. Questions naturally formed about the development of this situation, and the nature of private security's accountability and legitimacy. For, as I noted at the time:

"If the security industry continue to be entrusted with the care of fire-risks in areas of high residential concentration or where volatile chemicals are involved, then there should be concern about their competence, training and over-seeing."

Accompanying Sam on his route of check-calls a few days later we discussed the hotel incident, which he had already heard about, and I mentioned some of my concerns about the judgements that the company could afford to make in taking on new staff and asked what he thought training could contribute to improving the workforce and the image of the industry. At a time when unemployment was not so high and the security companies had fewer applicants and a high staff turnover, Sam was pragmatic in his response. "You have to take nearly everyone you can get," he said "and you don't really know how they'll work out until they're in the job and doing it - or not, as the case may be . . ." More importantly, for a man with a shrewd insight into the workings of his own company and the industry generally, I was struck by his minimalist attitude to training. "You can't train a man straight-off on all aspects of a site - at first there's only two basics - the route (to patrol), and always re-lock everything you



open!" Later in the morning he raised the subject again making a distinction between what "you can be told and what you have to pick-up yourself." This was especially true, he argued, in the case of getting to know a site which becomes "your own".

Indeed, the underside of being formally shown the lay-out of a site, the route, locks, risks and so on, involves getting to know it as an environment. So eloquently did Sam begin to describe this 'feel' for the patrolled environment that he was flattered as I rushed to take notes as we drove along.

"There's the feel of the pile of carpeting under your feet, even if you are wearing boots. The noises of the night: the banging of rope against flag poles, of wires inside a gate-arm, the feel of air from ventilation shafts, the one odd door that opens the wrong way . . ."

All these, and more, if consciously thought about and mentally noted, create, he suggested, a "sense" of the patrol, which makes you "aware that you've missed something if the 'sense' is disturbed."

Driving on to visit several factories near the airport most physical senses became dominated by the noise and smell of aircraft! All guards on duty on these sites took great interest in the aeroplanes. Even though, unsurprisingly, they complained of the noise, some became quite expert on the types of planes and the identification of international airlines - and all knew the times when Concord took off and looked out for it, using it as a regular marker for a joke or cup of coffee - a technological update of Donald Roy's 'Banana Time' (Roy, 1958).

At the light engineering factories that we visited Sam put a lot of work into maintaining a good rapport with the members of the workforces that we came across as we went round. Sam's role was to check on what the Sparrow guards were doing, look over their reports and inspect the security and fire precautions that they had a responsibility for. "At the same time," said Sam, "it doesn't hurt to keep your eyes open." Sam, who also did some undercover work for Sparrow, and who "could tell you a tale or two about fiddles on the Underground" for whom he used to work, saw himself as the scourge of syndicated fiddling and pilferage. "Keep you eyes and ears open and



you'll see who's in with who" he said. Given that his approach had frequently "paid off", resulting in 'random' searches which had uncovered pilferage, I was surprised that the unionised work-forces at the factories were not more evidently hostile to the security staff. Yet to the contrary, it was the white collar workforce of a computer company that we visited after lunch that were most obviously antipathetic to the intrusion of security, resenting their checking of names in and out of the building and their attempts to enforce minor rules. The mutual nature of understanding about workplace fiddles and infractions was much clearer between the blue-collar work-forces and security staff than with white collar professionals who, asserted Sam, had their own "tricks" and perks.

The regulation and incorporation of perks and so on, is too large a subject to go into (cf. Ditton, 1977; Henry, 1978; Mars, 1982; Scraton and South, 1984; South, 1982) but the subject cannot be passed without mentioning how researchers can themselves see phenomena displaced even when looking for examples. It took me a few days after going through my initial notes of the various visits with Sam to realise how perks were so neatly integrated into his and the routine of other security guards and supervisors. Subsidised lunches in factory canteens were nice but, further, some factory canteens and their meals were nicer than others, so the factory that was visited just before lunch was not a random choice. It had a good paternalistic American management that had overhauled the canteen and the menu. Many factories run company shops selling their own product at discount, wholesale or even below, and security staff are as welcome as company employees. Such initiatives are partly (if not largely) attempts to make pilferage an unattractive alternative. Relatedly some firms have sought to avoid the institutionalisation of informal systems of giving away scrap and waste as a perk or of allowing it to be taken as an entitlement. One alternative is to formalise its status as a service or benefit from the company, selling the items at a token price and giving a receipt. Sam bought a few pallettes from one firm for two pence each and duly got his receipt. They were put on one side for him to pick up later. The control of the 'perks' had become an easily administrated but formal process, yet reminiscent of the exchange networks in Henry's study of the Hidden Economy (1978), the pallettes were nonetheless



destined to continue to have exchange value in non-accountable terms. Sam intended to "let a mate have them for the price of a few pints . . ."

That all of this was taken for granted and regarded as unproblematic was clear. Sam knew that I was doing a research project on private security and he was certainly nobody's fool. He was thoughtful and reflective, yet there was no hint of irony in the justifications he put forward in a discussion that we had about the need for private security to be given more official powers to enable them to arrest on suspicion as the police could. We both agreed that police use of 'Sus' could be wrong at times and talked of its use against black youth in Brick Lane. Sam, however, argued that "mistakes" were "inevitable in one-off situations" whereas security staff "who work in one place" with one workforce "get to know them and pick out where the dodgy business is going on." On this basis, he contended, security staff were far more likely to be right in their 'sus arrest' than police in one-off situations.

Part of Sam's belief in good security personnel being able to 'pick out the dodgy business' sustained, and was sustained by, his willingness to take on short-term undercover work. This I never got to fully explore with Sam - and never really understood about him as a person. He was not zealously moral about petty crime as contributory to the decline and fall of civilisation as some security staff and commentators are. Rather he was the epitome of the pragmatic side of the security mentality. Neither a zealot, nor possessed by an equally familiar unimaginative doggedness, it was simply his job to take on the assignments that came his way. They were obviously more exciting and better rewarded than the normal routine of checking on contracted arrangements, but they were neither romanticized nor up for consideration alongside the perks, fiddles and pilferage which he and other security staff throughout the industry engage in to varying degrees (cf. South, 1983). As Arthur and Sam agreed after I had sat through listening to them finalising an undercover job, without union liaison, over the telephone: "It's the only way, if a lot's going missing."



However much Sam is committed to the company and embraces and is embraced by ideas of professional pragmatism, he is nonetheless a rather more individualistic and autonomous actor than most security staff. For those who Sam makes his mobile round to check on, and for the majority of security employees, responsibility and worth is measured less by their inclusion in the core group of staff and more by The Clock.

### The Clock

"So the clock is a tell-tale ticker-tape machine," I said. The working of the sealed, leather-cased clock that guards usually carry around their assignments was being explained to me by Winston and Joe, an old hand with nearly twenty years in private security. My little alliterative joke passed into common use for a week or so. But it was an essentially correct description and, as I subsequently discovered in developing the historical aspect of the research, it was a mechanism which had been around, relatively unchanged, since the early days of factory development (cf. South, forthcoming).

The clock has a significance - real and symbolic - belied by its humble appearance. The clock face is visible through an opening in a thick leather case, sealed by a small padlock or built-in lock, and with a shoulder strap attached. Inside the clock an ink-marking mechanism can be operated by inserting and turning the keys placed at fixed points throughout the building to be patrolled. This results in a mark being left on a paper tape rolled within the clock and attuned to the clock-work mechanism. According to the pre-planned and laid-out timing for the patrols, the keys must be reached at specific times and a record of the time made by inserting the key, thereby leaving a distinctive mark on the paper tape. Supervisors and managers then have a timed record of the guards' progress on his/her assignment.

Most guards accept this peripatetic and constant form of 'clocking on' without complaint. It is, after all, standard and routine practice and, as I found (though I suspect few guards know) a few hundred years old in principle. But being the human part of the mechanism for the monitoring of one's own progress necessarily promotes some reflection - albeit occasionally with humour:



Winston: "They did this to lorry drivers, with tachometers. The 'spy in the cab' they call them. To stop the fiddling!"

Joe: "It's like clocking on every quarter of an hour. They've got you 'clocked' see . . . (laughs)."

Rather more deeply, 'the Nightwatchman' in Fraser's book of accounts of Work, (Fraser, 1968:34-53), draws out the levels of self-discipline and self-surveillance (best understood in the senses developed by Foucault, 1977) which this procedure promotes:

". . . one carried time with one on this task, from beginning to end. Not the time of a wrist-watch, a diminutive meter for consulting at one's own convenience, registering the flow of a process from which one normally turned away. Not even the time of work-clocks on a factory or office wall. Dominant but at a distance, these are the sentinels of the work environment, parts of the whole external field of force one is pitted against. As such, one could fight against them. This watch-man's clock machine represented a deeper, more intimate penetration into one's being. As inaccessible as time itself behind its case and padlock, it embodied time's enstrangement none the less, and in the most immediate and compulsive way imaginable, resting against one's thigh like a companion, almost alive, demanding attention every few minutes of the working night. Every principal work action - that is every transference of oneself to the next point on the patrol route - was dictated and registered by it. So whoever opened the case and unwound the tape would see a complete and measured record of one's labour, the continuous night-long skeleton of one's experience. A better work instrument would have to be actually embedded in the skull, and seize the workings of one's brain."

(Nairn, 1968:38)

Again, it is evident that the imperatives of discipline and surveillance permeate private security in its theory and its practice. And they do so in their most effective forms - in a reflexive manner, directed not only at external threats but also back upon the bearers of security practice.



## 'Clocking Out': Conclusion

It was undoubtedly useful to accompany two of the people that I got on well with on their routine shifts. Both Sam and Winston were popular and fitted in well with the rest of the staff of all ranks, but as a boon to the researcher they were also reflective and articulate in their ideas and in explaining things to me.

Bearing in mind standard advice on participant observation, whether in an overt or covert role, I had high hopes of gathering insightful gems from these two during the day and night shifts on which I accompanied them. For as Becker (1958:655) has written:

"On the one hand, an informant may say and do things when alone with the observer that accurately reflect his perspective but which would be inhibited by the presence of the group. On the other hand, the presence of others may call forth behaviour which reveals more accurately the person's perspective but would not be enacted in the presence of the observer alone."

During the Sparrow stage of the research I was still fairly intent on undertaking a study with more reliance on observational field-work, and therefore seeking to tap both the contexts that Becker describes.

In the end it is evident that this is not how the research progressed - or rather it is not how it turned out, for nonetheless this initial intention afforded a most valuable base for progress - an insight into working in private security, understanding its values, encountering aspects of the 'security mentality', the permeation of discipline and surveillance in practice and symbol, and familiarity with the occupational and social dimensions of at least a part of the security world. So, although this is not a report of a full participant observation study, initial use of the technique, as I first entered the world of private security, did what it should do. It sensitised, gave perspective and, importantly, it raised questions, gave directions and generally helped to make me aware that there was a great deal more to find out about. Only really in this sense, but positively nonetheless, is the limited account offered here truly in tune with some of the precepts and pay-offs of sustained use of the participant observation method, as described, for example, by Becker and Geer (1957:32).



"The participant observer is both more aware of . . . problems of inference and more equipped to deal with them because he (sic) operates, when gathering data, in a social context rich in cues and information of all kinds. Because he sees and hears the people he studies in many situations of the kind that normally occur for them, rather than just in an isolated and formal interview, he builds an evergrowing fund of impressions, many of them at the subliminal level, which give him an extensive base for the interpretation and analytic use of any particular datum."

Impressions, both immediate and subliminal, were gained from having coffee with a group of guards or walking around a factory by night or day with just one or two. The 'questions raised' - about history, the clock, the uniform, about undercover work and other 'specialist' services, about civil liberties, accountability and so on, led me to explore the broader contemporary (and historical) significance of private security. But to first of all know something about working in it, was invaluable.

Working within private security and having access to the daily reality of its participants from senior management to ordinary guards, gave me at least something of an 'insiders' sense of what goes on, how and why, and - importantly - how and why certain things might and should be changed. Working with and under senior security management helps to make sense of the positions that they adopt on public platforms (cf. chapters 3,4,5). Working alongside and accompanying various operational grades of security staff gives a sense of the ordinary and likeable humanity behind the 'front' of 'the job'.

Management in a highly competitive industry is rarely enthusiastic about cooperation but grudgingly will go along with it. In private security managements share a perception of the status quo, stability and order and see their role as managing consistency and regularity, both for their clients and within their own organisations. Private security workers share a range of values, cultural viewpoints and occupational routines and accoutrements, such as uniforms. Private security as a whole is permeated by shared backgrounds, strongly influenced by ex-police and ex-military occupational cultures and a shared world-view which strengthens a boundary drawn against outside ideas and threats from alternative views of society. The field-work has therefore sought to draw out differences in, but also to highlight



shared features of, the occupational culture of the private security business.

Of course, shared values are not sufficient to induce self-sacrificing loyalty among all employees, even where the features of paternalistic embrace are strong, if pay, hours, conditions and so on are unattractive. Coupled with low unionisation across most companies the unsurprising manifestation of job-dissatisfaction is not merely fiddling time and goods but a high degree of labour turnover. These features of the contract security business could be remedied by the kind of licensing, regulations and accountability discussed in Chapter 4. However, the shared values and conservatism that permeates the business, as noted above, should not be under-estimated as a barrier to policy intervention and the implementation of change in practice. This is undoubtedly so throughout the breadth of the private security sector and should be borne in mind in considering the chapters that follow.



## Chapter 2 - Notes

- (1) It was clearly impossible to look at even just the major security companies in equal detail. So initially five firms were taken as 'case studies', each with a different and particular purpose in mind. Three of the major firms and two medium-sized firms were chosen. Group 4 was approached primarily with an interest in their training procedures. Securicor and Security Express kindly provided some information on their Trade Union agreements, and other aspects of their operations. Pressures of space however have dictated that only a limited amount of this information has been reported in Chapters 3 and 4.

The two medium-sized firms - Trusty and Sparrow (both pseudonyms of course) - were the subjects of short but intensive periods of observational fieldwork. The first in a covert, working, participant observer capacity, the second as an open observer.

The constraints of time and a desire not to overstretch the indulgence and cooperation of harassed and generally suspicious respondents meant that the same questions could not be asked of each firm. It was decided therefore to focus on a common core of basic questions with 'tailored' different questions for different firms, depending upon the 'angle' I was pursuing with them. In this manner I hoped to gather responses and material relevant to other concerns as well. I think this approach was largely successful although it did of course produce material which was essentially impressionistic - being the impressions and opinions of those interviewed filtered through my framework of questions and how I subsequently interpreted the responses. However, such problems would also have applied to a more formal questionnaire format. In the event far more useful material was generated than could be presented here.

These semi-formal interviews with representatives of Group 4, Securicor and Security Express, and the observational fieldwork were supplemented by more casual 'open-ended' interviews with other security managers and staff, with representatives of the industry's professional associations (cf. Chapter 4) with trades union officers and negotiators in MATSA and ASTMS, with members of civil liberties groups, with several members of the police force (Metropolitan and Yorkshire) with ordinary workers in factories where private security firms were employed and with two Home Office researchers who in fact were seeking information about private security from Mr. Bruce George, M.P. and his staff. In its early phases the research had extensive help and feedback from Mr. George who has been the most consistent Parliamentary advocate of licensing and regulation of private security.

The fieldwork was carried out in London for several reasons. First and most obviously it was where I was based. But additionally, the Metropolitan area has the highest concentration of crime and of commercial activity and hence it seemed reasonable to assume that private security would be flourishing particularly strongly there. Whilst the Metropolitan case was



also likely to produce demand for more specialised services this would not, I felt, necessarily detract from the general representativeness of the average private security firms offering the standard range of services. Obviously, there might be differences in standards and employees across the country and some factors, such as high levels of tourism for example are an important stimulant to the demand for private security in London. But on this level, I reasoned at the time, that the London case may also offer some generalisability to consideration of the employment of private security in other major cosmopolitan cities. As I have noted in Chapter 1 both the ambitions for thorough ethnography and for the comparative exercise were overtaken by the other directions in which the thesis developed.

- (2) A further post-hoc justification or awareness of good fortune, occurred as familiarity with the policing literature was extended for there are few studies which have based their observational work in this context of the 'hub' of communications. A notable exception is Shearing (1984) in an observational study of police work, conducted in the communications centre of a large urban police department in Canada. Among others, the continuing work of Peter Manning is examining this communications nexus.

In what is reported here I refer to nothing that is highly confidential or that is particularly specific to this company. Names and some other points of identification have naturally been changed. The purpose of this and the following 'case study' is, I reiterate, simply to give some flavour of everyday working in the majority of ordinary, medium-sized companies.

- (3) For a related, informative and detailed discussion of 'paperwork negotiation' among the police, from a phenomenological perspective see Manning, 1979 (54-6).
- (4) Of course a very high, but unknown, proportion (I might estimate 30-40% or more), of the private security guarding work-force are 'casual', marginal workers with a high turnover rate. That is to say, these workers are unlikely to have a great deal of interest in the central values of the job, or the rewards - official or unofficial - which it can bring; they are not "core" but "peripheral" workers (Mars and Mitchell, 1976)). But whatever my original intentions, this can no longer be a study contrasting the marginal workers with little interest in their private security occupations with those workers who embrace their jobs with more commitment, aspiration and enthusiasm. The observations that I am able to report in these case-studies must therefore be generally confined to being concerned with the latter group.



PART 3

CHAPTER 3

'The Private Security Sector: Activities and Breadth



Public Interest and Private Interests: The Police and Private Security from the 1900s to the Post-War Years: A Brief Introduction

One key legacy of the history of the arrangements that society has made for public order and social control is the enduring distinction between private and public policing as found in the institution of law. Considering the roots of this distinction Stenning and Shearing (1980) have emphasized that:

"Police and law-enforcement powers, because they developed originally from the peace-keeping powers of ordinary citizens have also evolved closely constrained by the legal recognition of the rights of private ownership. The legal concept through which this evolution was accomplished was the concept of 'the peace'. Essentially the 'King's peace' extended to the King's highway and other common lands not the subject of private ownership. In places which were the subject of private ownership, it was originally not the King's peace which prevailed but the 'private peace' of the owner/occupier. These concepts . . . lie at the very foundations of our modern day distinctions between public criminal law and private civil law."

(Stenning and Shearing, 1980:233).

Throughout the 20th century the 'private peace' of the owner/occupier has been a central point around which the developing relations between the police, the public and private security have revolved. Early problems in the establishment of the police and conflicts - overt and covert - over their control, as well as the activities and powers of private detectives and private guards, emerged out of the strength of this concept of 'private peace'. By the turn of the century the new national policing system had still not settled down (Radzinowicz, 1956 (a)) on the other hand private guarding associations and agencies seem to have been having a leaner time of it. The private detective bureaux which had emerged were also having to cast around for a new approach and style of work as they faced a popular cynicism towards them born of their frequent malpractices in matrimonial cases. At the same time however, the early decades of the century also saw the beginnings of the technical side of private security establish itself commercially in the United Kingdom with the installation of alarm systems whilst in the USA the clearly recognizable foundations of the modern private security organisation were being laid (cf. Draper, 1978:16).



## Private Interest and the Police

In the early years of organised policing of the new industrial cities much power had accrued to the members of the overseeing watch committees. The commercial interests of these members not infrequently enjoyed special protection and service and, where they involved dubious or illegal practices, occasionally enjoyed discretionary immunity from prosecution. Brogden (1978) for example, offers the case of the Liverpool Watch Committee of 1914, where the chairman was the attorney for major dealers in alcohol. After the introduction of beer house licensing in the 1870s, small unlicensed premises not owned by the major interests were often hounded out of existence by the police. Another member of the committee was the physician to many of the brothels. Elsewhere, as in Romsey for example, opposition to outside inspection of the police as a body often came strongly from the brewers and publicans who had a near monopoly over the provision of the negligible town police (Critchley, 1967, p. 121). In the case of Liverpool, as Fosdick (1969) remarks "needless to say, the activities of the police, in respect to liquor and prostitution were negligible" (p. 53). The private direction of the new police in certain matters of commercial interest had clearly not disappeared by the First World War.

## Private Enquiry Agents and Private Detectives

Equally unsettled as the Victorian era faded were the private enquiry agents who had flourished in fact and fiction with the flamboyance of the former on occasion nearing the flights of fancy of the latter. But such flamboyance and the occasionally boastful claims of even more sedate operatives had encouraged dubious practices which the courts were increasingly inclined to view with disfavour. As Draper observes:



"the courts began to reject the evidence of private detectives in relation to matrimonial affairs, in situations where it had previously been accepted, when it appeared too coincidental or contrived. The scope for the use of lies and false evidence in the divorce market was disappearing. In 1901, Garnier's detective agency was founded and became one of the first multi-purpose firms, offering all kinds of investigation services. Others followed suit, and this became the pattern of the 20th century agency; the Victorian enquiry agent had matured into the modern private detective."

(Draper, 1978, p. 16)

This is not to say of course that these early "practices of blackmail and deception" (ibid, p. 16) disappeared - but that is a point to which I shall return later in this chapter.

Clearly as the watershed of the turn of the century passed, neither public police nor private alternatives could claim to have occupied a wholly stable and unambiguous position in the history of the moment. However, as my concern here is principally with those private alternatives we should pause to consider their persistence, for persist they did despite their low profile (compared to the consolidation of the public police) and their varied manifestations.

#### Crime Rates and the Decline and Rise of Private Police and Security

A cursory look at the historical visibility of forms of private police or security might see them as common in the absence of public policing up to around the mid-19th century, thereafter disappearing, and only re-emerging as a 'boom' industry in the decades following World War II. Such a reasonable first-sight view would probably rest on one of the two hypotheses (or possibly both). First, that with the institutionalisation of the public police and the widespread provision of their service, recourse to private agencies was simply no longer necessary (and possibly more expensive if price were to rise as demand fell). Then, in the more complex and sophisticated society of the post-war era, private security re-emerged as part of the generally booming service sector (parallels may be made in such a hypothesis between the establishment of the National Health Service co-existent with a, lately, flourishing system of private medicine and health insurance plans). The general propositions and implications of this



hypothesis are elaborated in the 'fiscal crisis' explanations of the growth of private security and I offer a critique of this analysis in Chapter 5.

An alternative hypothesis however might equally reasonably focus upon and seek some correlation between public and private policing arrangements and the statistical incidence of crime and civil disorder. Fortunately (whilst by no means concerned with the phenomena of forms of private security) a major study by Gurr (1977) is explicitly aimed at investigating the hypothesis that both crime and civil disorder declined significantly in several major western cities (he takes London, Stockholm, Sydney and also Calcutta as a 'colonial' city) between the mid-19th Century and the mid-1920s/1930s and then underwent a massive increase after World War II. Clearly then an examination of Gurr's study, albeit brief, is appropriate given the above hypothesis.

Gurr is concerned with these trends in the decline of crime and civil disorder, with changes in their patterns of incidence and with their relationship to elite, institutional and political perceptions and actions regarding social stability and public order. He is well aware of the methodological problems of using crime statistics, especially across historical spans, - the influence of elite power, institutional procedures, popular pressures and political ideologies. But if criminal statistics cannot reveal the real 'rates' of crime, they can at least indicate a lot about trends in crime. Despite sources of distortion, he argues, they must reveal or reflect real changes in criminalised behaviour. As Storch (1979) observes:

"where the best data are available (crimes known to the police) they usually form patterns similar to committal or conviction data alone. This might mean for example that 18th century committal or conviction statistics can perhaps provide us with fair assessments of general trends in crime, though not of its actual incidence."

(p. 118)

What Gurr's analysis of the data for his three major cities finds is that between 1850 and 1930 there is a long-term decline in incidences of common crime: a finding which, as Storch (1979:118) notes, is confirmed for England as a whole by the work of Gatrell and Hadden



(1972:364). A somewhat bemusing finding however, and one born out by other studies cited by Storch (p. 119), is that "all studies of the west thus far show no correlation between rapid urbanisation and vastly increased urban crime rates" (Storch, 1979:119). Now, if this is the case, then perhaps the evident 'success' of the new police, called upon to stem the tide of feared and expected increases in urban crime, reflects rather a simple and basic absence of any such overwhelming or spectacular increase. Alternatively:

"The notion has been advanced that modern policing had uncertain effects on violent crime, but significant effects on property crime. The first proposition is probably true. Murder and serious assault are probably not much affected by the technique most used by modern police - pressure of surveillance and active patrol - but perhaps the statistical incidence of some kinds of minor violence . . . was affected . . . (But can this be ascribed to the deterrent effects of active patrol or to other social and cultural factors at work within the working class?)"

(Storch, 1979:120 - emphasis added)

With regard to the second proposition however, (effects on property crime), while this is "possibly true", there are problems and Storch concludes that:

"In London during the two decades after the introduction of the police, crime indicators seem to more readily reflect the swings of the economy and of the political and social tension than the effects of a new institutional factor."

(1979:121)

It therefore seems difficult to substantiate the case for making some causal correlation between the 'decline' of crime between 1850-1930 (and its resurgence after 1940), the birth of the new police (and their various reorganisations for efficiency after 1940) and the apparent fading of private arrangements between 1850 and 1930 (and boom after the late 1940s). Gurr himself recognises the breadth of sources and influences on any 'causality' that may be found, asking:

"whether the improvements that occurred, especially between 1850-1930 were due to the policies of public order themselves or to their coincidence with more fundamental cultural, economic and political changes. The disquieting general conclusion . . . is that the effects of these policies depend upon other circumstances, only dimly understood."

(Gurr, 1977:183)



Certainly, to take one manifestation of such changes not explainable solely by reference to the policies of public order: by the inter-war years a major discernible development in relations between the police and the public was the acceptance of the former into and by the community which was most heavily policed, that of the working class. Popular feeling towards the police had slowly adjusted to seeing them as being important in potentially offering protection to all against crime and providing a mechanism of discipline (Scraton, 1982:34), (despite the historical memories of recent use of the police in violent clashes with members of those same working class communities, cf. Scraton and South, 1981:29).

With regard to privatised arrangements for policing, their persistence certainly seems to have at least a significant degree more to do with cultural, economic and political changes than simply the effects of public order policies. But all these factors were nonetheless contributory to the development and growth of private security - from Victorian principles of self-help, through the stimulus of commercial demand to inter-war changes in the organisation of the public police system. It is with these 'contributions' that the rest of this section on the period 1900 to post World War II is concerned.

### The Persistence of Voluntary Policing

The concept of voluntary policing or, perhaps more appropriately at times, 'self-policing' has an interesting extension beyond the 19th century with the growth of the women police associations. Though not strictly privatised policing or policing on a commercial basis, their organisation and status as voluntary associations deserves mention here.

Their intentions were those of practical 'self-help' for women and the preservation of Victorian morality. A strange mix of assertion and denial of 'independence'. Thus they were to protect women from aggressors and from their own occasionally unsound judgements. The legacy of the 'evangelical police' and the societies for the suppression of vice (Radzinowicz, 1956 (b); Hall and McLennan, 1980:64) is discernible as are contemporary fears over the white slave



traffic at the turn of the century (Garner, 1978:43). The Associations also owed much to the inspiration of the Suffragette Movement, encouraging women to assert their competence in traditional male occupations (Garner,1978:43).

Whatever their commitment and motivation, from the turn of the 20th century to the 1920s:

"there were a variety of modes of service, some served the government while others were financed privately; some had specific duties, others had wide-ranging powers; most groups were shortlived but a few became permanent officers within the Metropolitan police. All the associations began as privately funded organisations trying to pressure the government into adopting the principle of women police whilst at the same time attempting to show why this was necessary by practical demonstration, such as setting up women patrols to guard the public spaces and parks."

(Garner, 1978:44)

The vigilance committees and similar private associations already relied on women as well as men to report unlawful and immoral acts to the police for prosecution (Garner, 1978:45; Owings, 1925:4). The use of the police against the suffragettes led many women to believe that the presence of women within the police force might result in a more sympathetic reaction to their cause from a masculine establishment, both politically and physically. World War I. brought a further rationale - patriotism and significantly with men away at war, it also brought opportunities. Whilst many in the Womens Movement were strongly ambivalent about 'the war effort' and others highly critical (Rowbotham, 1973, Chapter 17) still others were eager to prove that women could do men's jobs. A large number of voluntary, uniformed associations sprang up, often organised by society ladies and, as Marwick describes them, performing their roles as a "not necessarily ineffective mixture of Girl Guides, County Charity and Territorial Army" (Marwick, 1977:40).

By the 1920s the Women's Police Service operated in several major cities and while their work was generally for the police or government departments, they also worked in commercial factories (e.g. Nestle and Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk at Bromley) (Allen, 1925:71; Garner, 1978:51) and for private organisations such as the British Empire League Country Club:



"where they 'removed the loose women of Richmond' and at the request of Vicar William Q. Amer of Holloway, N7 they cleaned the neighbourhood of undesirable females in less than two months, no doubt being paid by the Church."

(Garner, 1978:51)

At the same time members of the W.P.S. were also employed on a permanent basis by the makers of Maypole Margarine as factory police women (Garner, 1978:51; Allen, 1925:150). The W.P.S. was shortly reconstituted as the Women's Auxiliary Service after conflicts with the new Metropolitan Commissioner, Sir Nevil Macready, in 1918, who whilst forming the Metropolitan Women's Police remained highly suspicious of the Suffragette cause. Voluntary work, supported by donation and subscription continued, as did commercial commissions for private security type work, as for example at the 1924 Wembley Imperial Exposition.

A further example of the initiative of organised women is represented by the 'moral policing' provided for by a convention organised in 1914 by the National Union of Women Workers. With the widespread movement of soldiers and male workers around the country necessitated by the war effort, concern arose over the "dangers arising from the uncontrolled excitement which possessed much of the girlhood and womanhood of the country" (Owings, 1925:23; Garner, 1978:54).

Initially paid for from voluntary funds these moral police were subsidised by the Home Office after 1916 at about £400 per annum to train other women to aid police work in London. Police funds were then used to employ a private, secondary force of moral guardians who, for example, reported on the behaviour of the members of the audience in London cinemas (Garner, 1978:55). At the same time, other sponsors and employers, such as vigilance committees, church organisations and the London Council for the Promotion of Public Morality, maintained an interest in the private employment of women patrols to encourage moral rectitude.

The fascinating histories of these women's 'self-help' groups, generally funded by private commissions, voluntary contributions and subscriptions or government grants, cannot be adequately or



appropriately dealt with in a study of privately paid policing and security (Garner's, (1978, Chapter 3) excellent thesis offers a thorough treatment of the subject). Suffice it to comment that for the purpose of this study the proliferation of women's private/voluntary police associations, now largely forgotten, highlights one irregularity among many in the conventional uni-linear picture of police history (cf. South forthcoming). It also shows how quickly and effectively, private, trained, uniformed and equipped personnel can be brought together - and, in some cases, be absorbed within the public policing arrangements of the state.

### Private Security and the Police in the Inter-War Years

Periods of conflict, oppression and victimisation invariably throw up examples of organised resistance and opposition. The General Strike of 1926 and the aggressive reaction, more particularly of the middle and upper class special constables than the regular police, led to the formation of defence corps by the workers. In some cases relations with the police were simply bloody. In others, (whatever the truth of stories of friendly football matches), as at Willesden with the 200 strong 'Maintenance of Order Corps' and at Selby, apparently harmonious cooperation was established in a mixture of community self-policing and state policing (Garner, 1978:62). But the response of employers in the General Strike actually highlights another facet of the privatisation of policing - the direct use of ordinary employees in a security capacity. The Times newspaper for example, directed its employees to act as guards to protect the loading and delivery of newspapers (Garner, 1978:63).

Most factories and warehouse complexes employed 'works police' for gate security work and to patrol for fire and intrusion. The outbreak of World War II in 1939 made such provision a more pressing problem, most acutely so where products, services and safe storage were essential to the war effort. Unsurprisingly the state saw the need for the incorporation of such security responsibilities into its own general home defence strategy and these early in-house security arrangements were amalgamated into the Home Guard (Calder, 1969: 143; 379; Garner, 1978:64).



After the war many large companies retained, and even expanded these basic in-house security forces. Other firms felt the labour intensive costs of such staffing (prior to the development of sophisticated security technology in the 1950s and 1960s) to be too prohibitive and instead opted for the provision of security by 'rental'.

Some sophistication in the sense of a 'technical' approach to security had already entered the commercial market place as early as 1926, though this was neither for the provision of factory guards or technological alarm systems. In that year an entrepreneur called Arnold Kunzler had formed a company called Machinery and Technical Transport. As Draper (1978:19) notes, "the word 'technical' in reality stood for 'security' but the company believed then (as it believes to this day) that one of the secrets of security is anonymity." Machinery and Technical Transport provided couriers to accompany and safe-guard the passage of various goods, including cash, valuables and bullion by road, rail or air. Specifically designed security vehicles were a later innovation but M.A.T. transport developed with the times and is still operating as Brinks-MAT in the United Kingdom, a part of the international Brinks security organisation.

In 1935 a Night Watch Patrol was offered as part of a limited range of guard patrol services run by Night Watch Services Limited on a commercial, rental basis. Night Watch Services was established by the Marquis of Willingdon and Henry Tiarks, a merchant banker, to protect the penthouse properties set against East-End undesirables and Moseley's fascists who were drawing violence to their meetings wherever they were in London (Bowden, 1978:253; Clayton, 1967:12; Garner, 1978:65). The pre-war complement of 15 guards on bicycles was reduced to two by 1945, but thereafter the firm grew, changing its name first to 'Security Corps' in 1947 and then later, in response to Home Office concern that this sounded too military, to Securicor (Bunyan, 1976:231). While the history of Securicor thus seems more lengthy than commonly thought, elsewhere private policing and security is even older. Apart from the USA, Sweden offers a good example. The Group 4 Total Security Company today operates one of the major U.K. security organisations, and may be the largest across Europe.



Unsurprisingly, it is a grouped amalgamation of four companies, 'Cash in Transit', 'Securitas Alarms', 'Store Detectives' and 'Factory Guards Limited'. Factory Guards was the fore-runner, established in the United Kingdom in 1952 as a subsidiary of the Swedish parent company Securitas International, which has an even longer history than Securicor being founded in 1913.

If the years immediately prior to World War II were formative for the organisation of the post-war private security sector and the type of firms that would emerge, so too was it a period in which the operational style and priorities of the police significantly changed in response to an apparently changing style of criminal activity. These latter two related changes also had implications for the development of post-war private security. As Scraton (1982:35) points out:

"well over a hundred years after Colquhoun's vision of a scientific form of policing there was little to recommend the service on this level. Classification systems were disparate and incompatible and communication between forces was sparse."

1933 saw the appointment of the Dixon Committee to assess the state of detective work within British policing. Critchley (1978) summarises the conclusions and recommendations of the committee, important as the blue-print of the organisation and practice of subsequent and modern police detection work, and the system and standard against which so-called private detection should be measured. (Though it should also be remembered that the negative appraisal of the achievements of the British police was the result of comparison with overseas police systems, where one exemplar, the United States, had derived much of its original and imaginative approach to criminal investigation from private security agencies such as the Pinkertons). Reporting in 1934, the Dixon Committee concluded that:



"England lagged behind other countries in the use of scientific aids in the detection of crime, and the outcome of its work was the introduction of systematic training courses for detectives; the establishment of regional crime-clearing houses to assist in identifying convicted persons, particularly mobile criminals; the issue by the Home Office of instructions of scientific aids, drawing detectives attention to the ways in which laboratory work could help them; the consolidation of a system of forensic science laboratories; and the provision of rapid, reliable and systematic means of collecting and communicating information about criminals between all police forces in the country."

(Critchley, 1978:210)

Far from resenting such criticism, senior police officers seemed to welcome it. The modernisation of policing technology and need for sophistication in its approach to detective work was a paramount necessity in their eyes as they identified signs of the growth of 'organised crime' with another image imported from the USA, that of 'gang-land'. The growth of inner-city gangs, born of the loyalties and fears of resistant community networks, depressed areas and depressing housing, provided, as they established themselves beyond street corner meetings and local prostitution and protection, the basis for more profitable forms of criminality such as robbery, burglary and the move from what McIntosh (1975) refers to as 'craft' to 'project' crime. The latter, in its turn, being a significant contributor to the growth of the private security sector, stimulating, in a relationship of assault and defence symbiosis, the development of alarm systems, armoured cars, guard services, camera monitoring and recording, personnel and investigation, and perpetually more and more elaborate cash protection and dispensing systems.

Of course, these developments were not the only major contributor to the dramatic post-war expansion of the private security sector. Whilst here I have only had the space to note the early 20th Century history of some forms of private security in a very cursory and selective manner, this sacrifice at least allows me the space to detail the nature of that post-war expansion. In the rest of this chapter I shall discuss the range and diversity of the modern private security sector. Understanding its evident significance then leads in Chapter 4, to discussion of its lack of accountability. In Chapter 5, I return to consideration of broader social, economic and political



factors which have contributed to the growth and importance of the private security sector.

## The Private Security Sector Today

### Contract Private Security

The only consistent and reliable statement that is continually made about the size and scope of the private security industry today is that it is hard to get consistent and reliable information about it. The most recent survey of the contract security field, produced by its principal trade union, MATSA (October, 1983) notes:

"There are no reliable figures on the size of the security industry. It is rapidly changing, partly seasonal and, of course, there are a number of very small companies about whom it is hard to get any information at all."

(p. 3)

It is worth pointing out at this early stage that if this last observation is true of the most visible and familiar aspects of the private security sector then it is even more true of the less conspicuous and more specialised aspects. And it is not simply that such information is unavailable to interested parties such as the trade unions. Until the Home Office produced its Green Paper on The Private Security Industry in 1979, it seems to have been particularly under-informed about or just particularly disinterested in, the subject. In reply to a letter from Bruce George, MP, to the Home Office Crime Prevention Centre, Lord Harris, Under-Secretary at the Home Office, wrote in March 1977:

"As you know, the Home Office does not keep a record of such organisations. In 1971, however, it did ask chief officers of police in England and Wales how many organisations were known to them which provided services for the protection of persons and property, including the installation of security equipment. The replies showed that 741 such organisations were known. This is the most recent information we have."

For some time this 1971 figure was the only vaguely official one to go on and yet many who knew the industry felt it a woefully inadequate estimate.

Prior to 1950, sales in the private security business i.e., contract



security dealing in guards, armoured cars, alarms and so on, amounted to less than £5 million per year. By 1970 turnover had risen to around £55 million, employing, according to one estimate, around 40,000 men and women (Wiles and McClintock, 1972:67-68). An estimate for 1976 suggested a much more sizeable set of figures: 7,000 firms; 250,000 uniformed staff and 10,000 armoured vehicles (Bunyan, 1976:230). Though now certainly something less of the over-estimate that it probably represented in 1976, Bunyan's figure still stands as a staggering estimate of the size of the visible dimensions of private security. No less so when considered alongside the police establishment in the 1970s which according to the Report of the Inspector of Constabulary for the end of 1979 had a total strength which had "grown to a new peak of over 113,300" officers, with an additional 43,000 civilian employees. The Chief Inspector for Scotland reported that in 1979 there were 31,214 officers in the eight Scottish forces. In these terms, private security employment far outnumbered total police force strength. (As a matter of interest, the relative strengths of the armed forces in 1979 were: Royal Navy, 71,053; Royal Airforce, 86,649; Army, 156, 415).

Such academic and journalistic estimates were no better or worse informed than those which could be made by the police. Speaking in 1979, P.D. Knights, Chief Constable of the West Midlands police addressed the Association of Chief Police Officers/Association of Metropolitan Authorities joint summer conference on the theme of 'Policing - Public or Private?' and had to return to the 1971 figure, offering the following breakdown:

". . . no reliable up-to-date statistics are available. One writer has put the figure at 128,000 (in excess of our total police force). The 1971 census would show about 80,000 people recorded at that time as being occupied as security guards, patrolmen, watchmen, gate-keepers and in similar employment. Police forces in 1971 knew of 74, private security organisations in England and Wales. About a dozen operated nationally and 80% of the total operated in only one force area. 47% of the organisations installed intruder alarms, 39% guard dogs, 38% mobile guards and 32% static guards. A majority of firms (60%) offered only one service. 529 of these companies employed an estimated 26,000 persons (which might give a total of 30,000 all told), and of the 26,000, over 20,000 (or 84%) were employed by only nine firms. More recent estimates put the total at 40,000 employees. Their turnover, outside of manufacturing, is put at about £130 million annually." (pp. 5-6)



More recently available information has not been exceptionally helpful. Sales turnover remains an indicator of growth which many refer to. Randall and Hamilton (1972) reported to the Cambridge conference on private security that annual sales turnover had risen from £5 million to £55 million in the period 1950-1970. By 1976 this had increased to an estimated £135 million according to the 1979 Home Office Green Paper (Chapter 1; cf. Shearing and Stenning, 1981:207). And again the 1971 figure recurs, as if it had been the product of some sound survey of the field originally, when in fact senior police officers had simply been asked to put together their locally available information, and had done just this. Thus, Shearing and Stenning (echoing Knight) note that:

"The Home Office also found that of the 741 private security organisations known to the police in 1971, some 80% of the firms operated in only one police force area, and only about a dozen operated nationally. On the basis of a more detailed analysis of a sub-sample of 529 security organisations, they report that 84% of the employees work for 2% of the security organisations."

(United Kingdom, Home Office, 1979:3) (Shearing and Stenning, 1981:207)

With a commitment to unionisation in the security industry, MATSA (the Managerial, Administrative, Technical and Supervisory Association, part of the GMBATU), have made as consistent and thorough effort as anyone to chart the growth and size of the private security companies. In their latest 1983 report, The Security Industry, they note the "best official estimates" starting with the Cambridge conference and the 1971 police figures. They also note that in 1978 the BSIA, (the British Security Industry Association) claimed to have 63 member companies employing 32,063 contract security workers.<sup>1</sup>

Agreeing with the BSIA's claim that it represents the security industry because its member companies account for most of its activities by volume, the MATSA report continues:



"As the top ten companies are all BSIA members and cover around 80% of the industry, total direct employment in contract security companies in 1978 may have been around 40,000. By Autumn 1983, the BSIA estimated that membership covered 26,500 contract security guarding jobs with a further 2,000 in ancillary occupations. Alarm maintenance and installation employment had reached 4,000 making an approximate total of 32,500 employment in member companies. Obviously, the vast majority of security companies are not members."

(p. 3)

The report also makes the critically important observation that contract security is only one dimension of the private security 'industry' which in wider terms includes specialised constabularies such as the Ports police, parks police, transport police, the Atomic Energy Authority police etc.; in-house security, security equipment design, manufacture and installation; private detectives; store detectives; security consultants, advisors and trainers; and so on. With the exception of the specialised constabularies (referred to in Chapter 1) all these and other dimensions of private security will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter. Taking account of those mentioned and "other smaller sectors", the MATSA report suggests that "from 80,000 in 1971, this wider definition of the industry puts total employment at just under 400,000 in 1980" (p. 3). This latter figure is close to the 386,000 persons employed in all 'security occupations' in 1980 as estimated in the 1983 Economic Review produced by the Institute for Employment Research at Warwick University. On this basis the Review estimates that by 1990 'security occupations' will employ 483,000 people or "two out of every hundred workers" (ibid., p. 3).

It should by now be clear, if it has not been all along, that it is extremely difficult (if not currently impossible) to give any accurate estimate or assessment of the 'size' of the contract security industry specifically or the private security sector more generally. I have presented all the available major, reputable estimates and have been unable to gather any data which could generate any estimates which I could argue as more accurate than those recently proposed. The latter offerings from the MATSA report and the Warwick Economic Review seem to be based on sound estimates, and if my feeling was that Bunyan's



1976 estimate of 250,000 staff in private security was an over-estimate for the mid-1970s I have far fewer reservations about its accuracy in the mid-1980s.

I have so far tried to indicate the size of the phenomenon of contract private security and now move on to describe examples of contract security companies in the upper and middle ranges of the market; common aspects of, and problems with, the labour force that they employ (principally in the labour intensive areas of guard and mobile work, cf. Chapter 2); and then broaden out to describe the range and nature of services which this contract security industry provides. I do not describe the very small companies operating in this sphere, partly because if the information were there this could go on indefinitely, but largely because the information about small companies is very hard to come by, unless one were to go through the telephone books of every town. (Looking at the Yellow Pages might give one the reputable sample - relatively speaking!)<sup>2</sup> I can also only cursorily deal with the common characteristics and problems of the employed (often marginal, casual) labour force found in private security guard and patrol-type work (though related issues are raised in Chapters 2 and 4).

Although the number of companies operating in the contract security field is unknown (though MATSA suggest it is at least over 1,000) what is striking about this particular area is that it is so heavily dominated by just five companies. These five now take up around 75%-80% of the market. In terms of size they rank downward from Securicor, Group 4, Chubb, Security Express to Pritchards. But Securicor is the really dominant force in the market, employing as MATSA observes, "14,000 workers, almost as many as the remainder put together" (MATSA, 1983:4). There is little point or value here in giving what would essentially be company histories. However, a few points about how certain companies are diversifying their activities are important.

Reference has already been made to the pre-war establishment of the fore-runner of Securicor and its post-war re-naming and subsequent growth, expanding rapidly throughout the 1960s up to the present.



However, within that expansion it has not merely sought the extension of established services but has consistently moved into newly developed areas. Thus, today it is clearly placing less of its growth emphasis on 'traditional' security services such as the provision of static and armoured van guards etc. and is moving into the booming area of communications: for example the development and application of cellular technology used in mobile communications systems. In a major project in this area Securicor has entered into a partnership with British Telecom - known as Sctel. This venture has a 25-year operating license, one of only two so-far issued, to build up a national cellular radio network which will:

"enable business people to use a cordless telephone to make and receive calls while on the move. Major cities and their connecting motorways will be divided into small areas, or cells, each with its own radio transmitter and receiver operating on a unique frequency. As subscribers travel from one cell to another a computerised exchange switches frequencies automatically to provide a continuous link."

(Golding and Murdock, 1983:33)

Golding and Murdock's comment on this particular kind of enterprise which, in this case takes radio frequencies out of public access and privatises them, reflects an unsurprising feature of all the commercial activities of the private security sector - a "tendency to put the demands and needs of business before the broader public interest" (ibid.).

Securicor is also involved in Cash in Transit operations (CIT), which are reported to be "doing reasonably" (MATSA, 1983) and also has interests in alarms, cleaning services, hotels, vehicle dealerships and insurance and travel. Its parcels and courier services "are expanding" (ibid.) including its data service delivery organisation. This latter venture was reported in the Securicor Guardian, Spring 1981, as providing "one third of the company's turnover, employing a staff of 3,500 and utilising 1,700 vehicles" (p. 15). The development and success of the parcels and data delivery services of Securicor provides one indication of the assistance which senior directors joining Securicor after service in the public sector, can give. In this case the Securicor Guardian describes the contribution of Sir Ronald German, the last Director General of the Post Office, who



"brought a wealth of knowledge to the board and gave invaluable help in setting up our radio network which has grown to become the most comprehensive coverage of any private company in the United Kingdom . . . (and) . . . he was able to advise on setting up the Data Service . . ." In common with most of its major competitors Securicor is diversifying from a position of financial good health in an economic climate when most businesses are simply consolidating or are contracting. As the MATSA report puts it:

"Even in the depths of the recession with competition at its fiercest, the company is doing far better than the average U.K. business."

(MATSA, 1983:4)

There is little point in noting similar details for other companies such as Group 4, (which alongside Chubb is the next largest security company in the U.K.) except to observe that it is also diversifying from early concentration on property guarding, CIT and store detective work into other areas. Securicor and Group 4 do however raise one further point which has, in general, been more of an issue for American and Canadian commentators. This is the question of foreign ownership of security companies (cf. Shearing and Stenning, 1981:207). There are undoubtedly now a number of foreign owned, almost exclusively US-based companies in Britain. But Group 4 is actually a Swedish company, and while Securicor is a British company it has sizeable overseas operations, with around 30% of its total staff working abroad. As Shearing and Stenning have remarked:

"this suggests that foreign ownership is probably a significant factor in the European private security industry as well as in the industry in Britain and Canada."

(1981:207)

Chubb and Security Express are the next two really sizeable companies. Chubb (the larger by far) is a long-established lock and safe-making firm based in Wolverhampton, which expanded into guard services (Chubb Wardens) and logically, into domestic and industrial lock and alarm systems and other electronics. In recent years demand for locks and alarms, particularly from the Middle East has been high and the company has prospered, though exports are now falling off. In common with the general trend the company has successfully diversified abroad and into other areas, though remaining principally tied to its locks



and alarms manufacturing and sales activities (cf. MATSA report). Security Express principally operate in the Cash in Transit field, which is unsurprising as they are a subsidiary of the De La Rue Group which specialises in the printing of bank-notes for a variety of countries. As the MATSA report observes, it is from this base that "the group has moved to high quality colour printing and storage and carrying of valuables" (p. 5). There is perhaps less scope for Security Express to diversify its activities, and a "recent spectacular robbery from one of their vaults . . . dented their image and forced them to drop prices to retain business" (MATSA report, 1983:5). But this set-back should not be over-rated and the company and group are doing very well.

Finally, other indicators of growth are noted by the MATSA report: examples of small companies 'fighting their way into the market' and undergoing rapid expansion; the continued growth of firms specialising in security system and alarm installation; and the expansion of companies like Security Centres Limited which "buys up smaller, weaker companies turning them into local branches for hiring out burglar alarms" (ibid. p. 5). All these areas of growth become evident from a focus on the contract private security industry, but it should also be noted that other security functions come to be taken on and commercially developed by firms apparently coming from a different direction. A clear example in the past few years has been provided by the growth of OCS (Office Cleaning Services) which now offers among its cleaning and maintenance services a complete package incorporating expertise in security and alarm systems.

On a continuum of a whole range of commercial services it is increasingly difficult to say where the private security sector begins or ends. The MATSA report summarises the current trend in the contract security business:



"The trend is therefore towards a multitude of small and medium-sized companies fighting for the patrol, guarding and cash-carrying contracts, with the very much larger companies tightening their hold on the technologically advanced end of the market. There may be a steady decline in CIT and pay-packeting as more companies move to cashless pay and plastic money becomes more widely used, but this may take a lot longer than is widely thought."

(p. 6)

### Employee Recruitment, Turnover and Training

One very significant consequence of this multitude of companies, of all sizes, is that, as Garner (1978:96) has remarked,

"the multiplicity of sizes, resources and expertise in the industry makes it very difficult to generalise about recruitment and training and working conditions . . ."

From my own interviews with managers in manned security and alarm and lock-fitting companies it was clear that issues of recruitment and training were fairly sensitive subjects and something that few people were totally happy with in the industry. For example, although the actual incidence of infiltration by persons with criminal intent or simply with a record of past offences is probably relatively slight, this is nonetheless an issue which security companies rightly feel is a public and police worry, and is hence a worry to them. The fact that there have been cases of people employed with convictions for violence, possession of stolen property, corruption and so on, means some considerable focus on and concern about the initial problem of selection of employees.

For many companies this becomes the key argument for greater recognition of private security's willingness to police itself if it were granted exclusion from the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (1974) and the means to vet prospective employees more thoroughly (cf. Chapter 4). There is also obvious awareness in manned security that given the low levels of pay (an issue which the Low Pay Unit has campaigned about cf. Williams et al, 1984) and the anti-social and long hours of the shift system (usually twelve hours or longer, cf. Chapter 2) then this level of private security is unlikely to attract high calibre employees. On the other hand, the companies argue, these conditions are forced upon them by the competitive nature



of the security market. Rates of pay are kept low by the vicious circle of competition which exists in this highly labour-intensive industry where the major costs are the wage bills. The companies argue that if they paid more then they would have to charge more; they would then be under cut by competitors. Similarly, in a business which offers a twenty-four hour service, then three shifts of eight hours might attract some better staff but cost-considerations mean that two twelve hour shifts are more desirable. All these factors, coupled with the generally boring nature of the job<sup>3</sup> contribute to a massive turnover of staff, which in turn, of course, reduces the possibility of the services achieving the levels of efficiency that security companies claim (or would like to claim).

The 1972 Cambridge Cropwood Conference on private security (Wiles and McLintock, 1972) estimated that 25% of the labour force changed four to five times per year. Ten years on, with the massive growth that the industry has maintained but with little commensurate improvement in conditions or pay this estimate should at least hold and the figure is probably somewhat higher. In one 'medium to small-sized' South London company that tried to offer good pay and conditions, and was generally well thought of, one of the principals told me that the average stay for guards was still only two months, though a number, of course, stayed rather longer (interview in 1979).<sup>4</sup> This company at least tries to make employees feel that they would like them to stay on, partly by offering a weeks training and induction course. Most medium to small firms simply cynically accept that they are employing a large percentage of casual, floating and part-time labour who will move on regardless, hence it is a waste of time and money to try to offer any (or more than a morning or day's) training and orientation.

There are serious criticisms to be made of such disregard for the sensitive positions that guards will occupy and the information and skills they will need (see Chapters 2 and 4). The level of preparation that is currently seen as better than most companies provide need not be a sophisticated matter. The South London company referred to above for example, after some lengthy experience, will try to cover points of relevant law and safety matters but insists that in this business they really have to start with basics, ensuring that



employees have the ability to read, write and speak English in order that they may write reports, read safety signs and instructions and communicate with anyone in or near the property or the police or owners.

In the field of manufacturing and installing security devices and locks, one manager suggested that the standard procedure for taking on employees would be very simple. Receiving the job application, checking the references and then undergoing 'on-the-job' training. Although work in this particular industry often calls for some qualifications, probably at least the three year City and Guilds certificate in Electronics (or equivalent), it was also acknowledged that anyone could set themselves up in business with no qualifications at all. Movement into the more 'craft-traditions' orientated world of the locksmith might more typically mean joining a specialist firm as a trainee, or in the old days as an apprentice, at sixteen and then being trained. Membership of the Master Locksmiths Association only follows after a series of examinations.

#### Growth, Expansion, Employment and Prospects

Having noted the instability and high turnover of the labour force in the contract security field, it is nonetheless extremely important to consider this area in terms of it being a major employer. As a major growth industry it is also a major provider of jobs. This is obviously a key issue for the trade unions as well as the industry itself. The MATSA report (1983) mentioned earlier, has distilled the implications and prospects for security professions generally from the most recent and important extrapolating survey and review which covers this field, (among others). It notes that the 1983 Economic Review from the University of Warwick, Institute for Employment Research, has predicted:

- That contingent upon the growth of trade, retail activity, distribution and so on, the security industry generally will experience continued overall growth across all regions of the country. (Predicted growth is not directly linked to any predicted rise in crime).



- That the increase of 10,000 jobs in contract security companies which occurred between 1975 and 1982 is part of a continuing growth trend, which may even accelerate.
- That the broad range of security occupations is the only area of manual employment which is not predicted to decline. By 1990 an overall gain of 100,000 jobs should take total employment in this area to just under half a million. This figure includes 'public administration' i.e. the police, but clearly non-public security occupations are a major percentage of the total. Within this sector both contracted security services and other security-type jobs in other industries are included.

On the basis of these projections both the public and the private security sectors are going to be of increasing significance on a range of criteria - not least size - in the next two decades.

The problem with such projections however is their vagueness and generality. On the scale on which they are calculated a variety of trends and indicators can be put together to produce a forecast figure for this or that. It is difficult however, if not impossible, to break down the components of the projected future picture. This is partly because one can assume that general trends will have the impetus to carry the composite whole to its forecasted growth, but it is less easy to predict how individual components of the whole will fare. Where some may decline (e.g. in this case manned security) others may flourish to take up slack and overtake in growth (e.g. electronic security systems). As indicated, the major companies in the contract security field are already seeking to diversify and make themselves less focused and dependent upon business which is as labour-intensive and hence competitive and costly, as guarding and cash-in-transit services. Hence, despite the sustained business activity and likely growth of smaller companies already in, and moving into, this area there is unlikely to be major or rapid increase in the labour force here. As the MATSA report notes:

"The 'new' sectors like telecommunications, electronics, alarm systems and maintenance are less labour-intensive in themselves. However, a large organisation is needed to support such high technology, complex operations. It is these 'indirect' jobs which are likely to continue growing.



Meanwhile, of course, jobs will continue to grow in parcels and courier services as trade rises . . . Cash in Transit is likely to fall somewhere between " . . . the latter 'new' areas and the old guarding and patrol services." The large, heavily armoured vans are a big investment and need expensive back-up. Small amounts of cash and valuables can be taken by smaller vans in reinforced boxes, this area of CIT is more easily accessible to smaller companies. Thus the overall picture is of more jobs in virtually all main sectors:

High technology craft and technician employment  
White collar administrative  
Parcels and security freighting  
Guarding - slight growth but only in small companies.

"The only exceptions are likely to be pay-pak," (i.e. the service offered by a number of companies which makes up pay packets for clients firms and then transports them on pay-day to the clients premises) "where a gradual decline is probable and CIT where the level of jobs may remain stable in the short-term and fall slowly in the medium to long-term."

(MATSA, 1983:7-8)

In 1976 the USA Federal Task Force on Private Security Standards and Goals forecast that "with the 'encroachment by electronic technology' growth rates for guard, armoured car and courier services will be modest compared to the . . . annual growth of the past few years" (US Department of Justice, 1976:34). Even given that the Task Force was considering growth in comparative and relative terms, it does seem now, for the USA and elsewhere that they may themselves have been too "modest" in their assessment of growth. However, it is true that it is these three areas particularly (within the contract security industry) which will be overtaken and, over time, see relative decline. Certainly, the 'encroachment of electronic technology' is the significant factor in this crucial re-orientation of the contract security industry and its activities and services.

"The classic nightwatchman is a thing of the past," observes the MATSA report. Closed circuit television and electronic warning and sensor systems now work out cheaper and can certainly be more efficient. The pace of development of electronics, the competitive nature of the market and the rising labour costs of guard and patrol services, mean that it is no longer the sophisticated and up-market option of major corporations to survey premises by camera and monitoring screen,



staffed by a single guard. This is now an option open to an ever-increasing number of companies with physical plant or stock to guard. More disturbingly perhaps such technology lends itself on a twenty-four hour basis, not only to the overseeing of property by night, but also to the surveillance of workers and that property, by day. Of course, there is a further set of factors which make electronic surveillance-guarding attractive to customer companies and security firms as well. As I have noted elsewhere (South, 1983) and as MATSA despite its sympathy and interests lying with security staff concurs:

"guards can become frustrated or bored or suffer temptation as their employers make no effort to train or pay them adequately."

(MATSA, 1983:8)

Fooling around, fiddling time or pilfering the protected goods can add interest to the job and the wage-packet. Electronic surveillance technology, especially that which can record and can be subject to checking involves a higher degree of professionalism and interest than traditional guarding roles for the security staff, can be cheaper and more efficient for the employing customer and reduces the problems of rising labour costs for security companies. Interestingly, despite the fact that this looks like a lucrative trend for the private security sector generally the structuring of the UK market in this area means that the bubble already has limits set upon its expansion before it bursts.

"In the UK a high price is charged for installation of alarms, closed circuit television etc., a relatively low hiring charge thereafter to cover maintenance (in the USA it is the other way round). This means big profits while the industry is expanding and selling new systems but the balloon will burst once the market becomes saturated. At the same time, since there is no money in service and maintenance, alarms have a poor reputation for reliability, to the great annoyance of passers-by, neighbours and police."

(MATSA, 1983:8)

Policy intervention to reverse this market trend and its consequences would make good sense for all concerned. However, in present and foreseeable circumstances this is unlikely.

Nonetheless, as a recent survey of the industry by Jordan and Sons of



London (1983) observes, intruder alarms in total market terms are "the most important sector by some distance (accounting for 35.2% of total sales in 1982) . . . Growth in intruder alarms from 1978-1982 was 69.5% but this was to a large extent attributable to a 21.8% increase in 1982" (p. 5). I shall discuss the problems of performance of alarms and the stimulus to the market for them prompted by the requirements of the insurance business in a section on the alarm industry below.

Finally in this survey of prospects I turn to cash-in-transit (CIT) and Pay Pak services. As the MATSA report astutely notes, "Cash-in-Transit is a response to whether people think crime is rising as much as whether it actually does. Hence the greater public presence of security companies itself generates trade" (MATSA, 1983:9). The visible presence and conspicuous movement of private security guards and armoured vans is commonplace on the streets and in operation on public and private property. Such presence very basically advertises the 'obvious need' for such services and needs little more to strongly resonate with public perceptions of the growing 'crime problem'. Continued demand for such services is hence encouraged.

Of course there is genuine commercial need for protection of the increasing amount of cash and valuables in circulation. Despite the electronic transfer of funds, some decline in the number of workers who insist upon cash in their weekly wage packets, the rise of credit cards and so on, the move to the cashless society is making little real headway. Over half of all manual employees are still paid in cash and over a third of all staff grades (MATSA, 1983:9). The transport of cash for pay makes up about half of CIT trade and the rest is accounted for by bank business and shop takings. The latter are actually generating a greater volume of circulating cash and valuables than ever before. This is partly the result of the decline of the corner shop and small chain stores and the growth of larger superstores, multiple chain stores and shopping complexes which concentrate and multiply the generation of cash. Such developments have meant more business for CIT companies (cf. MATSA, 1983:9). Finally, the cash-only nature of transactions in the informal economy and the large and growing service sector encouraged by the attraction



of avoiding high VAT, National Insurance and Income Tax rates means that as the MATSA report concludes "however much 'plastic money' grows or bank opening hours become more convenient, there will always be a substantial demand for cash" (MATSA, 1983:9).

The major security companies have been preparing for the moves to the cashless society for years but their far-sightedness has generally been tempered by keeping an eye on how fast trends are really developing. Some of the security technology which companies like Securicor were beginning to develop nearly ten years ago has still not seen the light of day, at least partly because the computerised card systems of monetary transaction which they are posited upon have not arrived.<sup>5</sup> Whilst property guarding and CIT services and other labour-intensive areas of operation still have so much commercial stability and some growth potential in them, then despite diversification and expansion into other areas, the major companies and their small competitors will remain in them.

### The Nature and Range of Services in the Contract Private Security Industry

Having outlined some of the basics of the 'foundations' of the contract security business and aspects of its potential for continued growth and diversification, I turn now to a fuller account of the nature and range of services offered.

The provision of contract security is the most visible private security activity. It covers a wide range of services and functions, including the provision of static guards and mobile patrols to guard and secure property and for the the protection of persons; the transport of cash and making-up, picking-up and delivery of wages; other specialised delivery services; back-up communications networks, such as the 'Haulage Emergency Link Protection' (HELP) system to assist and protect long-distance lorry drivers and their loads; tailored guard services for anything from race-horses to oil paintings and other special assignments; consultative work on maximising the efficiency and security potential of the work/business/home environment; and various forms of investigative work from store



detectives to shop-floor spies working under-cover. Less reputable firms will also happily offer services which constitute the strong arm of private protection, providing 'guards' for use in evictions or the repossession of property.

For many years, and in the eyes of many still today, the private security static or foot-patrol guard represented what the employment of security services actually meant (or seemed to mean). Some description of the role and functions of security patrol staff is therefore necessary.

The essence of the private security guard patrol has remained unchanged through history. The Pinkerton's bureau may have taken up the phrase 'The eye that never sleeps' to describe its private detective agents, but at least ideally the phrase describes the function of the security guard more accurately. The security guard is supposed "to keep an eye out for potential security problems" (Shearing et al; 1980:168). This involves the performance of tasks related to the safety and securing of property and the surveillance of persons within it. Checking on locks, doors, windows and gates, checking alarm and security systems, checking for fire risks and checking personnel, visitors and intruders are the basic routines. And such work is highly routinised, especially the core of tasks which fall into the 'housekeeping' category of duties such as turning off lights and taps, shutting windows, switching off machinery, bits of maintenance and checking for fire hazards. Similarly the checking of security guards themselves as they do their rounds is routinised, often utilising 'clock stations' located especially at vulnerable points where the guard must clock-in, inserting a key to have a ticker-tape marked at a specific time by the clock mechanism and telephoning into the control room as a back-up not only to confirm adherence to schedule but also as a check that the guard is alright (Chapter 2). Although in the past most patrolling was done on foot, and this is still generally the case, many firms employ mobile patrols not just to move between sites at unpredictable, irregular intervals (for obvious reasons) but also for the mobility of supervisory staff who can then personally check on guards and premises. As many commentators and security staff have observed, the patrol function of



the security guard can be seen as "very much like that of the traditional 'cop on the beat'." (Shearing et al; 1980:169)

Private 'beat' patrols pre-dated public police patrols by centuries (Radzinowicz, 1956; South, forthcoming), so it remains pertinent to keep in mind the question 'which is the most traditional?' Shearing et al (ibid.) elaborate on the 'traditional' role which private security seems to have taken over from the public police:

"The modern public police have increasingly turned to the automobile as a means of transport, and have accordingly evolved into an emergency force which prides itself on its quick response time. While the public police continue to patrol our streets the traditional foot patrol function, historically regarded as the mainstay of the police role, is now almost the exclusive preserve of private security."

(Ibid.)

Perhaps a more 'dynamic' account of the continuing development of private security should be more cautious about the kind of 'static' pronouncement quoted above from Shearing et al. Certainly there has been some bifurcation of services - public and private - especially in the post-war period. However, this has occurred within a continuum of policing services and functions which does not readily offer static and fixed positions or neat divisions. As at other times historically, there are familiar signs of overlap as well as of bifurcation. This has occurred in recent years as private security have offered mobile patrols of industrial and residential estates and the police have moved to put more officers back onto foot patrols in the community. Equally traditional but perhaps less routinised and certainly less emphasized are security duties involving the searching of employees and in some cases visitors, to commercial concerns and industrial plant, including their vehicles and those involved in delivery and distribution. These latter duties relate to occasional mundane tasks taken on by private security such as the receiving and shipping of goods usually after ordinary working hours (cf. Shearing et al; 1980:170). In the USA and Canada private security are now also involved in the process of 'receiving and shipping' of people as passengers. In their long-term study Shearing et al found:



"yet another form of access control mentioned, which because of its visibility has become associated with private security work . . . air craft pre-boarding checks."

(Ibid:170)

Although a "relatively rare activity", at least in Canada, and despite the fact that there is no precisely similar private security activity in the U.K. nonetheless given the use of private security to detain and guard people at the London area airports (see Chapter 4), such developments in the UK are not remote possibilities.

Remembering earlier comments about contract security companies' (occasional) concerns about training, it might have seemed patronising to those unfamiliar with the industry to find such concerns starting at basic levels like literacy and communication skills. However, there are some essential professional components of the security guards' work which in reputable firms perform several functions. The most obvious example is the writing of reports. These are important in terms of efficiency, communication and as an additional resource in checking up on the work of employees, at the organisational level of the private security company. They can also be important as an 'advertisement' and guarantee of good and conscientious service for the company in dealings with customers, police and others (e.g. the media). Additionally at the occupational level, they can offer a psychological boost to 'job satisfaction'. Although, almost inevitably regarded as an arduous task, staff can nonetheless see report writing (whether a 'duty' or a 'pain'), as a professional commitment and further, one which gives them a respectability and professional sub-cultural affinity to the broader law enforcement enterprise. Such feelings are naturally heightened and emphasized when a security guard is required to give evidence in court. This may not be a frequent call of duty, but given the nature of the job it is not surprising that it is an occasional one.

While not wishing to sensationalise by veering close to military metaphors (although there is a strong validating historical lineage) the guard's functions can be seen as the securing of the internal security and safety of an area or areas, or of premises and persons on a route that they are commissioned to patrol and protect. Within the



perimeters of their patrolled site or parameters of their mobile patrol they must be alert for internal problems but, equally importantly must also secure against, deter and detect unauthorised (and indeed, note authorised) entrance and intrusion.

Whilst security is actually employed to provide a wide range of services, it should nonetheless be re-emphasized that the primary concern emphasized by private security in selling its services and by employers (see particularly the surveys of the Toronto studies, and for the UK any random sampling of the professional security journals), is the concern to ensure the concept of 'loss prevention'. This includes everything from discovering the results of the negligence, carelessness and incompetence of employees to detecting and protecting against minor and major theft. Here, as part of a system of surveillance and discipline of property and persons (in the sense developed by Foucault, 1977) a primary aspect of what Shearing et al (1980:172) call "remedial loss prevention work" is, as they observe, "its supervisory and educative component." In this respect written reports passed to the employing contractor are expected to indicate 'breaches of security' which Shearing et al found in their Canadian study "were often used by clients as a means of increasing the 'security consciousness' of their employees and as a basis for improving the security measures in force" (ibid). The same expectations are held by UK corporate and government employers of private security.

The private security tasks of patrolling, checking, housekeeping and itemising breaches of security are essentially the operation of a system of surveillance. Whilst police surveillance is directed to cover what Spitzer (1975) has termed "problem populations", this is generally focused around actual or potential breaches of the law and public order. However, as Shearing and Stenning (1981:214-215) suggestively argue, the emphasis of private security on 'prevention' means that the focus of its surveillance falls not so much upon "breaches of the law" or even of organisational rules, but rather more upon the "opportunities for such breaches":

"As a consequence, the objects of private security surveillance tend to be not just potential troublemakers but also those who are in a position to create such



opportunities for breaches. Thus, the target population is greatly enlarged (my emphasis). For example, within a business setting the focus of surveillance is not simply potential rule-breaches but any person who might contribute to the creation of an opportunity for a breach of a rule. This feature of private surveillance is nicely illustrated by a surveillance strategy commonly used by private security and described in an article on corporate headquarters security by Jack Luzon, under the revealing heading "Further Loss Prevention Refinements":

"In support of the project drive for theft reduction, Atlantic Richfield security instituted an evening patrol still in effect. For each risk found, the patrolling officer fills out and leaves a courteous form called a "snowflake", which gives the particular insecure condition found, such as personal valuable property left out, unlocked doors and valuable portable calculators on desks. A duplicate of each snowflake is filed by floor and location, and habitual violators are interviewed. As a last resort, compliance is sought through the violator's department manager."

(1978, p. 41) (Shearing and Stenning's emphasis)

As this example illustrates, when the surveillance spotlight is turned from those who commit breaches of rules to those who create opportunities for such breaches a new class of "delinquent" is created; the category "offender" is expanded to include those who violate security procedures as well as those who commit traditional criminal and other offences . . .

As the "snowflake" strategy implies, the loss preventative role of private security, in creating a new category of delinquents also creates a new category of person requiring information."

As should by now be clear the invocation of Foucault's (1977) analysis of disciplinary surveillance is not simply a theoretical appropriation to offer theoretical perspective to this account of private security. The strategy of disciplinary surveillance makes sense in everyday empirical terms to the practice and practitioners of private security. It forms part of the programme of the private security enterprise which offers services to ensure the security of the conditions of production, exchange and reproduction (e.g. maintenance).



## Mobile Services

Closely related to the service of static and patrol guards is the provision of mobile patrols. These offer irregular checks, to confound predictability, to be made on the external, and sometimes internal, security of premises, usually where a static or patrol guard is not felt necessary or is considered too expensive. Such a service is held to be particularly useful and important when covering property to which entry is forbidden under any circumstances, as for example where Customs and Excise forbid entry to bonded warehouses. Dog handling services are provided by some companies at an extra cost if requested. From the interviews conducted with guards in the industry, it was evident that from the point of view of those who had worked with dogs, they can be of enormous psychological support when patrolling a large, dark, rambling - and occasionally rumbling - building. Companies stress that the provision to offer mobile services and support is extremely valuable, if not absolutely necessary, as it enables random supervision to encourage efficiency, allows for the immediate replacement and transportation of sick or called-away guards and also enables the running of an efficient key-holding service to premises so that clients do not need to rush to allow police or other services access to property when an emergency occurs.

The other major 'mobile' services are cash transportation (CIT) and the special delivery services. Before the arrival and expansion of CIT services, cash in transit was carried in public on the street by employees or taken by taxi or else, as in the case of banks, conveyed by special British Road Services vehicles with bank staff travelling with it (Garner, 1975:91). In 1971 the Post Office changed its 'high value packet' delivery system, effectively making the banks search for an alternative to this method. Many banks and commercial concerns had of course already sought the services of CIT specialists and conditions for a boost to such services had received favourable indications for future growth prospects when, in the wake of the 1962 Royal Commission on policing, the police service had withdrawn much of their back-up escort support for cash transport. The signs were right for investment in armoured van services and Securicor saw the



opportunities early, buying out a fleet of vans owned by an entrepreneur named Winkelman and modelled on the American armoured car companies.

Until the advent of the relatively successful raids on vans in the past few years, losses from CIT vehicles had been slight and considerable confidence was generated about them, (in 1975 less than £3 million was lost compared to total theft losses of £600 million). Certainly this confidence expressed itself in at least one way somewhat unexpected in a male-dominated and orientated industry. As Garner (1978) reports, Securicor apparently use (or used) many women for the job of staying inside the van, operating the radio and pushing out the money, saying that they "have clearer voices than men on the radio" and that it is not dangerous - "it's like sitting in a safe" (p. 92). It is unclear whether this practice has changed at all in response to the impact of more violent and successful attacks on CIT vehicles.

Undoubtedly, whatever the prospects for growth or simple consolidation in the CIT business, it has been a development that matched its times and will not see contraction whilst ever we are a cash-based society. Wage packeting and distribution services ensure that a firm's wages office is not an attractive target on pay-day and the money is vulnerable for the shortest length of time. The employment of specialist services rather than deployment of a firm's own personnel took some time to be accepted by British managements but is now a well entrenched orthodoxy which, as with special delivery services using quick delivery vans and courier staff working nationally and internationally, now justifies itself in terms of efficiency and competitive rates.

Related to the development of road transport services and awareness of the threat of criminal attack on them, as well as the occurrence of other emergencies, Securicor particularly has been engaged in expanding its Radio Telephone Service. It now operates HELP - its Highway-Link radio telephone service, which provides links between commercial transport vehicles on the road and Securicor's Control Centres spread across the country and which enables drivers to summon



help in cases of accident, illness or attack. Using the radio link, employers can also change plans, routes, schedules and so on in a secure manner. The service is not simple astute commercial opportunism. Though hardly a 'sensational' common crime, and hence not heavily publicised, highway robbery as a modern phenomenon is not infrequent. In June 1962 the Vehicle Observer Corps was established as a voluntary organisation with around 700 firms involved in road transport and haulage. The aim of the Corps was to alert drivers on the road to common and frequent dangers and to the modus operandi of recent attacks on drivers and their loads. It also paid out rewards to drivers who spotted stolen high value cargos (Bell, n.d.:22). As Garner wryly observes of this scheme, it is "rather like the rewards offered in the 18th century for information leading to prosecutions" (1978:94). As I have indicated elsewhere (South, forthcoming), there should be little surprise in finding such continuities.



## Security Equipment and Systems

High profits, low risks and a wide range of products and markets characterise the business of selling (and to a lesser extent, manufacturing), security equipment and systems. As noted above, patrol firms have diversified into this area traditionally dominated by expanded locksmith manufacturers such as Chubb and Brocks because it is a logical extension and adjunct to their services. In technical and service terms there are clear advantages in having alarms linked to the supplying security companies control centre in conjunction with their provision of a key-holding service. In recent years it has certainly become apparent that aggressive entrants to this market, such as the rapidly growing Security Centres Limited chain, do not believe that it is only the rich who can be encouraged to 'invest' in security equipment, alarms and safes. Such companies have not been neglecting their sales efforts in depressed social areas particularly inner city areas. This is partly attributable to strong recommendations made by insurers of small businesses and shops but it might be hypothesized that deeper insecurities and fears are also being reflected. Plate glass, strong locks and alarms are of little real value against street riots, nor do insurers seriously believe that their clients in depressed areas are significantly better risks for taking such precautions.

## Other Services

I shall fill out some aspects of histories and practices relating to these various services below but to anticipate the breadth to be covered I will just mention four more specialised areas of service provided. These further services range from the provision of security-vetted cleaning services through retail security and an intriguing side-line in security printing to industrial espionage services (usually advertised as counter-espionage services - though so few companies will admit to initiating industrial espionage on behalf of clients that one wonders where all the espionage to be countered originates).

Securicor and Pritchards are the principal firms offering screened



staff for cleaning 'sensitive', 'risk' areas and premises and for specialised cleaning services such as are required by computer facilities. Part of the rationale for this diversification is that the coordination of cleaning and guarding services is obviously made more effective and efficient if the two are hired from the same firm.

Briefly (though I shall expand below), retail security principally implies the use of store detectives to watch out for shop-lifters, make test purchases to check the honesty of staff and spot-checks on deliveries, stock and on staff when leaving the premises. One particular organisation, Lodge Services, which has specialised in supplying store detectives has offered significant and oft-quoted contributions to the estimates surrounding the size of hidden economy crime in the workplace as committed by employees not outsiders. For, significantly for a firm supplying store detectives which are commonly supposed to be directing their attentions towards shoppers, Lodge contends that most theft or fiddling is accounted for by staff. As Bunyan (1977:251) notes in referring to Lodge:

"it is estimated that £1 million a day is lost by retail firms - but only a small proportion, about 20-25% is through shoplifting by customers. Fiddling or theft by staff account for the rest (including shops' own security officers or hired detectives)."

(cf. South, 1983; p.130 below).

This implies that over 70% of losses are down to 'insiders' (in a Sunday Telegraph report of 8th December, 1973, Lodge was apparently estimating that it was 60% of losses that could be attributed to internal dishonesty). This is clearly a remarkably high figure and explains why, despite common assumptions about who store detectives are supposed to be watching, agencies like Lodge are happy to emphasize that they offer a service to plant 'undercover' detectives to check on employees. According to the Telegraph report, they also maintain what was a 12,000 name file of dishonest staff for employers to check during recruitment (although Bunyan notes such a file in 1977, reporting it as containing between 12,000 and 20,000 names).

There are evident and common sense reasons why security printers of bank notes etc. like De La Rue can find it logical to have connections with security transport companies, in their case their subsidiary,



Security Express. However, whilst not earth-shattering news, it is nonetheless interesting to also note that the demand for security printing services is neatly and ironically stimulated by the growth of the commercial hidden economy of perks just as other security services are stimulated by the hidden economy of pilferage and fiddles. And, as with so many facets of the hidden economy, it should come as no great shock to discern the operation of a familiar 'dual morality' (Ditton; n.d.). It is of course not unnatural that security printing has enjoyed demand for more sophisticated design and printing of documents, negotiable securities and, of course, banknotes, to help guard against fraud and forgery and to help tracing. However, inflation and the Inland Revenue have generally and recently most vociferously, conspired against the ability of commercial enterprise to reward employees or 'sweeten' buying orders, and so on, with 'gifts', perks and the odd fiddle. One adaptation, which is not new but in such circumstances is certainly attractive is 'private' paper money. This takes the form of 'gift vouchers' or 'bonds' redeemable for goods only at a range of national retail outlets. Such bonds are legally liable for declaration by the company and recipient but are remarkably easy to 'lose' in accountancy and forget about as personal income - they are not transferable, not bankable and cannot be exchanged for cash. The major bonus scheme in the U.K. is appropriately called Bonusbonds; its security printers are De La Rue, owners of Security Express. Such schemes do not lend themselves to the fiddles of the shop-floor hidden economy but are, rather, 'legitimate perks' in the hidden economy of the commercial business world.

The provision of initiating and countering espionage services will be dealt with in some detail later, suffice it to say here that there is a highly reputable part of the market, openly and candidly advertising its services, including companies like Securiplan and Walsh, many of whom emphasize that their specialist expertise is directed to the protection of information rather than property. There are other services on offer from other quarters which would entail breaking into property in order to get access to information.

I have already discussed the nature of contract guard and patrol



services in some detail. I now offer more detail about the range of other services found in what is commonly described and seen as the 'contract private security industry', as outlined above.

### Armoured Cars and Cash in Transit Services

Although Allan Pinkerton had established his private detective agency in the USA in 1830 and moved into the provision of Protective Patrol guard services in 1850, 'secure', 'express' delivery services were developed by other entrepreneurs entering the 19th century private security market. In the same year of 1850, Henry Wells established the American Express Company, which indeed "did nicely". Though not strictly the first (cf. Draper, 1978:16), Wells' operation, joined in 1852 by William G. Fargo, was a pioneer in its time and over a hundred years later was familiar to television viewers around the world (although how much connection they made between stage coaches and the armoured vans on their city streets would be interesting to know). Wells Fargo remains a major security vehicle operator in the USA.

As in the security market of the 20th century, rivals were quick to see that there was scope for competition. The Adams Express Company was established in 1854 and today's Brinks Incorporated (which operates in the USA and the UK) started life in 1859 when Perry Brinks established a company to provide secure transportation of valuable goods (Draper, 1978:16). A huge market had opened up, even in the era of the stage coach.

The security transport business did not get underway in Britain for nearly another hundred years, in large part because, as Draper (ibid.) observes, while the United States was a 19th century continent of 'migrating population and spreading towns', "in England and the rest of Europe, a community existence remained," as did poor communications and it might be added, other traditional notions about transport and security. Even the promise of the railways was not exploited to any far-reaching innovative degree but found its significance and impact within a traditional perspective of what transport systems should achieve. In turn therefore the railways were seen as swift and secure and all that could be needed for security transport. Hence it was not



until the middle of the next century that the 'armoured car' idea found its moment in the UK.

In 1955, Roy Winkelman made the sort of classic entrepreneurial move which seems to have contributed so much to the growth of the private security sector in the post-war period. Having gained experience of the Brinks Inc. armoured car operation in the USA, Winkelman established his own Armoured Car Company in the UK offering the security of a "motorised bank vault" for transporting increasingly large pay packets and other large sums of cash in a society then particularly (as it is still), suspicious about moving money by pushing paper between banks. Securicor established its own armoured car division in 1959 and eventually bought out Winkelman in 1964. Around the same time, Security Express was established in 1960 by De La Rue and Wells Fargo, with the former buying out the latter in 1965.

Such 'entrepreneurial moves' could, of course, only be successful where and when the market demand was influenced by conditions which encouraged the purchase of the services. In the case of armoured car services, other bank protection services and the related aggressive development and marketing of security hardware designed to protect cash and valuables, it is to the changes in patterns of post-war crime that we must refer.

John Mack (1975:59) argues that the organisation of crime changed significantly in the late 1950s with the development of 'commando-type' robberies. A graphic picture of some of the methods used in a bank raid for example, can be summarised from the evidence of a bank-robber turned informer:

"bank ceilings blasted with gunshot as an effective form of 'frightener', till-drawers shot open, commando assaults by ladder over grilles, counter-doors sledge-hammered down, raids over in a minute or two, mounting hauls, people injured. A decade that had begun with the craftsman bank-burglar working delicately at the vault with a thermal lance had ended with the primitive sledge hammer."

(Mack, 1975:60)

Such evidence of 'criminal organisation' found police organisation unprepared or at least inadequate to deal with such 'serious,



specialist crime'. As Scraton (1982:44) notes, the sense of outrage which such examples of the:

"post war crime wave stimulated throughout Britain placed the police under immense pressure. The development of new technologies in response to the range of crimes was not sufficient to gain real ground in containing project crime."

While the police increasingly turned to the development of networks of informers to establish some system of surveillance over the potential and real sources of major criminal enterprises, those on the 'receiving end' of project crime were, unsurprisingly, also in a mood to seriously cast their eyes about. Their commercial inclination however encouraged them to perceive that in response to 'new' forms of criminal enterprise, there was much to recommend new entrepreneurial forms of security-protection and crime prevention.

### Shoplifting and Retail Security Services

Shoplifting and dealing with it are emotive issues. It is an area of ambivalence - something about which in some respects, too little is made and in others too much. Kenneth Robinson writing in Punch in 1977 observed that "whoever the shoplifters might be, they are doing . . . well" before swiftly caricaturing the private security response (Robinson, 1977:377):

"The job of catching shoplifters is becoming a lucrative industry. A lot of people are having a very good time because of the growth of petty crime. Men wearing steel helmets, dark glasses and striped pullovers can be seen hovering in the back rooms of large stores, playing sinister-looking roles they never thought a respectable community would give them. They don't have weapons - not yet - but it surely won't be long before they are given not only truncheon-vouchers but also their own television series."

Ambivalence (to some degree) and dissonance, is even evident among the interest groups where one might expect to find unity. But as Henry (1983) has argued, the administration and exercise of private justice for the control of private loss problems can tend to the accommodation of plural perspectives. Since 1977, and alongside 'traditional interested parties' such as the Home Office, retail stores and private security companies, the Association for the Prevention of Theft in Shops (APTS) has become a vocal pressure - and coordinating - group



representing various retail interests. The nature of this representation may have been a contributory factor in an interesting divergence of views between APTS and private security and the Home Office over 'who' is principally responsible for the majority of losses (theft, pilferage) from retail stores. As the APTS Director, Baroness Phillips has written:

". . . the Association is not merely a prevention exercise on behalf of traders but another agency to support authority in the fight against crime."

(Phillips, 1982:5)

However, there seems to be some slight disagreement about the perpetrators of the crime in question. Such disagreement may not appear earth-shattering but it is indicative of uncertainty about the nature of the problem and hence about the certainty surrounding 'appropriate' responses. Indeed it is suggestive about the extent to which the 'problem' really is such a major problem for interested parties and society (a query which I shall go on to elaborate with reference to the work of May (1978)) - except as a problematic bit of social behaviour which interested parties have imbued with a significance that is a corollary of their interest.

The significance of the problem and the need for serious response starts, for most commentators, with the size of the problem and the subsequent breakdown indicating those responsible and against whom the response should be directed. According to the APTS:

"The figures of loss, "shrinkage" as it is called in the retail trade, are given as a possible £1 billion in 1982 and although this covers bad stock control, back-door theft and employees' dishonesty, the major loss comes from customer theft, despite the declaration of various security firms who prefer to suggest that 60% of goods stolen from stores are taken by staff."

(Phillips, 1982:5; my emphasis)

It may be that it is a touching loyalty to shop staff on the part of APTS that leads them to assert that the major proportion of shrinkage is the result of customer theft. While security firms may have their own interests reflected in their emphasis on shrinkage as the result of theft by employees. It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that the Home Office comes down somewhere in between the two positions, though



leaning slightly in favour of the private security view. Thus the Home Office and Police Guide, The Disappearing Profits; Pilferage from Smaller Shops (1973) suggests that shrinkage is made up of three elements:

"National averages show that of every £1.00 that is lost about 30 pence can be put down to error and genuine wastage, while of the remaining 70 pence that dishonest people are stealing from you, about 30 pence are accounted for by shoplifters taking your goods. This leaves about 40 pence which is stolen (in the form of goods or cash) by some members of your staff."

(p. 1)

I shall return to more sophisticated estimates and arguments about the size and significance of the shoplifting problem below. It is important to set the scene with the appropriate backdrop of uncertainty because despite disagreement about numbers, private crusades like APTS and private entrepreneurs like security companies can in tandem, cooperation or competition, develop a very disturbing scenario around the appropriate responses to 'the problem'.

To take a swift look at what could happen in the UK by looking at what has already happened in the USA we could note the availability of a handy 452 page book called Where's What (O'Toole, 1978:152-154). Where's What is a "guidebook for a tour through 6,723 different record systems maintained by the federal government . . (and) . . personal data depots operated by the private sector" (O'Toole, 1978:152). The handbook directs those interested in the past of any given individual not only to governmental sources of information but also beyond to the record systems kept on those who have passed through, or by, the private justice processing system - whether they know it or not. Shoplifting and store theft incidents - real, suspected or imagined - are grist to the mill of a system which can only thrive confidently if it feels it is working efficiently i.e. even when in doubt recording everything and everyone.

Obviously there are specific conditions surrounding the response of US retail organisations to shop-theft, a particular history and cultural set of commercial values surrounding the nature and seriousness of the problem, and hence legitimacy of response. The current organisation



of security and response to shop theft in the UK seems far more ambivalent, inconsistent and, at times apparently disorganised. But it is of course, precisely these circumstances which private security services and pressure groups like APTS would like to see replaced by the more serious 'positive' and organised response common in the USA.

Ambivalence about shoplifting in the UK, about why it occurs and about what could be done about it is reflected in a fairly consistent attitude which has been amenable to incorporating it as a side-effect of the attractive and accessible display of goods, bringing with it, as a necessary evil, the need to employ security staff. For example, a writer in Readers Digest in the early 1960s noted the 'dangling of the carrot' psychology employed in sales techniques and display presentation:

"Display techniques (are) psychologically devised to increase 'impulse buying' - bright lights, soft music, the tumbled profusion of stock near the door. Four months after opening, the proprietors of an Essex discount store were able to diagnose the disappointing volume of business from the amount of shoplifting: the pilferage rate was, in fact, too low. "That meant the goods were not accessible enough," explains the manager without cynicism. "We had to rethink the whole system so that people could get at things. And engage two floor detectives."

(Quoted in South, 1978a:3.20)

Whatever the manager quoted may feel, such thinking inevitably invites some cynicism and prompted Kenneth Robinson to write in his Punch article that "a society that sells easy-to-grab sausages next to help-yourself panti-hose has reached such a point of decadence that it must expect fairly unstable behaviour from its victims" (1977:377). In a more serious vein, though similarly touched by incredulity other researchers, official and academic, have observed that commercial considerations and costs, not any sense of compassion, tend to govern responses to discovered shop theft and also to commercially motivated psychological enticement.

Thus the 1973 Home Office Working Party on Shoplifting and Thefts by Shop Staff reported that:



"Most of the retailers' representatives with which we discussed the matter agreed that lay-out could make a substantial contribution to the prevention of losses. It was agreed that those high displays and blind corners which impeded observation by staff, those unattended low counters and shelves which facilitated shoplifting, the stacking of displays close to, or in entrances and at exits were all to be avoided. It was also agreed that offices overlooking the shopping area and (in supermarkets) the check-out points were aids to security. Yet in every case we were told that management took little, if any, account of these points when planning the lay-out of shops and display areas. The sole criterion was the effect it would have upon sales."

(Emphasis added - Home Office, 1973 (b): para. 3.13)

Having outlined the 'problem' and noted the ambiguities contained in understanding its causality, control and component parts, I turn now to consider the application and practice of store security in this context.

According to the Home Office Working Party on store security (ibid., para. 4.14) there are two identifiable types of security staff who may work in shops and stores. Security officers who deal principally with theft and rule-breaking by internal staff and related to delivery of goods by other firms, and so on. The second category is that of store detectives who are employed to deal with shoplifters. In practice however for all except quite large stores, such a distinction is unlikely to be precise or at all evident. There is in any case, inevitable boundary-blurring where both categories are concerned about 'undesirable-looking' individuals or groups in or hanging around outside the store.

I have found no available figures relating to the gender breakdown of employees in these categories, but from interviews and the literature it seems safe to suggest that 'security officers' tend to be male (e.g. "retired policemen supplementing their pensions in a time-honoured manner" (May, 1978:139)), whilst 'store detectives' tend to be female and often part-time, whether working for security firms which train them and offer a vague semblance of career structure, or for the retail organisation itself. Such workers can be sociologically described as marginal but nonetheless (or perhaps because of this) they assert strong group and occupational norms,



claims for informal, if not formal, autonomy and negotiate their peripherality within the immediate work-environment by suggesting some higher loyalty or deference to higher authority in the form of the security company they 'really' work for, or else the Chief Security Officer or Director of the retail organisation, remotely (and facelessly) based at head office (on the latter, cf. May, 1978:141).

The issue of the assertion of autonomy by store security staff has received attention from a number of researchers, most evidently because it is part of the discretionary basis of private justice so strongly identified with the decision to prosecute or not prosecute those apprehended (or simply observed but ignored) while shop-lifting. In the UK, May's (1978) study of juvenile shoplifters and the organisation of store security in Scotland found that:

"In the organisation of their work security officers, both part-time and full-time, enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. Shared perceptions of what constitutes 'high risk' periods determine their presence on the sales floor."

(p. 140)

In the USA, Rojek's (1979) study of 'Private Justice Systems and Crime Reporting' in a mid-western city found that:

"Discount stores had entrusted all security decision-making power to their private police employees to such an extent that the organizational structure of these stores had been redefined, thereby giving the security staff complete autonomy. The threat of employee theft had prompted major organizational changes, resulting in the security staff being held answerable not to the local retail store manager, but to a special security component within the overall organization . . . However, in all stores a pervasive sense of concealment and specialization tends to shield security personnel from company rules and regulations thereby ensuring them of a significant degree of autonomy."

(Rojek, 1979:109) (Emphasis added)

This autonomy works at the level of shop-floor practice; it can at this level guide and, to some extent control, decisions about apprehension and movement onto the next stage of the construction of the statistics about shop-lifting and impressions about security's efficacy. For the next stage is generally notification of senior security staff or some level of management. This then opens up another arena of discretionary decision-making about whether to notify



the police and whether or not to actually prosecute. As should be evident in this particular sphere, there is much similarity between the processes involved in the practice of security work and the eventual construction of criminal statistics, and the work of the police. Having noted this however, I do not propose (or have the space) to follow the implications much further down the ethnomethodological cul-de-sac (for a critical excursion see Hindess, 1973).

However, the nature and patterns of policies (such as are distinguishable) which stores have are clearly significant in terms of public perception of 'the shoplifting problem', commercial perception of the utility of security and the actual practice of security in this area. Interestingly there are at least two consistencies identified by studies of 'policy' in this area in the UK, USA and Canada. These are first that there are a variety of 'policies', suggesting a circumstantial flexibility based on little real policy applicable to practice, whatever head office or deterrent signs may say. And, secondly that the fundamental consideration of cost not compassion governs decisions and procedures.

In the UK a recent (1983) report of a Home Office study of 'Dealing with Shoplifters', (Murphy and Iles) found that as had been expected,

"the shops included in the study demonstrated a wide range of policies for dealing with suspected shoplifters. In some cases all those apprehended were referred to the police, in others as few as one-third (contrary to the recommendation of the Home Office Working Party that all those apprehended should be referred to the police).

"Even these figures, however, obscure the extent to which the shops varied in their use of discretion. As is known from previous studies, age was an important factor in decisions to apprehend - the very young or old being less likely to be stopped, and less likely if stopped to be reported to the police. Similarly, physical and mental condition such as pregnancy or depression were often taken into account in decisions to prosecute. In addition many stores operated within cash limits: they would not contact the police if the offender had taken only one inexpensive item, when there was some possibility that it was a mistake, and where the costs to the store in terms of the lost service of the detective while at the police station or in court outweighed the value of the goods involved.



"What this study was able to demonstrate, however, was how much the policies of stores and shops in relation to shoplifting differed not only between shops but between stated store policy and actual practice."

(p. 25)

As this same study notes, the variety of policies - and practices - has a number of significant implications.

"First there exists a large number of people who are apprehended and recorded by stores as shoplifters but not referred to the police. Secondly, the figures already quoted for referral rates need to be interpreted within the concept of preventative action - the point being that there were known to be far more shoplifters than those apprehended. Thirdly, it appears that store detectives do more than apprehend suspects and refer them to police; they also operate in many situations where prosecution is not the aim and the strategies and techniques they employ require a degree of tact and skill. Further, there does not appear to be any standard method of preventing shoplifting; the tactics used differ from store to store, and vary according to the time of day or year and the number of suspects."<sup>4</sup>

(p. 27)

I have already emphasized the contradictions surrounding the position occupied by private security. The specific context of retail security provides a microcosm of some of the ambiguities which the private security function and private security employee must negotiate. This largely hinges on the paradox that private security is supposed to detect offences and hence deter by detecting, but is not necessarily supposed to deter by apprehending those detected. As May puts it, "apprehension is inherently problematic" (p. 156). This assertion rests on three factors:



"Firstly, the security officer can never be certain of the suspect's response to intervention. For the first time she finds herself having to react to events rather than dictating them. Secondly, the limits to her authority remain unclear. While a security officer may regard her actions as morally justified, she cannot know that they are legally justifiable. Intervention must always proceed with the fear that one day this ignorance will be exposed. Thirdly, even if the security officer can show that her actions were both morally and legally justified she may find that the Company for whom she works does not regard them as commercially justified. That is, in the final analysis she must take care not only to avoid violating the law that remains unknown (and, until too late, unknowable) but also a Company "policy" that is, as I have argued, essentially ambiguous."

(p. 156)

But beyond these problems in the practice of private security, the case of shoplifting (as opposed to the more difficult issue of shrinkage as a whole) also highlights two other issues central to examination of the private security world. First, their contribution to the construction of official statistics and second, the prevalence of what I call the 'security mentality' and its tendency to typologise and stereotype.

The official recording of the crime of shoplifting is suggestive about the contribution of the security industry to popular perceptions of the incidence of crime in society, insofar as, in filtered and digested forms, such popular perceptions are informed by reports of trends in criminal statistics. Scepticism towards such statistics is not of course the monopoly of academic criminologists. James Anderton, Chief Constable of Greater Manchester police referred to the problems with shoplifting statistics in an address to an international security conference in 1978. Discussing thefts from shops and stores he remarked that:

"in the light of all the uncertainty surrounding this matter and the irrelevance of most statistics, I am reluctant to mention the number of crimes of shoplifting recorded by the police. It is nonetheless significant that the number of recorded crimes of theft from shops and stores in England and Wales rose from 25,756 in 1956 to 180,993 in 1976; an increase of 603%. Such a growth must lead one to conclude that the true incidence - as much as the better detection of shoplifting offences - has increased."

(Anderton, 1978:17)



Shoplifting may have indeed increased in its incidence, it is likely in inflationary times, but still we cannot be certain by how much. We can however be certain that the private security industry has 'inflated' the statistics by increasing detection rates, and in many cases pushing for prosecution. The growth of private security and 'crime prevention' advice has meant widespread employment of store detectives, the installation of closed circuit television, surveillance devices, electronic 'tagging' etc. The resulting likelihood of increased rates of detection of offence (not necessarily of commission of offences) does indeed show up in the statistics for these boom years of private security growth.

Table 3.1: Offences of Shoplifting Known to the Police

Year	Shoplifting Offences	Total of all Indictable	Shoplifting Offences as % of All Offences
1966	68,288	1,999,859	5.3%
1969	91,169	1,488,638	6.1%
1973	130,161	1,657,669	7.8%
1976	180,993	2,135,713	8.5%

Source: Compiled from Home Office Statistics

The fact that retail managements have unknowable and ambiguous 'policies' about apprehension and prosecution of shop-lifters should not be confused with the inclinations of security staff. Similarly, identifying a system of private justice which employs security staff to detect and apprehend on occasion but which leaves the next stage of disposition of offenders to employing managements (to which security staff naturally ultimately defer), does not mean that there are not inclinations and structural pressures found in the position of security staff which disincline them to whole-heartedly go along with decisions not to apprehend or prosecute. Senior security staff at retail companies head offices and security companies advising retailers will generally try to encourage a policy of apprehension and prosecution. Security staff on the shop floor must mediate between the reasons for such an inclination and the store management practices which will often seek to discourage apprehension or at least prosecution.



May notes some of the factors which produce this dilemma, starting from the point of how the efficiency of store managements versus the efficiency of store security staff, might be evaluated:

". . . although management retains ultimate responsibility for store security, its efficiency, in that respect is measured essentially in terms of profitability, not shoplifting apprehensions. Security staff, however, occupy a different position. Given that neither the level nor the source of "shrinkage" is known with any degree of accuracy the number of apprehensions becomes the one objective test of the security officer's efficiency. Evidence given to the Home Office Working Party suggests that some companies do in fact employ this method of evaluation. (1973, b)

"Like all security organizations (e.g. police, army) security staff in stores find themselves on the horns of a dilemma. While on the one hand the elimination of the problem might be regarded as a measure of their effectiveness, at the same time this would remove their *raison d'etre*. The ideal situation calls for an expanding crime problem which security staff can show they are on top of, and this is most readily demonstrated through the volume of apprehensions.

"These situational pressures are reinforced by ideological factors. Security staff for the most part possess what I can best describe as a "police mentality"; that is, they tend to see shoplifters as constituting a limited and readily identifiable group who sooner or later will find opportunities to steal."

(May, 1978:148-149)

Such stereotyping was evident in my own research on security staff who also held a world-view, cosmology or ideology like that which May refers to as a "police mentality" although I have called it the "security mentality" in order to distinguish it from the ideology and occupational culture of the police (see Chapter 2; cf. also South, 1983). I conclude this review of the issues relating to retail security (which could form the basis of a whole separate study) by elaborating on the nature of security mentality stereotyping as illustrated by a quote from a popular Handbook for Detectives (Meek, 1967) and noting the important but neglected (here, as elsewhere) consequences of over-zealous certainty about some people feasibly looking like and therefore probably being shoplifters - the case of wrongful apprehension and allegation.

The occupational cultures of private security and the police typically assert that they seek to avoid prejudice and stereotyping, acting only



on what they have reason to suspect, have observed, have evidence of and so on. Evidently however, occupational practice (and its urging of short-hand and expediency), occupational experience and occupational folk-wisdom, all combine to provide pointers, hints and warning signs. Up to a point this is understandable, 'common sense', even logically desirable in terms of capitalising on the value of experience. What is required at this point however is good judgement not a good imagination. The place of stereotyping, and its ideological significance, in the operational security mentality is a cause for concern. It is disturbing in its tendency to dichotomise the 'them' who are deviant, criminal, weird, etc. and 'us' who are upright, honest, clean-living etc. No matter how liberally coated, the underlying assumptions can be strongly discriminatory towards many social groups and, in particular xenophobic towards those regarded as 'foreigners'.

Meek's Handbook for Detectives offers a good example. An experienced commentator he adopts a technique familiar in private security texts - the adoption of a 'liberal' pseudo-psychology to cover his prejudices.

"It is frequently found that arrested hoisters suffer from the loss of a limb deformity, or from some facial disfigurement such as a birth-mark; or they are hump-backed or have a cleft palate, or an uncontrollable nervous twitch, or extremely offensive breath, or some permanent complaint of which they are only too conscious though it may not be apparent to others. Such misfortunes can develop in their victims a mood of resentment against the world in general which they try to assuage by vengeful actions such as writing anonymous letters and stealing from shops. A cripple can always anticipate merciful treatment so has no need to put forward a complicated defence. Customers with ailments or disfigurements sad though it may be must therefore be watched.

"Foreigners, particularly hard-up au pair girls from countries where attractive goods are not so generously displayed fall easily for the temptation of shoplifting. Being a long way from home makes them reckless."

(Meek, 1967:50-51)

Not surprisingly, if this kind of advice influences or resonates with the opinions and attitudes of security staff then in their practice they will inevitably not only apprehend people 'caught in the act' (who may or may not conform to stereotypes), but will also be



encouraged in their belief that they 'know what to look for' and apprehend a number of perfectly innocent parties. In some cases, where security staff have not detected any shoplifting at periods when they might expect to, it might be hypothesized that they will increasingly turn their attention to customers who 'fit' the stereotypes and perhaps wishing to deter by indicating their interest and making their surveillance apparent, could encourage 'suspicious' behaviour on the part of the worried and embarrassed shoppers. The consequences could be wrongful accusation. In response to an apparently rising number of cases of wrongful accusation, (though this is truly an area of statistical quicksand), an organisation now offers a help and advisory service - CCAS - Crisis Counselling for Alleged Shoplifters. Regina Dollar, Coordinator of CCAS, describes what the organisation does:

"CCAS aims to offer sympathy and advice to genuine cases of forgetfulness or error on the part of the shopper. If necessary, we can refer those wrongly accused to expert help in their area. Other commitments we have are to make the consumer much more aware of their rights should they ever find themselves in this awful situation. We are also waging a continuous campaign against certain stores whose names we feel keep cropping up with alarming regularity."

(King, 1983:17) (Emphasis added)

A counsellor with CCAS explains a further element of the process of intimidation which can take the stages of wrongful apprehension further than the initial challenge, a development which in itself might confirm the security officer's beliefs about the suspicious nature of the person apprehended:

"It is a dreadful experience to be stopped by security staff when you have done nothing wrong," says Harry Kauffer, Deputy Executive Counsellor. "People start staring and very soon a crowd gathers. It is hardly suprising therefore that rather than cause a fuss, many entirely innocent shoppers accompany the security officer to the manager's office."

(King, 1983:17)

Retail security is clearly an area of ambiguity, it is also indicative of the power and of the contradictions of discretionary private justice. Having sought to emphasize such points throughout, it is only fitting to end on a note of paradox and irony. CCAS would undoubtedly be among the first to condemn the basis and nature of



stereotyping found in the security mentality, to deny the validity of 'occupational knowledge' which says that you can 'sense the guilty type' and to emphasize that being accused of shoplifting and then being asked questions about it is a harrowing experience and needs to be handled with sensitivity. It is then an interesting testament to the power of the mythology of stereotyping to find the coordinator of CCAS invoking the concepts of 'occupational knowledge' and 'gut feelings'.

"How though can one distinguish between a shopper who has taken something by mistake and an habitual shoplifter who also happens to be a convincing liar? "Trained security staff and the police should be able to tell the difference easily," Regina Dollar insists. "Only a very small percentage of people contacting us are guilty of deliberate theft. After a while we have a gut feeling about them when they ring."

(King, 1983:17)<sup>6</sup>

After such a diverse survey of private security services any attempt at a summary would be difficult and probably pointless. What should be remembered, and I shall now go on to emphasize, is that these are services for hire from what is seen as the 'open and above board', highly visible, contract security companies.

I next turn to the less visible but nonetheless major area of employment of security staff and practices, the in-house security staffs and departments of business and industry. I shall then move progressively through specialised security industries, such as alarms, locks and safes etc. toward more clandestine and less reputable aspects of the private security sector.



## In-House Security

I shall devote less attention to In-House security for several reasons. First, although it appears to employ more personnel than the statistically enumerated staff of private security companies, this figure is inflated by staff who do a variety of duties which are not necessarily of a security nature. Secondly, the range of actual security functions performed by in-house staff while wide is necessarily not as wide as the range performed throughout the private security sector as a whole. Thus most in-house security is of the mundane nature of patrol and gate-keeping duties etc., already well-covered. There is however a relatively new specialism which has developed with particular regard to in-house security arrangements whether provided by in-house security managers or by contracted security consultants. This is the concept of risk-management and evaluation, and I shall discuss some of its principles at the end of this section.

From the point of view of purely cost considerations, then the widespread persistence of large scale employment of in-house security staffs is odd. The commercial argument of those who proclaim the virtues of contract security usually emphasizes that the attraction of hiring an outside agency as against retaining in-house staff is probably most significantly the added labour costs of in-house security staff. An argument increasingly heard in relation to the privatisation of public services, this argument has long been around in selling the privatisation of security in the private sector. As Garner summarises,

"for round-the-clock, all year round protection, one needs at least seven men on the payroll depending upon the size of the plant, as each eight hour shift has to be covered and holidays or emergencies like illness need to be taken into account. National insurance, pensions, uniform, holiday pay and sometimes transport home after late shifts, all need to be included for the full cost to be ascertained. (This is of course before training costs are added)."

(1978:68)

Such requirements which in-house employers usually have to meet to bring their security staff into line with all other employees' benefits, hours and so on, are not, of course, problems which the



contract security employers tend to be overly-concerned with. (Although in interviews with representatives of MATSA the principal trade union in contract security - conducted in 1983, it was suggested that often, or at least occasionally, security staff may be in a different union to the rest of the work-force which weakens their position whilst allowing management to suggest that this is best for industrial harmony. The major trade union on site will then be unconcerned about the conditions of service of the security staff and more interested in what they do. The security staff, if indeed unionised at all - something else which management can discourage on grounds of 'conflicts of loyalty' - will in any case be in the very weak position of the minority without allies).

Nonetheless, in terms of strict numbers, in-house security (on available statistics, and consonant with trends in the USA and Canada) seems to employ more staff than contract security, at a ratio by the late 1970s of 3:2 (cf. Shearing and Stenning, 1981:202-203) (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Private Security Personnel: United Kingdom, 1971-78

	(000s)		Change (%)	
	1971	1978	1971-78	Yearly Average
Public Police*	97.3	109	12	1.6
Private Security**	80	100	25	3.2
In-House	50	60	20	2.6
Contract	30	40	33	4.2
Ratio Police/ Private Security	6:5	1.09:1		
Ratio In-House/Contract	5:3	3:2		

\* Source Reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary for the years 1971 and 1978 (app. 1, "Total Police Strength not including Civilians, Special Constables and Staff") (London H.M.S.O., 1972 and 1979).

\*\* Source: United Kingdom, Home Office 1979, p. 3.

(n.b. Although this is not officially stated or broken down in available statistics, on the basis of the current research I would suggest that the category of in-house security is often a 'convenience' category for many companies, covering staff with multiple roles - the term 'security' adding a touch of company efficiency and employee status. Such additional roles would include responsibility for out-of-hours shipping and freighting,



delivery, checks on health and safety regulations, maintenance of some items and areas, including for example cleaning duties and so on.)

As a general and standard definition of the expected activities of in-house security staff I derive the following from a wide variety of literature originating from respondents in the research, from advice given by various business associations and government departments and from the writings of specialists on industrial security. The first two sources tend to emphasize the basic, the routine and the mundane whilst the latter, principally USA writers, tend to add an over-emphasis on readiness and capability for dealing with the exceptional like industrial espionage and terrorism. Hence this 'definition of activities' is something of an averaging-out exercise. Perhaps as a result of this (although I think not) at this basic, standardised level of the functions of in-house security they come out in formal terms as little different from the formal functions of contract security staff (patrol/static guard).

- Control and direct and indirect supervision and surveillance of the work-force. Checking for example on clocking on and off procedures and maintaining criteria for suspicion of personnel who may be absenting themselves from shifts or involved in pilferage etc.
- Control of access to site premises, both entry and exit, involving the recording of arrival and departure of vehicles, as well as ensuring that visitors are helpfully guided to their destinations (a function of diplomacy and company representation), whilst ensuring that intruders are discouraged (a function of security and company solicitude).
- Finally, general responsibility to ensure the security, securing, surveillance and recording of the state of site premises.

I do not have the space to go into the more rare and exceptional (and hence interesting) aspects of in-house security services and functions. However, having outlined the basic levels of in-house operations, it would be misleading not to stress that - corresponding to trends in the private security sector generally - in-house security engages in both specialist operations and in certain industries can



also, necessarily take on specialist forms of organisation. To offer three examples therefore, I take first the case of surveillance as an elaborate in-house security operation in an industrial concern, and secondly the development of airline security, as reported by one of its insiders in the 1950s and early 1960s. Finally, and briefly I offer the example of how major economic developments - in this case the exploitation of North Sea Oil, can open up new circumstances and responsibility for companies in their provision of in-house (and contract) security.

The surveillance of trade union representatives, their offices and meetings within companies is probably, in general, not a lot more sinister than actions that union representatives will take to keep an eye on what managements are up to, differences reside in matters of power and resources. As Bunyan (1976) observes:

"while bugging and tapping of union offices and 'phones is not unknown, the practice does not seem widespread. But surveillance could be carried out in other ways."

(p. 252)

Bunyan reports that in 1973, equipment was installed in the office of the Chief Security Officer of Guest, Keen and Nettlefolds Birmingham plant which enabled him to eavesdrop on all calls made on the plant's internal telephone system and interrupt should he so desire! The equipment was removed when the workers at the plant found out about it and made protests. The explanation offered by GKN's Administrative Director was less than wholly convincing. The machine, he said, had been installed to allow the Security Officer to contact his staff:

"His men are trained in First Aid for instance. They might have been needed for that purpose. The fact that the 'phone enabled the security chief to listen in on all our 'phones was coincidental."

(Bunyan, 1976:253; Sunday People, 7th January, 1973)

In the context of in-house security directly operating across international boundaries, Fish (1962) provides an 'insiders', if exceptional, account of the overlap between private security (in this case airline security departments), and international civil police agencies.



Such overlap and collaboration most commonly occurs in relation to terrorism (though this is a recent development) and smuggling. For example, in the case of drugs:

" . . . although Customs and police at Hong Kong were kept on their toes in an attempt to keep up with the increasing ingenuity of the smugglers, we all knew the grim facts. The seizures were no more than a minute part of what was getting through. Heroin had been discovered in a shipment of small pictures, neatly pasted in between the picture and the cardboard backing; also in a hidden compartment in the back of a wooden doll. On another occasion, the stuff had merely been mixed with a shipment of rice. Buchanan's (B.O.A.C) private intelligence system went into action between Hong Kong and Bangkok. Security officers, in co-operation with the Hong Kong police began a discrete watch on passengers and regular freight shipments in and out of the colony."

(Fish, 1962:162)

Although airports have at various times been 'policed' by the public police and at other times by locally based 'private' statutory police forces (usually run by the local authority transport, docks or port 'authority'), private security companies have also been widely employed in various capacities, both generally throughout airports as well as in the employment of particular companies, for example for the guarding of goods in transit. But the operating airline companies also maintain their own security staff. The first airline to seriously utilise its own private security department was BOAC, establishing it in 1945 under the direction of an ex-detective inspector from Scotland Yard - Donald Fish - who just prior to taking up the appointment, was also on secondment 'for special duties' with MI5 as well as being a captain in the Intelligence Corps (Fish, 1962:52). Fish, writing of his career in 1962, recognised that international law was not then (nor is it now), prepared to deal with the sort of crime, liabilities and other problems which the post-war expansion of the air-routes and capability of air technology would bring.

His forecast of the recognised necessity for an international air-security police has however (not yet) been realised:



"Today, everyone in air security knows that once the really big trouble hits the airlines, there will be precious little help forthcoming and little the law will be able to do about it. It is this weakness that long ago convinced me of the over-riding need for a code of international criminal air law. This on its own will not be enough, for the national police forces are not the people to enforce it effectively, even with the help of Interpol. Instead, if the airlines are to meet the very real threat of highly organised air crime hanging over them at the moment, it is their own security forces who will have to do the work. Sooner or later, they will have to combine under some central authority to form the nucleus of a really international Air Police Force, with full legal powers to attack air crime wherever it occurs, irrespective of local laws and national boundaries. There seems no other way."

(Fish, 1962:26)

The cooperative vision that Fish tendered may be a little melodramatic; it was offered at a time when Interpol seemed a genuinely successful international force for the cooperative exchange of information about crime and the contemporary feeling was that such an auspicious start could only be improved upon. Further, Fish had himself seen the growth of intimate cooperation between the security staff of various airlines, not only among themselves, but also with specialised police agencies of various countries - from CID to drug/currency/fraud/forgery squads etc. to intelligence agencies. However, it remains now, as realistically it probably did then extremely unlikely that any nation would give up the sort of sovereignty or legal monopoly which the establishment of an 'Air Police' would imply.

Nevertheless, although Fish suggests that "there seems no other way," we might reasonably anticipate an alternative system of coordination of airline security. And indeed professional security associations, liaison between security staff and encouragement from bodies such as the United Nations has led to greater coordination in air security, most obviously and explicitly as a response to air terrorism but in other areas also. Essentially, de facto extension and coordination of airline security 'authority', responsibilities - and legally granted powers - has occurred without recourse to the creation of a cumbersome and accountable bureaucracy, or the divesting of any legal powers by any state to an external authority.



A third example of specialised in-house security is an example of changes in law and policing resulting from extensions of property rights and the redefinition of private versus state jurisdiction afforded by the relationship between commerce and state after the discovery of North Sea Oil. At a time when the energy crisis was underlining the true seriousness of deepening recession and rising inflation, the exploitation of North Sea Oil was greeted as a saviour. However, the period of the late 1960s and early 1970s was also characterised by the growing tactical capability of international and indigenous terrorist groups. This development generated considerable concern about the security of North Sea Oil and Gas. There are now over forty major companies involved in off-shore production and development operations and probably well over 150 operational rigs. To provide constant security against capture or sabotage a series of secret contingency plans were drawn up by the UK government and the Offshore Operators Association.

Offshore rigs are, of course, rather uniquely difficult to get access to and this means that the first level of security is provided by nature. However, it also means that the provision of a permanent civil police or armed forces presence would be stretching the limits of the conventional 'brief' of these forces as well as stretching their establishment numbers in terms of other commitments. Typically then, the commercial compromise leaves the owners of the rigs responsible for "structural and operational security measures on their installations" (Smart and Hodgson, 1979:40). However, as Smart and Hodgson (ibid.) detail, there are two further levels of responsibility which neatly illustrate a tiered approach to provision of security by the state which now confidently incorporates (as indeed in many instances it always has), the level of private security.<sup>7</sup>

The police, by virtue of the terms of the Continental Shelf Act (1964):

"have authority to operate in the sea areas within a 500 metre radius of offshore installations. The Chief Constables exercise their authority under the Port of Operation rule and respond to incidents of platforms registered in the ports within their areas of jurisdiction."

(Ibid.)



The third level of responsibility rests with the armed forces who "have to be prepared to act in support of the civil power at offshore installations to contain urban guerilla action or threats," (ibid.) but who would (theoretically) be used under the direction of the civil power. This is a serious commitment by the state to provide back-up and rapid support; however the absence of a permanent immediate presence necessitates placing great emphasis on sophisticated in-house security provision along lines worked out in negotiations between the Offshore Operators Association and government departments and agencies. This Association also lays down guide-lines for stringent safety precautions which health and safety officials are supposed to oversee with the cooperation of security staff and the police (though with a documented poor safety record in the North Sea coordination at this level may leave something to be desired).

### Risk Management

Mention of health and safety responsibilities is by no means incidental in this context however. The specialism of risk-management which is offered to commercial customers on a consultancy basis but which also has a primary place in any description of comprehensive in-house security coverage, embraces, as one independent consultant observes,

"such a wide spectrum that one needs to start with some terms of reference. In this context, it ranges from the Health and Safety at Work Act, through the fire regulations, to measures against fraud, theft and terrorism."

(Hasler, 1978:45)

As an in-house security services manager makes clear, none of this is new. Risk management "is simply a means of bringing together functions which have hitherto been conducted quite separately and, at the same time, enables the whole subject of the management of risk to be treated in a more sophisticated and orderly manner" (Bridges, 1978:46) Indeed, the in-vogue status of risk-management as a concept needs little further consideration except to emphasise that its significance is in "bringing together" previously disparate functions (although it is arguable how really separate they have been in the past). In terms of the development of private security, what should



be noted is the emphasis on programmed planning; an idea well developed since the 1960s in the USA (cf. Momboisse, 1968). Essentially, programmed planning (which can integrate highly sophisticated psychological approaches to critical, vulnerable and hazardous situations) boils down to 'a place for everyone and everyone in their place'. It is first and foremost directed at the total security of premises and plant. For example, in Momboisse's classic text Industrial Security for Strikes, Riots and Disasters (1968) the two principal criteria for risk evaluation determining the degree of protection necessary are discussed in terms of the political geography of "the facility". 'Criticality', for example is defined thus:

"The portion of the facility which is considered to be of high criticality is one whose partial or complete loss would have an immediate and serious impact on the ability of the facility to provide continuity of production or service for a considerable period of time."

(Momboisse, 1968:8)

'Vulnerability' is "the susceptibility of a facility to espionage, thefts, slow downs or work stoppage for any cause" (ibid., p. 9). But programmed planning is not parochial; it can also extend to the coordination of information and development of provision for mutual aid between companies and outside services.

Risk management and planning is not new. In many ways its in-vogue status, especially with insurers, is misleading in this respect. It is however, clearly the line of development which corporate (and even small-scale) enterprise will follow with regard to the organisation of in-house security in the future.

### 3. Defence, Deterrence and Detection: Alarms, Detection Devices, Locks and Safes

Although this section is principally concerned with the security hardware industries, it should be apparent, and borne in mind, that there is a key role played in the fortunes of the private security industry overall and especially the alarm and lock industries by the insurance sector. This is self-evident but no less significant for being so. After all, the major growth (in value terms) of private security has been in the commercial not the private (household) sector. Such growth is evidently not unrelated to where the influence



and pressure of insurers is strongest (because of risk criteria and high premiums for plant and stock etc.) The fear of crimes such as burglary is very high among the general public, yet without concerted encouragement from insurers this fear has not resulted in particularly significant investment in devices such as intruder alarms. As the Sunday Times reported on 22nd October, 1978, one-quarter of all households carried no burglary insurance at all; one-half of those that did were heavily under-insured and of the 27,000 (estimated) alarms installed in 1977 only one-third were installed in private houses.<sup>8</sup> The point is that, there are evidently grounds for scepticism about the rising tide of crime generally being the sole, or even principal, push to the growth of private security. Hence the complex picture must also take serious account of other institutionalised economic forces.

The concerns of the insurance sector in relation to private security revolve more around the deterrence of crime than catching criminals. As the MATSA (1983) report notes, this can produce an odd conflict because insurance companies:

"prefer, and often stipulate, noisy visible alarms (; by) the time the police or guard have responded there is of course little chance of catching the intruder. This conflict of policy between insurance companies and security alarm makers on the one hand, and the police or Home Office on the other, is a running sore for the industry."

(pp. 8-9)

Nonetheless, insurance companies and their own priorities remain extremely powerful within these relationships. Reports of business consultancies make no mistake about emphasizing that a customer's interest in security is generally the result of their insurance companies' advice about the unacceptability of the risk without some security cover. This has been the standard pattern. But recently some insurers have begun to actually offer discounts on premiums for customers installing alarm systems. In some cases, insurers have linked directly with security hardware manufacturers, for example Economic Insurance and Hoover which markets a DIY alarm system. At the level of inter-industry liaison, limited formal links exist, with the British Insurance Association being represented on the National Inspection Board of the National Supervisory Council for Intruder



Alarms. This latter body maintains a Roll of Approved Installers who are to adhere to British Standard 4737 covering the installation and maintenance of alarm systems.

While a number of commentators have argued that NSCIA has been fairly ineffective it should still be stressed that even for small companies it can be quite important to be a member of the organisation because insurance companies are then more likely to accept it as an installer. Members of the NSCIA can also be members of the Alarm Systems section of the British Security Industry Association which aims to develop policy promoting high standards for screening and training of employees. A second sub-section of the BSIA that should be noted is the Alarm Manufacturers Section concerned with development of guidelines for standards and performance of equipment and alarm systems. However, the membership of both these groups is quite small; at June 1983 the former had thirty-six members and the latter only fifteen.

Despite significant growth, profits in the alarm business have not always been easy to come by. In value terms the commercial sector of customers has been the most important, though this is probably now close to saturation, but the volume potential of the private, household market may still offer a great deal of scope. Despite all this, and it has to be acknowledged, largely to do with the absence of standardised accountancy practices within the industry, there has recently been some controversy over profits in the alarm business. 'Security Profits Cause Alarm' ran the 'Exclusive' lead story in the Sunday Times Business News on 31st July, 1983.

The alarm business is not, of course, new. Electronic alarms were first used commercially in the UK in 1916 and, familiarly, were introduced as a result of pressure from insurers on furriers in London's East End, emphasizing the deterrent value of alarms. But even then, the USA and Scandinavia had a longer history and more sophisticated use of alarms. The next technological staging post in the use of alarms in the UK did not come until 1936 with the use of Post Office telephone lines to connect alarm systems to a central alarm monitoring point, pioneered in London by the Rely-a-Bell



company. This system was shortly extended throughout major UK population centres but despite its considerable greater efficiency it proved quite expensive. In 1938, a new system appeared based on the automatic dialling system of the telephone network, enabling a silent message to be sent over the 999 emergency lines and first used by the Burgot Alarm Company (Dring, 1972:19). By 1971 one authoritative estimate of the number of alarms in use was set at around 110,000 of which 76,000 were directly connected to the police (Dring, 1972). However, it was still evidently unclear even in 1972, as it is now after years of growth, how many alarm firms were in business. In 1960 there were eleven known firms, by 1970 the Trade Directory listed ninety-eight, but it was accepted then, as now, that many more were unlisted. It was hoped that coherence, standardisation and accountability could be brought to the alarm industry by the establishment in 1971 of the National Supervisory Council for Intruder Alarms, supported by the Home Office, the police, insurance companies and the security industry.

From the latter two involved parties representatives of the British Insurance Association and the British Security Industry Association alternate to take the Chair of the Council. With laudable aims and a staff of seven experienced electronic technicians acting as regional inspectors to follow up complaints and check on applicants for membership, the NSCIA generated some optimism among supporters and neutral observers. The real effectiveness of its "supervisory" role was, however, based on the willingness and voluntary cooperativeness of the firms in the market-place to allow themselves to be supervised. This was, unsurprisingly, frequently not forthcoming. Further, as one media observer of the crime control scene noted;

"in 1979, eight years after its formation, it was apparent that the general public was not aware of the Council's existence nor of the help it could offer either to those with alarms installed by Approved Installers or to those thinking of having one installed."

(Burden, 1980:113)

Without formal license-based regulation the watchdog will remain toothless and its bark ignored. The case for control is more serious when NSCIA, aware of its own limitations, nonetheless suggests that "at least 750,000 alarm systems are needed in Britain." (Burden, 1980:114)



Probably the most frequently cited problem with alarm systems and the industry which provides them is the extremely high rate of false alarms. It is quite often felt that one result of this situation is the development of an attitude among the police that "the boy cries wolf too often" (cf. Matthews, 1972:29). But there is anyway a general problem of speeding up the response time of the police as usually it is first a key-holding security company which receives the alarm and then has to notify the police to check the cause of the alarm. This fairly typical procedure occurs where the alarm is discovered by a patrolling guard on site or where the alarm is fed direct to a security company's central control. If the alarm is not wired to a centralised check-board with a security firm then in the past it was either wired direct to the police (a practice no longer allowed by most forces and strongly discouraged by others) or else it simply rings in isolation until acted upon by somebody.

Not surprisingly, many in the security industry have argued that this is a serious problem area in which there is a need for much closer cooperation with the police on an operational basis. One suggestion, for example, has been to build private security alarm and guard control centres close to, or even next door to, police stations. Other members of the industry have, it should be noted, been very wary of such suggestions in terms of their concern for the industry's public image and this caution has been expressed to me in interviews with both very senior and very junior employees in security companies. Nonetheless, employment of new communications technology is being seriously exploited by the major companies in efforts to provide a more sophisticated and efficient service.

The relationship between the alarm companies and the police is clearly one that is often, classically fraught with difficulties, and is founded, and occasionally flounders, upon tensions. The official police 'line' has some praise for the efforts made in the past twenty or so years to achieve a mutual operational accommodation although the Metropolitan Commissioner has recently called for more to be done. But a different, unofficial, subcultural response can tend to view private security in general, and private alarm companies in particular, as close to parasitic. Other researchers in this area



also feel that they have detected this sentiment. One of the major contributors to the literature on private security in Canada similarly notes that alarm companies are seen by the police as being among that section of the public which 'use' the police "exploiting their relationship as allies" (Shearing, 1981:290).

Moving here from the general to the relevantly particular, Shearing observes that the police:

"complained that the public were often not as helpless as they seemed. The public, they believed, sought to use the police to accomplish their own self-serving ends. The police became particularly incensed when persons misused their power and status for these reasons. In the police eyes, one of the worst groups of offenders were private alarm companies who 'had the nerve' to ask the police to respond to their alarms for them."

(291)

Whilst it is in the alarm company business in particular, (at least in the UK - and I believe in Canada), that efforts have been made to simplify and better synchronise police and security responses to alarms, a significant degree of resentment seems to remain. The feeling may principally be one of professional disdain for imagined (or real) negligence or incompetence on the part of alarm companies. As one West Yorkshire beat constable told me: "Of course they can do something about it!"

Whatever the persistent shortcomings, the development of security technology, and indeed of the private security sector as a whole, is strongly related to a competitive cycle not simply between customers demanding better security from their suppliers but more importantly between security systems and those who attempt to neutralise them.

Obviously, security technology has, in one sense, simply kept pace with technological developments generally. As the US 1976 Private Security Task Force commented:

"with the application of advanced technology to the security industry, even one of the oldest security devices, the lock, was subject to revolutionary changes: combination locks, combination time locks, delayed action time locks, combination locks with surveillance and electronic controls, and eventually access controlled systems that utilised the technology of television and mini-computers."



But within this history of technological advance, professional competition lies at the heart. Whether the professionals are designers of security systems or of organised crimes. O'Toole (1978:186) draws this point out quite nicely:

"Locks, safes, vaults and burglar alarms are among the most traditional paraphernalia of the Private Sector. Locks date back to Ancient Greece. They were thoroughly commonplace in the mid-19th century when American locksmith Alfred Hobbs challenged his English colleagues with the boast that he could pick the best of their products, but no English locksmith could defeat a Hobbs-built lock. He made good on both claims. Such contests of ingenuity advanced the art of locksmithing, even as competition between electronic eavesdroppers and countermeasures technicians elaborated audio-surveillance techniques a hundred years later. Edwin Holmes, who invented the first electric burglar alarm in 1853 put it this way: 'The whole history of bank burglary and vault building is competitive; and in the same manner that a new system is devised to protect armour plate, so the burglar finds or devises a new method of attack.'"

As McIntosh (1971) has succinctly argued, changes in the organisation of thieving have generated a cycle in which the manufacturers of protective devices of all kinds have had to respond with their own, increasingly sophisticated changes. McIntosh cites the example of burglary as a fairly routinised craft form of crime up to the industrialising and urbanising 19th century. Quite naturally the great new buildings housing the new industrial wealth tended to be increasingly better protected. Thieves successfully rising to such a 'challenge' were met, in due course, by further improvements in protection techniques and "an innovative cycle was under way." (McIntosh, 1971:117) McIntosh presents the history of the safe since the 19th century, as a good example of this process:

"Since Elizabethan days, strong-box locks with other locks had been vulnerable to the Black Art of skeleton keys and pick-locks. But this was defeated when the warded lock was replaced by the lever or tumbler locks. In turn techniques were developed for forcing locks off and for defending against this; for drilling holes in locks by various means and for defending against these; for dynamiting locks and defending against this, and so on. The technology of the 'peter man' (safebreaker) has by now moved through gelignite, oxy-acetylene or oxy-arc cutting equipment and even to the use of the thermic lance to cut through concrete to get at a safe, which puts some safebreakers at the forefront of technological advance. So rapidly is the technology changing in this sphere that leading safemakers



are contemplating hiring safes rather than selling them on the grounds that, unlike most industrial or commercial equipment, an outmoded safe loses all not just some of its usefulness."

(McIntosh, 1971:118)

According to one professional 'heist', or 'hold-up' man, the improved security of bank safes, particularly the introduction of the time lock, and the tendency for ordinary safes just to carry non-negotiable cheques and securities has prompted a move away from burglary and safe-breaking to hold-ups (McIntosh, 1971:123). This kind of view is shared by other experienced commentators on crime and crime prevention. As Worsley (1983:13) recollects of his visiting lectures at the Stafford Crime Prevention Centre, the "most important 'law'" he devised to provoke his audience was that "security equipment and services do not prevent crime. They divert it to other targets and change its pattern, even producing violence, but in the national context they prevent nothing."

But all of this is to consider the technology and effectiveness of crime-prevention related security devices and systems. The areas of security hardware cannot be left without some brief description of security technology less clearly designed for employment in the commendable, if ill-starred, pursuit of crime prevention.

#### 4. Security Technology, and Issues of Surveillance and Privacy

This section explicitly moves away from a focus on so-called crime prevention to briefly note examples of security technology designed with matters such as industrial espionage and personal information storage and retrieval in mind. I start by quoting a sceptical note about crime, capitalism and technology.

In the early 1970s, the new wave of critical criminologists argued that:

"we may be entitled to a degree of scepticism . . . as to the centrality of crime (even in a period of 'societal breakdown') in the development of new technological devices and machinery by capitalist powers."

(Taylor, Walton and Young, 1973:212)



I would contend that whilst the spirit of scepticism remains valid, in the late 1980s we should be wary of 'critical complacency'.

### Personal Surveillance

"Now You Can "Clone" Your Best Employees  
&  
cut applicant screening costs to the bone. Do it with  
"VAPI"  
Voice Analysis Personality Inventory

Generations beyond lie detection and psychological  
assessment.  
Fully validated and complies with EEOC and FEPC  
requirements.  
Rave reviews from users and labor leaders. Slashes  
recruiting  
and training costs, turnover and theft.  
Call collect, 609-452-8960

(Advertisement run in New York state newspapers, 1980)

The common version of the lie-detector or polygraph monitors physiological signs of 'stress' such as heart-rate and, retaining the psychology of the culprit sweating while being grilled, the electrical conductivity of the skin (which 'measures' a person's sweating). Perhaps the Voice Analysis Personality Inventory (a "generation beyond lie detection and psychological assessment") was inevitable as a development. Not because of any leap-frogging with the technological sophistication of organised crime, but because - even in the USA, the Disneyland of personality assessment tests and devices - scepticism about lie-detectors and their effectiveness has been growing. As the Sunday Times (5th December, 1982) reported:

"Lie detectors are being seriously considered as a way of improving Britain's leaking security vetting system. But, according to a leading authority in America - where lie detectors have been widely used for years - they are almost useless. 'It is an insidious myth in the United States that lie detectors produce highly accurate results . . . In fact the best scientific evidence is that the polygraph produces a wrong answer about one time in three . . ."

(Dr. David Lykken, University of Minnesota)

The VAPI advertisement which promises to help employers to "clone"



their best employees (interestingly referring to a more sophisticated form of biological technology in its sales promotion) actually refers to a form of voice stress analysis. According to the Sunday Times report,

"the original voice-stress analyser was invented and marketed by a former CIA man. Because it can be used without the subjects knowledge, even over the telephone, it is widely used for job-vetting in America. Voice-stress analysers are based on the idea that a natural, almost imperceptible, body tremor, with a frequency of about 10 cycles a second, is reduced by stress and that there are resultant detectable changes in speech."

Apparently, four serious studies have been made of the voice stress analyser, including an important one in Israel. "The results," according to Lykken, "were even worse than with the polygraph. They were no better than chance." (Ibid.) Which must lead one to wonder about the "rave reviews" for VAPI from "users and labor leaders" (especially the labor leaders!).

Perhaps capital is not developing amazingly effective technology, although this area, as with others in the private security sector, attracts large research and development investment. There may however be an equally serious danger in the fact that it is prepared to buy and use - on a large scale - technology which is effective only to varying, and eminently disputable, degrees. The widespread embrace of use and acceptance of that fact, brings us ever closer to the reality of being a totally surveilled society. As Hougan (1979) comments of developments in the USA:

"Saber Laboratories President, Leo Jones is correct when he declares that 'Society today is on a surveillance binge', citing the fact that for every bugging device in the hands of government, there are three hundred in the private sector. Indeed, surveillance has become such a routine of western life that we pay it hardly any attention. In the banks, supermarkets, department stores and airports, we're watched - sometimes by kindly eyes, always by hidden ones - and have become accustomed to it."

(p. XX)

Voice analysers and the comments of Hougan and Jones may seem to reflect a picture of American commercial zeal and excess, but for Britain it is less a matter of 'it can't happen here' and rather more one of 'following the American pattern, one, ten or twenty years



later . . .' For example, in 1975 a New Scientist report (Hanlon, 1975), on "electronic warfare" in Britain argued that,

"clearly the increasing squeeze on corporate profits and rising political dissent has led to an escalation of electronic spying on corporate and political opponents, which in the best military tradition has led to an electronic counter-measures capability. Beating the buggers depends upon how much you are willing to pay."

(p. 67)

Apart from the quite naughty pun for New Scientist, this report again indicates the peculiar vampiric thrust for immortality of the development of technology in the private security sector - feeding off its own life-blood; it is highly commercially competitive, insatiable in its efforts to prove itself outdated and in need of rejuvenation and further innovation. For, of course, once simple eavesdropping has become regarded as old-fashioned or impracticable, then the horizons of technological eavesdropping open wide - and almost to infinity. Personal or technical surveillance devices are, as Campbell (1978:600) has succinctly put it, "generally used to attack personal or commercial security; sometimes they are used by those who claim to promote security by such surreptitious means." There is not the space (or the necessity) to describe the variants of 'bugging' devices here, but it should be illustrative to describe the single example of the 'infinity' transmitter.

This, it has to be acknowledged, is one of those sensational examples which most commentators will use for effect. So it is hardly original to draw attention to it; though it should be noted that there seems to be some slight dispute about the extent of its capacity. But for the simple point of indicating the established potential of electronic surveillance devices I defer to the authority of K.G. Wright, one of the major and most prolific commentators on private security in Britain. As Wright puts it,

"The most dangerous of all listening devices . . . . . is the notorious 'infinity transmitter'. The bug itself is much smaller than a matchbox and can be connected to the telephone wiring quickly and easily by a skilled operator. Normal use of the telephone is not affected until the eavesdropper wishes to bring the transmitter into action. When this time comes, he need only dial the number of the telephone he has bugged, and transmit a special tone down the line to activate the microphone. He can do this from



anywhere in the world providing he has direct dialling access to the number he is calling. Thereafter, the microphone will pick up everything that is said within its hearing: the eavesdropper can listen over the open line. Once activated, the bugged telephone will give the 'engaged' signal to callers, but there will be no other indication of anything unusual. If it is possible to connect a microphone in the target room to a different telephone in a neighbouring office, the microphone can be activated in the target room by ringing the number of the telephone in the other office."

"In Britain an incoming call is not finally connected until the handset has been lifted from its cradle at the receiving end of the call. Thus in this country it is necessary to make sure that an incoming call has been answered before transmitting the signal that will activate the infinity device."

(Wright, 1972:223)

In the private security sector the sensational should certainly be treated with scepticism but never simply dismissed: because just as aspects of the security world are mythologised in various media images so can the world of myth be sought in reality. As one of the major suppliers of spy and anti-spy equipment of the 1970s, Lee Tracey, commented on this tendency to the New Scientist, (21st June, 1973:738):

"I was doing special engineering for films such as James Bond, and at the same time selling military equipment in the Middle East. There is a funny parallel between motion pictures and selling goods. On one side you create the fantasies of some writer, on the other you meet people around the world who want the articles created by those fantasies . . . I decided to see what could be done in reality."

While still rather more prevalent in spy fiction than the real world, electronic surveillance, to intrude upon or to protect privacy, and the absence of any effective legal controls, are nonetheless serious realities. As a recent advertisement ran:

"BUGGED? It's quite possible - in fact, quite likely - that you are. The reasons for electronic eavesdropping are numerous. The methods, simple. And the consequences to you . . . devastating."

The apparent irony of this advertisement, appearing in that guardian of civil liberties, The New Statesman (15th February, 1980) presumably reflects a shrewd commercial targetting of the market of investigative journalists, paranoid sociologists and their like . . .



Treatment of the technology of security and security systems necessarily entails exploring the diversity of that market from the boring to the sensational and the mundane to the sinister. The point to be made is that the significance of the private security sector today, and its antecedents in the past, cannot be really appreciated unless the tremendous contribution to patterns of policing, crime and indeed everyday life, which is made by the technology of security is emphasized.

"Contribution" may be a word to use advisedly and with caution here, but if that is so, it is only because there is much to cautiously consider about the positive and negative consequences of developments that "contribute" to the security of people and their property whilst at the same time bringing closer the reality of a surveilled, security-conscious society. Deep ambivalence is perhaps the most appropriate response to such a contradictory history and modern development. Issues of public safeguards and accountability will be discussed in Chapter 4 and a broader analysis of the services of the private security sector offered in Chapter 5.

#### 5. Private Eyes: Private Spies?<sup>9</sup>

While many of the various forms of private security operation can be seen to work at a fairly visible level and changes to our physical environment designed to provide better security also tend to be evident, at least to some degree, there is a further, important dimension of the private security sector which has tended to adopt a very low profile. Its existence and activities are no secret: its practitioners easily found in the Yellow Pages of virtually any town. But it is generally in the nature of the work done by Private Investigators that a low-key 'softly, softly' approach is demanded. Sometimes this is for relatively honourable reasons, like the good name of the client or subject of investigation, at other times it simply facilitates covert and dubious or dishonest practice.

In this section I shall describe the range of activities of this final, key dimension of the private security sector and continue to raise issues of concern which will be more fully taken up in the



following chapter which addresses the case for accountability and control of the private security sector.

To begin with, there is considerable definitional confusion in this area. Terms like private investigator, private detective or enquiry agent do not really reflect any precise degree of characterisation and where some authors choose one term, claiming its particular appropriateness, this generally seems more a matter of whim and preference than taxonomic expertise. Enquiry agent may more commonly be a term used to describe the part-time amateur; private detective may be eschewed as a description by some respectable practitioners seeking to show they do not desire any confusion of their role and powers with those of the police; and private investigator sounds relatively unthreatening yet solid and professional. Nonetheless, here I shall generally follow Draper (1978:27) and use the terms inter-changeably.

The public image of private investigators is also somewhat confused. This too, of course, is strongly related to the influence of the media, both in fictional depictions and in the occasional, usually negative, news report. Not surprisingly, the profession has been consistently concerned about this image problem:

"The private detective works against cheats and bullies in the main, assists and often brings about the end of suffering and cruelties. Why does he not get due credit for his value to the community? The answer is simple - all our Public Relations have been negative and damaging . . ."

(Open Letter, The Association of British Private Detectives; quoted in Thompson, 1970:141).

Public relations efforts do not usually emphasize the saintly qualities of private investigators, but they do commonly emphasize the value of the profession to the community. According to one member of the Institute of Professional Investigators for example,

"There is scarcely a field of modern day existence which does not at some time or another require the services of the Private Investigator."

(Undated document: private files of Bruce George, MP)

Unfortunately, as part of any public relations effort, such statements



are as likely to sound like a sinister threat of all-pervading intrusion as they are a confident professional claim. Certainly private investigators are employed by clients who range across the economic scale from finance houses to ordinary families. Insurance companies, solicitors, large and small companies worried about internal theft or industrial sabotage and interested parties like families or creditors concerned to trace a missing person who is not a priority for the police - may all employ private investigators. In recent years the compilation of personal profiles involving assessment of financial status and moral character has become a growth area of activity, especially as corporate expansion brings with it the commercial version of the 'need to know' principle of who should be told what in the company and the accompanying 'need to know' more about the person(s) being told.

Private detective work is commonly thought of as the occupation of a mysterious class of hard-bitten ex-cops who rent sleazy offices in downtown Los Angeles, start the day with a shot of Jack Daniels and then amble off to investigate a murder, invariably carried out in the environs of Hollywood. There is, of course, a substantial British tradition of 'private enquiry agents' from the Victorian London of the 'worlds first consulting detective' onwards. Today, although the status of all of them is unclear (as the Younger Committee, 1972 earlier found) there seem to be five professional organisations in Britain alone which include private investigators among their members. These are the Association of British Private Detectives, the Association of British Investigators, the Institute of Professional Investigators, the International Professional Security Association (IPSA discussed in more detail in the next chapter), and the Institute of Industrial Security. On a wider international scale, the Council of International Investigators and the World Association of Detectives are affiliates of similar organisations in other countries. By virtue of this network of professional contact one member of the Institute of Professional Investigators asserts that:

"Investigators . . . are able to bring their enquiries to a satisfactory conclusion far quicker than the regular police forces, who are so often hog-tied by red-tape or even politics."

(Ibid.)



The investigation business is expanding. Central to its development there remains (as always) a somewhat individualistic modus operandi which might take its actions well into the unethical and sometimes the illegal, yet at the same time it is apparently striving as never before for professional respectability - or so its occasionally vocal spokespersons would have us believe. The problem is that there is no recognised office or representative for the profession. The competing organisations, with more or less unknown memberships present a jumbled picture. In the past the two organisations that seem to have made the strongest claims for representative credibility also did little to conceal the conflict between them. The Association of British Private Detectives, which seems to have all but disappeared in recent years, was almost evangelical in its approach, publicising the integrity of the profession, apparently gathering evidence of malpractice and even threatening legal action against its perpetrators. Certainly in the late 1960s and early 1970s it was vocal in calling for higher standards and a sense of unity, pride and identity for the practice.

The Association of British Investigators (ABI) not only seems somewhat more moderate in its general tone but would also seem to be able to claim some legitimacy by virtue of its history. The ABI was originally known as the Association of British Detectives (formed in 1953), but changed its name partly, the story goes, because they did not wish to make claims for their members which might lead the public to confusing them with police detectives. It also seems very likely that they wished to avoid being confused with the ABPD. The Association of British Detectives was in turn an amalgamation of the Federation of British Detectives (founded in 1945) and the British Detectives Association (founded in 1919).

All of these organisations represent only a minority of private investigators (the ABI apparently still has only a few hundred members) but their proliferation and lengthy history at least indicate some vitality in a profession that has been around a long, long time. Today, the ABI seems less concerned than the ABPD with the problem of those who may tarnish the general image of the profession and concentrates instead on trying to maintain a high standard among its



own membership, with a code of practice, disciplinary committee and professional examinations. The ABI's Constitution lays down conditions which prospective members must fulfil, but there is no real mechanism of enforcement in practice, the conditions could only apply to the limited number of ABI members anyway, and oddly, though unsurprisingly, its original members were not required to meet them (cf. Madgwick and Smythe, 1974:114).

As with the guesstimates applying to the rest of the private security sector it seems easier to count the number of supposedly representative associations than it does actual private investigators in practice. There are simply no wholly reliable sources of information, government or otherwise. As matters stand there are in any case very few statements to collate and these offer a grossly inadequate basis for detailed discussion in this area or related policy purposes. In 1970, Thompson suggested that "if everyone calling himself (sic) a private detective were to be taken at his word, then the total number of operatives in the field might be set as high as fifteen thousand or so" (p. 142). Both the Association of British Investigators and, particularly, the Association of British Private Detectives have challenged this estimate. According to Thompson, in 1970 the ABPD estimated that:

"there are probably no more than 2,700 full-time private investigators in the country, plus about 2,000 'status enquiry agents' and specialists in writ-serving. Of the 2,700 or so full-time private investigators, they claim that only about 1,000 are truly worthy of the name - and possibly as few as 500, depending on how strictly one interprets the qualifications needed for the job."

(p. 142)

The most recent 'statement' on this matter from the Home Office seems to be the five lines it received, admitting the lack of information, in the 1979 Green Paper on The Private Security Industry. The best that the Home Office researchers could do here was to refer back to the 1972 Report of the Younger Committee on Privacy, noting that the committee,

"thought 'that a reasonable estimate of the maximum number is of the order of 3,0000', but said that it had not been able to obtain hard evidence (see paragraph 430 of the Report)."

(Home Office, 1979:5, para. 14)



But as Madgwick and Smythe observed in 1974, this estimate,

"probably does not take account of the many people working on the fringe of the profession. One of the leading agencies estimates 15,000 as a conservative figure and the great proliferation of one-man businesses over the past few years inclines us to believe that this is no exaggeration."

(p. 113)

Clearly, alliances are at work somewhere here. Thompson was writing of the encroachment on privacy by Big Brother (his book evoked the theme of 1984 - somewhat less hackneyed in 1970). The ABPD represent a view asserting the integrity of the profession and its ability to regulate itself. The Home Office has much sympathy with this view. Madgwick and Smythe write from a perspective of many years involvement with the NCCL. The Younger Committee took its evidence on this issue from the few representatives of the profession that would present evidence. So the picture remains obscure. The most recent independent estimate was provided by Bowden (1978), a political scientist with an interest in policing. Writing eight years after Thompson, he suggested that the highest estimate might be around 20,000 (p. 259). On the basis of Thompson's 1970 estimate, the undoubted over-cautiousness of the ABPD and the Younger Committee evidence, I would suggest that Bowden's 1978 figure is at least close to being acceptable for the mid-1980s.

One key issue which this particular numbers game revolves around, whether explicitly or not, is that of licensing or regulation of private investigators. I shall devote more attention to the arguments for and against licensing and regulation of the broader private security sector in the next chapter. However, because private investigators have been the subject of specific attempts to legislate around them, I shall briefly fill in some of this specific background.

As with much else in this area, the position of representatives of the private investigators' profession appears confused. According to Thompson (1970:143) both the ABI and the ABPD have opposed legislation in the past. Presumably, the ABI (at least) changed its position in the early 1970s for in its 'Report . . . to the Royal Commission on Legal Services' (undated document; circa 1978) it stated that it had:

"for many years advocated that there should be some control



of the Private Investigative profession, and strong support was given to the following:-

Andrew Gardner, MP - Private Investigators Bill  
Norman Fowler, MP - Security Industry's Licensing Bill  
Michael Fiddler, MP - The Private Detective's Control Bill  
No. 1

The Private Detective's Control Bill

No. 2  
Bruce George, MP - Private Security (Registration) Bill

It seems likely that the general trend in the profession has been towards favouring some form of licensing, though clearly this was at one time anathema to some. For example, the response of the ABPD to the news in 1968 that a Private Members Bill proposed the requirements of a license to practice and surety of £1,000 was to suggest that:

"If this was to reach the Statute Book, it would simply move us nearer the Police State and would eliminate our work as a field."

(Thompson, 1970:143)

At the same time, there were others who welcomed such proposals. Colin Finlay, a well-known private investigator and then vice-president of the Council of International Investigators argued that:

"As the law stands at present, anyone can start up a private detective agency. Some of the many agencies that have sprung up in recent years have done untold harm. The people who run them don't really know what they're doing and are just getting money under false pretences."

(Evening Standard, 27th May, 1968).

The law currently stands as it did in 1968 when Mr. Finlay made his statement. Five years later Norman Fowler, MP was commenting in the House,

"If a private detective here was convicted of the kind of offence for which the Watergate conspirators are now serving sentences in the United States there would be nothing to prevent him in this country recommencing work as a Private Detective on the day of his release."

(Hansard, 4th July, 1973:538)

Mr. Fowler's statement topically reflected the feelings of many engaged in the debates and responses to the findings of the Younger Committee which had reported a year earlier.



When Younger had considered the possibility of issuing licenses to private investigators it found, of course, that it could please no-one. The ABI liked the idea of licenses but when the committee felt there were grounds for over-printing on them that they carried no official authority and the public were under no obligation to cooperate, the enthusiasm of the ABI cooled. They apparently felt that in such a format the license might actually discourage public cooperation, and likened it to a dog license. At the same time the reservations of the Committee were being prompted by the police and Government who saw dangers of abuse of the document and the misleading of the public. According to Draper (1978:151),

"It was this consideration which persuaded the Government to oppose the recommendations of the Younger Committee relating to private detectives when they were finally debated a year later. The only concession made by the Home Secretary was the suggestion that a 'Disqualification Scheme' might be introduced by which anyone wishing to practise as a private detective would have to go to his local police station for a criminal record check which, if it proved positive, would disqualify him from practising. This is a scheme which bears some resemblance to the Continental approach and, although it represents the very minimum form of checking, it would at least be a step in the right direction. As yet, however, nothing has been done by the Government to implement this proposal."

The now thrice-failed attempts by Bruce George, MP to introduce Licensing across a range of private security activities have included provisions covering private investigators, but successful legislation seems almost as remote as ever. (This issue is discussed in more detail in the following chapter). However, many of the more professional agencies now favour some form of legislation, although for much the same sort of reasons as the larger security firms. Not least among these is a desire to drive out of business, by stiff licensing procedures and heavy financial and insurance demands, all the smaller firms who are capable of undercutting prices by doing a shoddy job.

Such concern about competition is made the more understandable when it is realised that the private investigator business is not really one of glamorously esoteric arts and plush office suites. Rather, in general, it is dull and drab, basic and frequently boring, and most importantly, routine. Obviously the large and successful practices



have grown by virtue of having something special about their services, their contacts and clients. But most of the work done by private investigators can as easily be done by small firms.

Most agencies, small and large, depend upon solicitors offices for the bulk of their work. Despite advertising, few agencies receive anything like a majority of cases or enquiries through direct client approaches. It is far more likely that a person with a problem will approach a solicitor who may then refer them on to one of the private investigators that they know of and deal with. Importantly for the investigator, client referral through solicitors means that they can be fairly sure of genuine cases rather than the type that turn out to be imaginary. Further, contact through the solicitor can make legal aid available to the client if eligible (cf. Draper, 1978:28). Most investigators therefore need to build up their contacts with, and the regular custom of, various solicitors practices. Similarly contacts in local Chambers of Commerce, among Rotarians and so on, can provide the difference between a bread and butter practice and one which gets the jam of more prosperous clients who will pay for discretion, and of business clients who may even put the investigators office on a retainer basis to handle all their company's enquiry work.

My use of the term 'practice' to describe the investigator's work is not intended to confuse their image with that of solicitors or doctors and the like. Rather, despite the continued strong presence of lone detective operations, there is a trend towards more organised, multiple staff offices with all the accompanying resources of a well-run business. Such practices are fairly evidently modelled on those of solicitors, with senior and junior partnerships and younger apprenticeships. Such a development may serve to improve the image of investigators quite considerably.

Certainly given their close working contact with solicitors it is unsurprising that they should emulate the model, and do so also in the hope of attracting further business from reputable sources. The point about this search for business is that it is not necessarily the sort of work that private investigators are commonly thought to do; it is legal dogs-body work, like process-serving - passing writs and



summonses into the hands of those required to be party to legal proceedings. This task can be a simple matter of straightforward delivery or involve making enquiries in order to trace an elusive defendant. As Draper observes,

"For many agencies this is their 'bread and butter'. This is especially so since the falling off of divorce work, and the demand for process-servers at least does not suffer too badly in times of economic recession because there are the resulting bankruptcies to maintain a steady stream of litigation."

(1978:30)

In the world of the private security sector, society's dark clouds often have silver linings. In hard times another detective agency service can flourish - that of acting as bailiffs. Focused principally at the lower end of the profession, among what may be called enquiry agents (and carried out in Scotland mainly by estate agents), such work can be relied on for its regularity (cf. Draper, 1978:30-31). The business of making mundane tracing enquiries can also be a regular source of work for an agency. Draper succinctly summarises what is involved here.

"This may involve locating a missing relative, a beneficiary or a child, or tracing stolen property, credit cards or hire-purchase goods. The private detective may be required to find and interview a witness to a road or industrial accident who has not been forthcoming with his evidence. He may also be employed by a party to civil litigation to find evidence supporting his case - evidence, for instance, as to the nature of the whereabouts of a defendant's assets and his means generally, or proof that one party has not been telling the truth under oath in the witness box."

(Ibid., p. 31)

Real investigative work in the real world, as opposed to that of the media, plays only a small part in the work of private investigators. According to Draper (1978:31) involvement in criminal investigation may account for only about 10% of the investigator's work-load. This may be a slightly low estimate according to one police source I talked to, but there again the police are not necessarily the best judges as relatively speaking they are likely to come into contact with more private investigators involved in criminal offences-related work than is perhaps representative of the average. Usually this work involves being retained by the Defence to check up on aspects of the case,



tracing witnesses, looking into alibis and covering the ground gone over by the police to get an idea of the Prosecution evidence.

Investigators, may, of course, also be used on occasion by the police themselves, either officially or unofficially, sought out because of their good reputation and perhaps because of some particular expertise, lines of contact, or to bring in a fresh face or perspective. Where the police have not conducted some investigation to the satisfaction of some party, then investigators may be employed to add to a Prosecution case. This is not common, but it does occur and as Draper points out, "it is likely to arise more frequently as the police find it more difficult to keep pace with the increasing numbers of serious crimes" (Ibid., p. 31). During any criminal offence-related investigation, and even in the course of an ordinary, routine kind of job, there is the strong possibility that the investigator will discover evidence of some criminal matter. The investigator will (or should) then discuss the issue with the client recommending that the police be brought in. It should be noted though that this relationship leaves a great deal of room for discretion, and for a variety of motives!

Private detectives have something of a 'snooper' image. This may be due in part to the enquiries they undertake in criminal cases, but it is likely that much of the disapproval surrounding their image and profession - in the real world - arises from their past heavy involvement in matrimonial divorce cases. Indeed, despite the passing of the heyday of such work, the familiar modus operandi persists. In a taped interview with Jane Walmsley of Capital Radio (tape supplied to the author, 1979), one private detective blandly stated that he would take on an investigation of "suspected infidelity" more or less at face value but did qualify his attitude when the possibility of blackmail was raised. In circumstances where he or his colleague felt that "something wasn't quite right," then it would be fairly standard practice to turn round and investigate the client, "to find out why there's something funny," he assured the interviewer. The negotiation of loyalty to the client and maintenance of professional integrity can clearly give rise to strong ambiguities in the private investigation business.



As a proportion of such business however, the Divorce Reform Act (1969) and subsequent amendments, have diminished the importance of cases of adultery for private detectives. Generally there are now easier ways to secure a divorce by establishing "irretrievable breakdown" of the marriage. Additional provisions for 'postal divorces' by mutual consent accompanied by sworn statements have also removed some of the need for the employment of private detectives in those adversarial contests where a divorce action was defended in court requiring the submission of evidence. Having made these points however, it should be noted that observation to prove adultery is still very much a part of the business of many agencies, perhaps taking up around 5% of their business (cf. Draper, 1978:34). Typically, such a case might arise where a husband fears that divorce by mutual consent could lead to him having to make a substantial settlement on his wife - 'proof of' adultery is apparently often sought by husbands in the hope that the divorce settlement will somehow be affected and reduced.

Adultery in such cases is proven, according to one private detective, by the 'eternal triangle' - opportunity, inclination and association. For example:

"Take an instance of a man and woman who go into an empty house together at night, at say 10.30 p.m. At midnight the lights go out . . . we would be standing outside watching . . . and would keep observation perhaps all night . . . and you would see them come out the following morning. That means they've had the opportunity, you've proved the association and to spend all night together they certainly must have the inclination."

Such an account might form the basis of a courtroom statement, especially the emphasis on maintaining surveillance all night. But of course, like any occupation, private detectives have their 'tricks of the trade' which are employed to 'ease' their work. One security consultant, with some experience of investigation work told me of one classic. Staying at an observation post all night, for example, in the case of an adultery investigation, may be both unattractive and thought unnecessary. So, to check that those under surveillance have not moved during the period of absence or sleep, age-old techniques of 'marking' are used. These are anything from simply pushing a matchstick in a door which should be still there on return if the door



has not been opened and marking the position of car tyres with chalk on the road, to placing pressure pads which are linked to a paper-tape time recording mechanism. (Apparently, whether intentional or not, the name of the 1960s television private-eye Frank Marker was a small in-joke in the business).

### The Private Investigator as Undercover Agent

Whilst much of the investigator's mundane and routine work now comes by way of referrals from solicitors, there is one area where increasingly their services are sought by direct approach. This is in their employment as undercover agents and use at all levels of industry (cf. Lipson, 1975; Draper, 1978). The direct approach is justified on grounds of secrecy and security, though on the other hand, in the UK at least, many client companies and investigative agencies will seek the cooperation of trade union representatives over the matters being investigated rather than risk discovery and the possibility of industrial dispute over the protocol of consultation and so on. Such work is of course, highly sensitive in its nature and can range from the investigation of fraud and embezzlement at the top of the company hierarchy to sources of large-scale pilferage at the bottom. In some cases, 'troublemakers' are being sought out, personal profiles compiled, even information on the habits and opinions of spouses can be the nature of an assignment.

Though some agencies have offered these services in Britain since at least the late 1950s the increase in demand for them seems to have only slowly followed the boom in private security services generally; probably gaining some sense of legitimacy as a commercial option in the wake of broader acceptance of the place of principles of security in modern management. Such practices have been used extensively in the USA throughout this century, and earlier, and often with little regard for ethical investigative practice. This can mean that they are viewed without great sympathy even by security professionals like Lipson (1975). According to this author of a well-known security text, undercover agents are usually put on a company's pay roll as an ordinary employee, paid the full salary for the job they have been hired for and in addition receive a sum from their agency. They are



mostly employed in relatively unskilled positions, such as shipping rooms, stock rooms etc., (but presumably this does not mean that some are not also deployed in the higher reaches of organisations).

"Their job is to infiltrate existing cliques and strata of companies . . . Some of the techniques used can be said to border on entrapment, or the actions of an agent provocateur. Many make it known that they are interested in "making a fast buck", placing a bet, obtaining marijuana or more potent drugs, joining the union - whatever it is that their assignment encompasses . . ."

(Lipson, 1975:121)

It is unknown how far the agent provocateur approach has been adopted in Britain, but as the Daily Mirror reported in 1982 (23rd November) the idea of planting spies in the workplace is certainly becoming increasingly familiar.

"More and more firms - insurance companies, stockbrokers and supermarkets - are planting 'moles' to check on thieving by staff. The move is worrying union leaders who are virtually powerless because the spies are necessarily known only to top company executives. Though they appear to be on the payroll, they are employed and trained by security companies - and paid by results calculated in arrests or a cut in the firm's losses. [As one] union official complained . . . 'This sort of thing must harm staff morale . . . Company detectives are known and accepted as part of life. But how can bosses expect a happy atmosphere with the thought that there could be a spy on the next desk or counter.'"

(Emphasis added)

For the USA, Lipson suggests that investigation agencies and security staff follow up such undercover operations with trained interrogators who will question "those 'fingered' and obtain confessions and restitution. Cases developed in this manner are seldom referred to the criminal justice system" (1975:121), but are part of the private justice system. This observation is at odds with Draper's comment that the police are unlikely to object to undercover investigations carried out privately in companies because "in all probability, if the offenders are found out they will be handed over to them, making a welcome improvement in police detection statistics" (Draper, 1978:32). I think that Draper is probably being generous here in her estimation of the regard for legal process necessarily held by private companies or investigating agencies. There probably is higher regard for traditional referral to the police in the UK than in the USA, but it



is also true that Draper's study, written from the point of view of a practitioner at the bar, is generally blind to the concept of private justice as embracing forms of social control which run to the side of the formal legal system (cf. Henry, 1983).

On the other hand, writing with direct experience of work in the security world, Lipson is explicit about the implications of such a private justice system for the private security personnel involved.

"The private investigator is deeply involved in this practice of private justice. He often combines the function of investigator with that of prosecutor, while his business colleagues sit in judgement. The operation of these private, kangaroo 'courts', of course, means that the crimes they are dealing with are unreported and that justice has become a private affair. In this area the function of the private investigator represents a challenging and disturbing problem in criminology."

(Lipson, 1975:120)

While many private detective agencies will therefore be in a position to attract reputable local and legal business and others will have a 'name' as specialists in certain kinds of investigation, many others must seek the basis for a steady living elsewhere. One avenue of work is supplementing the strength of the investigation departments of insurance companies, usually when an enquiry is being pursued over a lengthy period of time and is exhibiting some complexities requiring extended enquiries (for example dubious fire insurance claims).<sup>10</sup> But perhaps the area which has seen the most expansive participation of private detectives in recent years is the boom throughout the 1970s in credit rating and referencing agencies. These agencies themselves pursue enquiries of a private investigative nature and hence, in some respects, the line between the two can become almost indistinguishably blurred.

Credit as a routine matter of commerce is by no means new of course and assessment of credit worthiness has always been an associated problem. In the 19th century Trade Protection Associations and private registers of bad debtors arose to formalise some degree of protection and means of investigation for those giving credit. But the 20th century, and in particular the affluent decades of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s has seen the credit investigation agencies flourish as



an expansive and profitable area of business in itself. The promotion of a consumer credit society, embraced in the 1950s and 1960s by slogans like 'Live Now, Pay Later', inevitably means a boom in work for credit-reference agencies, first in vetting customers and then in reclaiming goods and payments when 'living on the never, never' proved too much for household budgets to handle.

Briefly, the credit reference business falls into two areas. The less intrusive (relatively speaking), credit rating of commercial businesses. This tends to be simply a matter of compiling a detailed report from the variety of available sources about the standing of the company financially, as a trader and customer and so on. There are, for example, registers of businesses with established credit ratings, such as the 'White Book' published by Dun and Bradstreet of London (cf. Draper, 1978:35). Such profiling-type investigations rarely involve any intrusion into the personal lives of members of the company. Generally of more concern are those investigations pursued by agencies supplying credit references on individuals. Well established organisations exist providing such services, usually regarded as reputable and of high standard, for example, the United Association for the Protection of Trade and British Debt Services. But there is little serious regulation in this area and as Draper observes, "one mistake on the part of the credit-reference agency can bring untold misery to an individual who gets blacklisted as a result of it."

Within the credit industry then, the small private detective agency can really be small-fry indeed. However, as Draper notes, they have their significance here for two reasons. First, they provide and are used as an alternative source of credit reporting for traders and finance houses" (ibid. 36). On a localised level private detectives prove useful for gathering information in those less serious cases which perhaps do not merit the time, trouble and cost of resorting to specialised agencies employing computer time and correspondingly trained and expensive staff and investigators. This division is emphasised further in the second important role of private detectives in the credit field. This is their function as a source and conduit of local information about private individuals and traders passed on to larger credit organisations.



These private detectives are probably diminishing in use and in reality were, in any case, less professional investigators than casual amateurs, usually employed when the larger agency had no local office or representative, and generally called correspondents. Their 'stock in trade' was simply their knowledge of the locality and willingness to approach potentially unreliable sources of reference - neighbours, acquaintances and shopkeepers, etc. Part of their bad name followed from the sort of information they therefore tend to gather and their inclusion of it in written reports. Such additional bits of gossip can be ostensibly valued as 'background', in reality as titillation.

Some of the most dubious practices have however seen a degree of tightening up in the wake of the Consumer Credit Act, 1974, particularly with regard to verifying accuracy of information. This follows the opening of access to personal credit reference files provided for by the Act. The industry has also had to tighten up in a broader sense. The "personal credit boom, which reached a peak in 1973, has seen a reversal as there has been a reduction in the demand for hire-purchase and other instalment credit business" (Draper, 1978:37). This has certainly reduced the available work for the old corresponding investigators and also put many of the smaller agencies out of business, whilst the larger ones have widened the services they provide in the commercial field. A number of credit and private detective agencies have however simply shifted sideways into the area of debt-collecting and 'counselling'; and it should be noted that the clients who use them are not necessarily scrooge-type businesses - 'private eyes' can even be hired on the rates by councils concerned over levels of bad debts (Evening Standard, 27th October, 1978). Despite the protection offered by the Administration of Justice Act, 1970, to debtors subject to harassment, some agencies employ distinctly unsavoury techniques in trying to extract repayment. While here, as in other areas of private detective work, these may be the minority, some attention should now be paid to examples of dishonest and corrupt practice.



## Private Detectives, Professional Abuse and Civil Liberties

There may be many private detectives who fit the seedy, down-at-heel image, but the majority make a reasonably comfortable living from their trade. There are, of course, an additional few for whom the business can be very lucrative. As Draper (1978:30) observes:

"Any who are prepared to resort to unlawful methods, or indulge in dishonest activities such as industrial espionage, will find that some people are ready to pay a lot of money for their services."

In general, the profits to be made depend upon the character of the agency and of its cases. They can thus vary widely, and it is not of course a necessity to engage in unscrupulous practices in order to build up a highly profitable turnover. However, the private detective business can be insecure, competitive and highly opportunistic - indeed successful and honest detective work can make relative virtues of these factors. But the scope for unethical, corrupt or illegal practice is nonetheless evidently large, especially given lack of any serious official regulation. And it is not as if there has been no evidence of the need for such regulation.

Following an Editorial in The Guardian (11th May, 1970), the Central Office at Scotland Yard was encouraged to take a token sweep through the private investigator business. The editorial followed an interview by one of the Guardian's reporters with a private detective who had boasted that he could easily obtain details of Inland Revenue status, criminal records, bank account details, debts and so on. Under various charges of 'Demanding money with menaces', 'Conspiracy to pervert the course of justice', perjury and under the Wireless Telegraphy Act, nearly twenty private detectives were subsequently taken to court. The comments of Thomas Beet, while perhaps a little extreme, may nonetheless remain an apposite caution, despite first being written in 1906:



"I am convinced that fully 90% of the private detective establishments, masquerading in whatever form, are rotten to the core and simply exist and thrive upon a foundation of dishonesty, deceit, conspiracy and treachery . . . Thugs and thieves and criminals don the badge and outward semblance of the honest private detective in order that they may prey upon society."

(Beet, 1906)

Certainly the infamous upholding in November, 1974, of the appeal by the Withers brothers, a private detective partnership based in Brighton, casts neither private investigators nor the capacity of the law to protect the public, in a good light. The Withers brothers had dishonestly obtained information of a confidential nature concerning private individuals by misrepresenting themselves to councils and government departments. This led to a charge and conviction for 'Conspiracy to affect a public mischief'. However, at an appeal before the House of Lords, the Law Lords, Lord Dilhorne, Lord Diplock, Lord Simon and Lord Kilbrandon ruled that there was no offence at law of conspiracy here. This has left what could prove to be a serious gap in the law.

Not surprisingly, even before the law was found to be so seriously inadequate as a regulator of abuses by private detectives, the issues were a strong source of concern to civil liberties bodies. As the NCCL put it in their evidence to the Younger committee:

"It is the NCCL's view that all forms of intrusion into people's private lives are inherently undesirable. Some of them may be necessary, and in an industrial society we have to concede more than we would readily wish. But we find it wholly deplorable that there should be no control over who can carry out these tasks and under what conditions."

(Reprinted in Jones, 1974:135)

Such concern is justifiable. Unlike the situation in many other countries, barriers to entry into the commercial business of being a private detective are non-existent. The aspirant needs little more than the basics - one of the many popular guidebooks or short correspondence courses, a telephone, maybe a car and a fair degree of audacity. But this point should not be allowed to diminish the seriousness of some of the tasks private detectives become involved in. As Draper (1978:40) remarks,



"possibly the most recent development in the role of the private detective in industry is the importation from America of the idea of pre-employment checks, a procedure which is beginning to take place on a considerable scale."

Another importation, lie detectors, are being assiduously promoted by some agencies, and although their reception in Britain has generally been cool, the very development of widely available services using them raises questions and concerns. Not least among these is the clash between employment checks, lie detectors and so on, and the principles of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, 1974. Some of this thorny issue is discussed in the following chapter on licensing and regulation of private security personnel with regard to whether they themselves should be exempted from the Act. Private detectives however have usually been concerned about the way in which provisions of the Act affect their work. Many simply say that in any conflict between the Act which would restrain them from telling their client about, say a prospective employee's past conviction for fraud, and their feeling of duty to that client, then the person who pays would win and the client would be told. Existing legislation to protect and safeguard the rights and privacy of individuals is inadequate anyway. When it is seriously considered in relation to how it can be abused by agencies in the private security sector, then it is disturbingly so.

#### Conclusion: Blurring the Lines of Definition

Quite rightly, Hilary Draper has argued that "the line of definition between detective agencies and security companies is becoming somewhat blurred, making it more difficult to deal with their respective problems in isolation from each other" (1978:47). While Draper does not discuss the broader division of private security services across the spectrum that can be identified, nonetheless, at this core, there is some sense in which the wheel is turning full circle and some investigating agencies are offering security consultancy and guard services while security organisations offer investigatory services.

The blurring of boundaries here and elsewhere in the private security sector (and across the private/public divide), is not a sign of confusion or imminent commercial collapse. The private security sector is expanding and will continue to do so, in varying ways, to



varying degrees, for the foreseeable future. As it does so, the need to ensure that it is strictly regulated grows even more. It is to this issue that I turn in the next chapter.



### Chapter 3 - Notes

- (1) The roles of MATSA and the BSIA, and other trade union and professional association bodies are discussed more fully in Chapter 4.
- (2) More description of two middle range companies - one London wide and beyond and the other more 'localised' to the centre and south of London - is given in the description of the ethnographic phases of this research in the preceding Chapter 2.
- (3) I have discussed aspects of these issues, particularly the shifts and the boredom in Chapter 2.
- (4) Not surprisingly, given the international character of private security, similar problems are strongly evident in the USA and Canada. In 1971 Kakalik and Wildhorn observed in their Rand Report on private security in the USA, that:

"Turnover in private security work, especially guarding, is much higher than in public law enforcement. Lateral entry is rare in the public police; recruits generally enter when young and a substantial fraction remain until retirement. Precise, overall figures for turnover in the public police, however, are not available.

"In contract security work, especially in guard work, turnover is high, ranging from a low of about 20% per year for high-quality, more highly paid guards at government installations, to a high of 200 percent and more per year for the low-quality, low paid, hourly guard. For example, one large firm claims an overall rate of 75 percent in some areas and as high as 200 percent in others. The highest turnover rates are experienced during the first several months of employment"

(1971/2, Vol. II:74) (cf. Shearing et al. 1980:96-97).

For Canada, the major study undertaken by the Toronto Centre of Criminology, confirms the same general picture. Shearing et al, (1980:97-98) were able to draw upon extensive survey data in their assessment of the high turnover characteristic of private security in Canada and found the same contributory factors as I have mentioned in the main text. Thus,

"the American literature tends to identify poor salary as the principal cause of the high turnover within the security industry. Our respondents concurred that poor salary was a major cause of high turnover in Canada. Just over half of our respondents mentioned that low wages contributed to high turn over. Related to this was the response that the benefits offered employees were not attractive enough. This was mentioned as a



factor by just over a sixth of our respondents. Further, agency executives commented that the absence of salary increases and chances for promotion contributed to the turnover problem. A number of the agency executives (16%) also pointed to the nature of security work itself as a source of high turnover. About 10% mentioned the existence of shift work as a factor. Several pointed to the often boring nature of the work. In addition, several indicated that because many contracts were short-term, it was sometimes necessary to let employees go at the expiry of specific contracts. Another 10 percent of the agency executives indicated that one of the reasons for high turnover was poor job performance, which resulted in a continual process of termination and hiring in some agencies.

"Another set of reasons offered for high turnover focused on the security agents themselves. Over ten percent of agency respondents indicated that security work was regarded by many as a stop-gap while employees looked for another job."

(Shearing et al., 1980:97-98).

- (5) Interview with senior Securicor management, 1979.
- (6) The mythology and stereotyping of the 'special' abilities and functions of private security/public police/figures of authority/guardians of order (etc.) representatives, are part of a grander unifying, hegemonic consensus (or ideology/cosmology) in society, which mediates contradictions held by individuals with individual experiences and beliefs but who must nonetheless subscribe to the idea of society as made possible by virtue of understandable meaning and order conducive to some degree of unification. Pauline Morris and Kevin Heal (1981) have discussed the idea of myth in relation to the police role, referring to the work of Levi-Strauss (1966).

"The importance of myths in society is referred to by Levi-Strauss (1966) who discussed the way people fit together . . . 'the remains of events . . . odds and ends, to lead to a completed picture' and he refers to the untiring ordering and re-ordering of events and experiences in a constant search for meaning. Myths themselves are never true or untrue, real or unreal; they are a body of beliefs mediating and interpreting reality and they perform an important unifying function"

(p. 5).

- (7) In April, 1984 the Conservative government intending to privatise the Ordnance factories was considering arrangements which would also involve privatising the security of the plants, and was tentatively inviting tenders from reputable private security companies. The proposals were eventually dropped, but if they had been implemented these commercial services would, of course,



have had the backing of the police and, in the last resort, the army. (Background information from sources in Westminster and Trade Union contacts. The deliberations of the House of Commons Defense Committee were reported in the National Press in April, 1984).

- (8) Of course, the figure for private households installing alarms may have been somewhat higher really as small firms, even smaller 'cowboys' or do-it-yourself may have been employed, blurring any estimates. Commercial customers following the 'advice' of their insurers are more likely to use at least relatively respectable alarm companies whose installations would be more likely to figure in sources for compilation of estimates (e.g. the figures compiled by the National Supervisory Council for Intruder Alarms). Sales figures are generally unhelpful of course because they do not indicate the use to which the alarms will be put.
- (9) Although I do not have the space here to thoroughly detail their range and activities, there are significant sections of the private security sector whose concerns and dealings are less with people in the flesh and rather more with people as data-subjects. This occurs at levels from the routine of credit referencing to the high-tech levels of international commercial intelligence gathering and industrial espionage. While credit reference agencies use their own and hired private investigators, they can generally be excluded from this survey of the private security sector (except that measures designed to ensure probity of commercial agencies and civil liberties of citizens should affect them). Information about international computerisation of personal information and its use is, by its nature, difficult to come by, but in any case properly belongs to a different study. There is an intermediary arena for the collation and private transmission of personal information, that of privately subscribed agencies like the Economic League. However, these are more in the nature of private information agencies than private security or detective operators and hence deserve separate consideration elsewhere (cf. South, 1983).

Nonetheless, the acquisition and collation of personal information is central to or at least a significant part of the work of many components of the private security sector.

- (10) Insurance companies in the UK usually have efficient investigation departments of their own but are quite willing to resort to outside help from private investigators or police fraud squads. However, developments in the USA should always be noted. There the establishment of in-house fraud investigation units is becoming common. As Guarino-Ghezzi (1983) observes "because fraud cases are rarely brought to court, these units operate as a kind of private police" (p. 321). In a personal communication, Guarino-Ghezzi confirms that there seem to be striking similarities between the way that these private fraud investigators operate and the way that the DHSS Specialist Claims Control teams operate in the UK (cf. Scraton and South, 1983). It would be interesting and informative to explore further those constants and similarities which exist between public and private agencies of investigation adhering more closely to 'principles'



of private justice than the civil and criminal law. I hope to be able to return to this subject in future work.



CHAPTER 4

'Public Safeguards for Private Security'



## Public Safeguards for Private Security

The private security sector is already a major area of commercial and industrial growth - and it continues to expand and make substantial profits. Its activities touch, directly and indirectly upon many aspects of ordinary and extra-ordinary, everyday life. It has now been widely recognised in Britain and abroad, as a service sector industry of some special significance and there have been several attempts to introduce some form of official over-view of the industry in Britain. All such attempts have, however failed.

In this chapter I shall bring together, for the first time on such a broad scale, the range of issues and arguments surrounding the case for or against licensing and regulation of private security (cf. inter alia: Draper, 1978; Outer Circle Policy Unit, 1978; Stenning and Shearing, 1980, (a); George, 1984). However, it should be stressed if it is not already apparent that I am not presenting an attempt at neutrality in the debate. I am in favour of strict regulation of the industry and would support an effective model of licensing as a step towards ensuring public accountability and control of the security world. In conducting this research over a period of several years I have become convinced that licensing alone is not an adequate 'solution' to the security problem - i.e., its control. However, it does seem the only viable first step.

This chapter is therefore concerned, in a reformist sense, only with those issues relevant to providing for the licensing and accountability of the private security sector. However, a broader approach to providing a genuine sense of 'social security' must go beyond the common focus on policing and crime-prevention and also consider how this can integrate with a broader social service providing crime prevention, insurance, victim support and other services. I shall make some suggestions about this more ambitious second step in the concluding chapter, 6.

At this point of introduction to the policy issues I would emphasize that the conclusions to the observational field-work discussed in Chapter 2 should not be forgotten. There I emphasized the strength of



the occupational culture and its values and the nature of the conservative world-view permeating private security from board-room to guard-room. These create powerful barriers to change within private security itself and a strong boundary set against intervention from without. The case presented below is not one that can be criticized for ill-informed optimism. Rather and to the contrary, while it may be criticized by some for its moderation and caution, these qualities are at least borne out of a reasonably well-informed realism.

In the following I shall draw upon a wide-range of sources, from academics, media, government and private security itself, as well as on field-work interviews with a variety of interested parties, including MPs, private security managers and workers, police and ex-police and others. I shall consider first some of the causes for concern, then the current state of self-regulation in the industry (confined at present in a narrow sense), arguing throughout for strict regulation and accountability to be built upon a system of effective licensing.

#### 1. Causes for Concern

##### Inefficiency? Who Really Pays for Private Security?

Many concerned with the future of private security, whether working within it or outside it, express a desire to see standards raised, to improve pay and conditions, offer training to workers and so on. However, the 'realities' of the highly competitive market seem to militate against such improvements. This means, as is widely recognised, that services offered to and paid for by customers are usually (invariably?) not of the quality they might be. In some instances, those concerned with civil liberties might initially feel that this is no bad thing, but as NCCL and others agree, it is far better to have responsible and trained personnel working in this sensitive area than some of the staff who have been employed and who would be of far greater concern. And, of course, private security is not simply going to 'go away', so such accommodations must be made and thought about.



So in fact, the need to cut costs to stay competitive actually restricts freedom of choice in the market - the choices are limited in terms of the level of quality of service. Moreover, as Williams (Williams et al., 1984:35) points out,

"many of the costs of the private security industry are being passed on to the public and taxpayer. The industry affects the police, the insurers, the client, local authorities, National Health Service, employees families and the general public. Everybody pays a price."

Low pay, poor conditions and high turnover make for 'cut rate efficiency' (cf. MacLennan in Williams et al., ch. 2). I have covered some of these issues earlier (in the preceding chapter) and without re-iterating them and other social and economic costs related to the current organisation of private security (e.g., costs to employees and their families; to industrial relations; those resulting from claims on police time; inefficiency in being able to deal with fire and serious theft and crime etc.), I can here only emphasize that low pay and all these related issues have in fact proved expensive not primarily to private security but to society.

A system of licensing could be the basis for setting minimum standards of pay, conditions, training and so on. Indeed given the support for this proposal among groups like the Low Pay Unit and the principal trade unions in security, there would be strong impetus to ensure that licensing worked for the private security labour force just as much as it did for the respectability of the companies licensed and for society.

Such developments will of course be closely followed by the trade unions, not least because in this field they stand particularly uncomfortably between their efforts not to upset the rather conservative managements and their efforts to increase their membership and obtain good agreements for them. They might also be wary about how negotiations for better conditions could be blocked. The following exchange at a workshop in Canada (Jeffries, 1974:48-9) is suggestive. A representative of the Canadian Guards Association "expressed his conviction that better working conditions in the industry would result in a higher quality work force." A reply to this point argued the employers line "that higher pay should be



dependent upon better training." Although he agreed with the (Canadian Guards) Association's objectives, he said that "improved qualifications must precede increased salaries."

A system of licensing must ensure that companies are responsible for providing or sponsoring at least basic (and opportunities for more advanced) training. What needs to be avoided, of course, is a situation where companies, having for years relied upon and encouraged a low qualified (etc.) workforce, prepared to accept low wages and poor conditions, then turn around and say that low pay and poor conditions were the fault of poorly qualified staff who did not merit better.

Training provision for security professions has been extremely patchy and undeveloped in Britain, especially in relation to other countries. Yet it is an area that must be integrated into any strategy to improve the industry in its service delivery and inform its workers about their own rights and duties and also the legal and ethical constraints upon them. It is also the only area where some legislation exists specifically directed at the private security firms albeit only in relation to handling guard dogs.

Whereas in the USA, training for security occupations has been a growth area in higher education (at least at Community College level) there has been little movement into this market in the UK. Letchworth College of Technology innovatively ran security courses for eight years in the 1970s but for some reason these have ceased, despite a good reputation for their senior courses which dealt with a wide range of subjects. Motherwell Technical College started a pilot scheme in this area and other colleges such as Trent Polytechnic, have considered following, but training in the college sector remains virtually non-existent. This only really leaves the courses, conferences and seminars run by the security industry itself. These may be offered under the auspices of representative organisations, like the International Professional Security Association, or by individual companies, the larger of which (such as Securicor, Group 4) have their own training schools. Such limited availability means even reasonable standards of training, let alone high standards are spread thinly.



Regulation could in future set minimum standards and periods of training. At present the only area of training which has attracted legislative interest is that concerned with handling guard dogs. Securicor runs its own dog training schools, supervised by an ex-Metropolitan police dog trainer and providing basic and refresher courses. The 'dogs issue' has long been an emotive one in the security business with some fearing it gives the industry a bad name. Hence, Group 4 has phased out its dog-using operation, but because Securicor, the other major voice in the British Security Industry Association, continues to use dogs, there can be no united disapproval of the practice.

Nonetheless, concern in the industry did lead to the establishment in 1974 of the British Institute of Professional Dog Trainers to represent dog trainers and handlers. In such a case puns about further 'toothless watchdogs' are probably too obvious, but even with stipulations of examinations for handlers and tests for dogs on obedience, scent-work, criminal work (chasing and catching) and so on, as pre-requisites for membership, the Institute has no special powers to improve standards. It did however join in exerting pressure for legislation in this area and the 1975 Guard Dogs Act provided some legal basis for standards, following a number of serious cases of children and adults being mauled by guard dogs. Under the Act, from 1st February, 1976 guard dogs had to be either under the direct control of their handler or else secured so that they were not free to roam the premises. Warnings were also required to be clearly posted at all entrances. The Act was also supposed to eventually provide for local authority licensing and hence inspection of guard dog kennels, but these provisions have never been brought into force, apparently on grounds of expense. The BSIA endorses those rules and regulations which therefore do apply, and can point out that member companies who use dogs, like Securicor, have in fact improved standards quite voluntarily. So who needs statutory intervention?



## Lack of Public Control over the Range of Activities in the Private Security Sector

Most of the points dealt with above apply principally to the case for licensing and regulation of the main body of private security organisations and their activities - what is usually referred to as the private security industry. But either within the boundaries of this main dimension of private security or at least their fringes within the broader private security spectrum, there are various other 'services' and activities which must be noted and brought into the case for regulation. This includes dubious practices of otherwise ordinary security companies as well as some of the services of specialist agencies and free-lancing 'heavies'.

In 1978 I contributed to a Report from the Outer Circle Policy Unit (1978), which pointed out that,

"where the security industry defines its role as the protection of profits (and therefore the process of production as well as property) then it extends into areas which are politically sensitive, such as strikes and picketing, and its activities are likely to be in conflict with the rights of employees. For instance, the Handbook of Security includes go-slows, strikes and picketing in a list of the 'most important crimes which a commercial manager of today must protect against.'"

(OCPU, 1978:8, quoting Hamilton and Norman, 1975, 1.1.02)

Unhappily the Handbook . . . does not simply reflect its author's opinions, but practices and attitudes which have wide currency and high demand. The security and detective agency of the notorious Barry Quartermain was always a good indicator of the approach of the rogue-end of the market in the 1960s and early 1970s. In 1969, Quartermain explained to a Times reporter that industrial 'counter' espionage essentially meant "investigating agitators and finding the real motive behind a strike" (Times, 28th June, 1969). In the 1960s particularly, but into the 1970s and 1980s as well, specialist agencies opened up providing services like "pre-planning for action in riots and other disorders . . . and penetration tests and how to apply them" (INCOMTEC, n.d.). Given the lengthy history of private security's involvement in 'emergency planning' for strikes, riots and disasters in the USA (cf. Momboisse, 1968 and the discussion of 'risk management' in Chapter 3) it was not surprising that many such



agencies boasted ex-US marines, police and secret service personnel on their staffs. But such services are home-grown as well, as the Guardian reported in 1972 (13th July), when a firm set up by ex-RAF security officers identified the shop stewards involved in the 1972 London docks strike.

Perhaps such fringe operations would be marginally less disturbing if the people involved in them did not seem to have such evident cross-over connections with the worlds of state law-enforcement and security. It may also be that such connections make less-laughable article titles like 'Nuclear Attack - There's a Job for Private Security' (Evans, 1980). This article is not, actually, suggesting that private security guards could become a nuclear deterrent, perhaps delivering nuclear pay-loads in armoured cash-carrying vans. Rather the author, Peter Evans, the Home Affairs correspondent of the Times (writing in Security Gazette) suggests that in the event of nuclear attack private security could be a valuable disciplined force to aid in civil defence organisation, especially in and on behalf of industry. It may well be that in the event of nuclear attack people will be glad of any organised help they can get. However, such suggestions from responsible commentators really ought to suggest that before any serious thinking about future roles for private security gets that far ahead, an immediate priority ought to be the adequacy of standards that could be brought about through regulation.

These points cannot be dismissed as if they had relevance only to some exceptional or possible reality. Private security already - and indeed for a long time - has been of serious relevance to those grand issues which exercise minds normally dismissive of the agitation of the 'civil liberties cranks'. The most recent example is the case of the plans of the present Government for the privatisation of the ordnance factories and, initially with them, the arrangements for security at the plants. The withdrawal of the Ministry of Defence police and their replacement with a private security firm slowly became a proposal which alarmed the House of Commons Defence Select Committee. "While nobody is going to steal a Challenger tank," they argued, "the ROS' range of arms, explosives and ammunition offers immense attractions to terrorist or extremist organisations"



(Standard, 26th July, 1984). According to the Standard, "the committee took 'some very scathing evidence' about the private security industry and doubted the government's wisdom in including Ministry of Defence police in spending cuts if they were to continue effectively guarding weapons factories" (ibid., pp. 1-2). Now it should not be taken that effective licensing and regulation should ever be assumed to be a mechanism for 'improving' private security so that it could take over such roles. The important point here is that privatisation of an important military police function was confidently and happily proposed by the present government who had informally but nonetheless actively considered tenders from various companies.

No doubt in this case the bona-fides of the company expected to get the contract had been well checked and my sources, as they say in Fleet Street, assure me that it was a wholly owned British company. But this very assurance is an index of another 'grand' consideration about control over private security, one which has already attracted some attention in Canada. In a report on Contract Security in Ontario, prepared for the Office of the Solicitor General of Canada, Shearing et al., (1980), observe that private security raises very important questions about the administration of justice in terms of whether it is being defined and maintained fairly and equally or whether, in certain circumstances, the conflict of interests between corporations and government, and the resources that they control, means that justice can be skewed in the interests of the corporately-blessed few. Important however, as they go on to argue,

"This issue of private versus public interest takes on a new complexion . . . when the multi-national corporation as a provider or consumer of security services is introduced into the picture. With this development, the issue is no longer simply one of the public versus private interest, but of the possible conflicts between different national interests and the interests of the multi-national corporations that straddle continents and nations (Friedenberg, 1975)."

(Shearing et al., 1980:72)

As yet, the case for the regulation of private security in Britain has not taken on board the issue of private security operations being allied to the 'sovereign states' of international corporations, rather than being accountable to home-grown authorities. But it seems unlikely that the matter will not have future importance. What is



currently understood is that certain elements of the private security sector in Britain inhabit very murky waters with regard to identifying what they do - let alone to whom they feel accountable.

### Who Pays - Wins

In a Parliamentary Question (written: 1st August, 1978) to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Bruce George, MP, asked for a listing of those private security companies hired by the department in the last five years, details of their responsibilities, the expenditure on them and the criteria for choosing companies for hire. The details of the Written Reply are now outdated, though along with questions to and replies from other government departments, it did confirm widespread use of private security companies by virtually all departments. This remains the case, perhaps with some expansion of the heavy use of private security by government departments in Northern Ireland (cf. George 1984). What was of special interest about the brief reply from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was its even briefer note on the employment of private security agencies abroad:

"Abroad, guards have been obtained through one private firm (KMS Limited) to protect Ambassadors at a very few particularly exposed posts . . ."

It is perhaps no surprise that KMS should be favoured by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Many of their requirements in different parts of the world will probably call for highly trained security staff with a working familiarity with arms and with terrorism, insurgency, counter-insurgency and so on. According to Duncan Campbell's Special Report in Time Out of 21st July, 1978, KMS more than fit the bill (Campbell, 1978). The only element of surprise should perhaps be around the fact that, as with the rest of the private security sector there is no degree of control - other than contractual - over the 'top', specialised end of the private security market.

Campbell described KMS as an "undercover mercenary recruiting organisation" with strong links with past and present members of the Special Air Service (SAS) engaged in "a private army service,



supplying bodyguards, troops and invasion parties to despotic rulers and other wealthy interests" (p. 7). Oddly, Campbell's story notes that just earlier that same month of July the Foreign Office had replied to a Daily Mail Report - 'A Worldwide Exclusive' on 'The Bodyguards' - which claimed that private "hired armed bodyguards" were employed on a secret Foreign Office contract to protect British Ambassadors and other diplomatic staff abroad. The Foreign Office dismissed the story as largely untrue. This prompt response the very next day apparently suggested that:

"No armed bodyguards are ever hired from private companies to protect Diplomatic Service staff - they are employed directly by either the British or the host governments. There were no such 'secret' contracts - only a 'normally budgeted' arrangement for a specialist British company to send visiting teams to a small handful of embassies to train locally-based staff in security practices."

(Campbell, 1978:11)

To the Foreign Office's credit in answering a written Parliamentary question it does indeed make no secret of its contract with a specialist company - KMS - however, its reply of August has KMS protecting Ambassadors, as opposed to training local staff. But what KMS really did - or does - for the Foreign Office is not the point here. The point is that KMS operates, recruits and trains in Britain, keeping its finances in Jersey and its contacts in London.

Given the nature of the activities of KMS and agencies like them, it is doubtful that any system of licensing and regulation could control them without very strong powers and the ability to enforce them. For quite apart from the immorality of mercenary work abroad, there is little to prevent such agencies offering their various services in the UK. And indeed some agencies do specialise in offering 'elite' bodyguard and protection services in the UK. Regulation and a system of accountability must therefore take very seriously the range of activities in the private security sector, as the following two sections also illustrate.



## Bodyguards and Minders

The spate of kidnappings in the late 1970s led to a boom in the bodyguard business. A NOW magazine report of 1979 claimed that:

"Many potential 'targets' have their own full-time team of guards . . . If a visiting millionaire wants to hire protection in London from a private company it costs him £10 an hour for each guard. 'For just two guards on duty through the working day he will have to pay a minimum of £160 and that is a competitive price by general European standards,' reports a former Special Branch officer who has retired into the protection business."

(Now, 1979:20)

Certainly at the prestige end of the market the services of a company may get increasingly expensive but such agencies frequently boast of having personnel who in the past have been senior police or intelligence officers. One such company is Saladin Security, which includes among its directors Commander Rollo Watts, ex-Head of the Special Branch. According to the Now report, Watts describes Saladin as "an elite organisation which can't be matched."

"He lectures his recruits, many of them ex-SAS and Royal Marine Commandos, who keep fit by running up the seven flights of stairs leading to his Chelsea office, pointing out that we live in an age of violence, that violence breeds fear and that people need advice and guidance about protecting themselves. Where the need arises, there is a commercial response."

(Now, 1979:23)

Saladin's operations are also instructive in terms of private security's ambiguous relationship with firearms and the authority its personnel assume. Watts naturally emphasizes that what he calls 'protection officers', must remember that their activities are limited by the law. However, as the Now report points out,

"this comes hard to some of his recruits, many of whom have served in Ulster, where the army can stop suspects and search them and their cars. Although they may now be doing similar jobs they no longer have those extra-legal powers."

(p. 23)

The use of firearms is legally proscribed but according to several informants is certainly informally condoned at this end of the market. As far as can be ascertained, no bodyguard agency in Britain has



personnel licensed to carry guns whilst operating in this country. Police guards for foreign statesmen may be armed, and by arrangement with the Home Office personal guards may also be authorised. Some private figures who may be at risk may be granted firearms certificates to carry a gun for their own protection. However, many agencies operate abroad with armed personnel who move around the company internationally. Even the 'ordinary' guarding companies (such as Securicor) arm their staff abroad, and many senior personnel are trained in arms use. Like many of the specialist agencies, Now reports that:

"Saladin often send teams abroad to places where it is essential for them to be armed. A two-man team carries a mixture of weapons. One will have a 9mm. Browning pistol with a thirteen round magazine loaded and a twenty round magazine in his pocket. This is a weapon most of them will have used in the army and they feel comfortable with it. The other man will carry a Luger .357 Magnum with a 2.75" barrel. The idea of this mix of weapons is that the man with the blockbusting Magnum can get off his six heavy bullets quickly and while he reloads his colleague can use his Browning with its greater ammunition supply to hold off the attacker."

(p. 23)

Training is carried out in this country at the range run by gunsmiths, Holland and Holland. Agencies like Saladin are also prepared to act as initial consultants on a security 'problem' and carry through their service to the provision of guards, technology and a 'security plan' to minimise risk.

Other specialist agencies, such as Zeus Security Consultants Limited, run principally by Peter Hamilton, act as advising "middle-men between potential targets and the companies who offer to protect them" (p. 25). The Cititel offshoot of Consolidated Safeguards also offers advice on building security, vetting and industrial counter-espionage, calling in other specialist consultants in any areas where additional expertise is required.

The activities of these agencies at the specialist, 'elite' end of the market are all but invisible. The task of an adequate licensing and regulation authority would be to bring them under public scrutiny - and control.



## Down-Market - Strong-Arm Security

There is not the space here to cover a wide range of examples of down-market dubious practices. However, some mention should be made of the kinds of activities which can and do routinely involve violence.

Some security firms happily undertake work involving the eviction of squatters. Over the years numerous cases of this type of work have gained private security some notoriety in the media, although it is usually made clear that it tends to be the 'cowboy' type of agency that takes on such work. Less concern seems to have been demonstrated by the courts and the police however, even though many if not most of such evictions probably contravene Section 6 of the Criminal Law Act which makes it an offence "to use or threaten violence to secure entry into premises where another is present opposing your entry." Somehow squatters seem exempt from the protection of the law, whilst private security, here as elsewhere, benefits from some purposefully turned 'blind eyes'.

The attitudes underpinning this kind of security work are neatly indicated by the office manager of Omega Security Services of North London, reported in Time Out in 1979, (16th-22nd February).

"This is just one of the little services we do for clients - it's just a job . . . We don't go in for crossing t's and dotting i's so long as we know where to send the bill . . . We're filling a vacuum in the security market. We're doing the sort of things Securicor wouldn't do - they're too establishment minded after all."

Evidently intrigued by the work of Omega Security, Time Out followed up their February report with a further one in March. This report highlighted how people with a perhaps dubious past can succeed in the security business without really trying. There is, after all, no test of integrity that needs to be passed. In Omega's case the head of the security guards was known as Barry Evans, an alias for Roger Gleaves, the former self-styled Bishop of Medway, "who was jailed for four years in 1975 after a television documentary 'Johnny Go Home', claimed he corrupted young boys in hostels run by him." Gleaves subsequently served less than half his sentence and has been attempting to prove his innocence.



The point with regard to the running of a security firm is not whether or not Gleaves was innocent of what he was accused and convicted of. It is that there is no control over or means of officially checking on the bona-fides of those who run private security firms. Perhaps the use of an alias may not in itself necessarily arouse concern - though many clients and the general public might have been alarmed if the Kray brothers had gone 'legitimate', changed their names and set up in the security business. What should be of serious concern is that this issue is simply a small part of the consequences of who can run a security firm and what they can offer as services.

Omega, for example, sent out standard solicitations for business offering to remove 'anti-social parasites' (i.e. squatters) from property:

"Instead of wasting weeks or months in getting trespassers evicted, why not call us in to act on your behalf. We act strictly within the requirements of the Law (although we pay no attention to the 'rights' that are claimed but have no foundation in law) . . . we find that once our Repossession Officer and his staff, accompanied by the owner of the premises or his legal representative arrive at the house . . . then the people soon decide it would be more advantageous to them to reside elsewhere."

(Time Out, 16-22 March, 1979)

What is being sold here is not security but 'repossession' of property by use of threat and physical force. Perhaps such services are carried out within the (vague) letter of the law. But the approach and attitude of this and similar security firms is surely disturbing - and the conclusion must be that the (vague) letter of the law in this, and other areas where security services are offered, demands some amendment.

Of course, threat and physical force are resources in the world of security - not in the respectable, "establishment minded" world of Securicor, Group 4 and their like - but at the up-market end of the military-trained bodyguard and, also, at the downmarket end of the 'gym-trained' bouncer. The case of the death of Henry Bowles in November, 1978 brought some attention to the frequent circumstances in which bouncers employed in pubs and clubs use considerably more than what might be regarded in law as 'reasonable force' to evict people from premises.



After a firework was let off in a Kings Cross pub, Bowles was pointed out to the bouncers as the person responsible. He was physically removed and thrown out, despite protestations. As Time Out reported, outside he was then "kicked and punched unconscious. He died in hospital on 4th November, a fortnight later, without regaining consciousness." (Time Out, 8-14th December, 1978). The subsequent court case at the Old Bailey found one of the pub's £8 a night bouncers guilty of manslaughter and another guilty of common assault. The case did little to bring the casual employment of private strong-arm security under the scrutiny of the law, law-makers or public. It did establish that bouncers are entitled to use reasonable force in removing people from a place, though as the judge said in summing up, "once the customer has been ejected, the license to use reasonable force ceases because the object allowed for by the law has been attained."

Subsequently, Bowles' brother, Matthew, started a campaign - CURB - to draw attention to a variety of cases where bouncers had been responsible for carrying out serious assaults, some of which (in Scotland, Liverpool, St. Helens and London in 1978 alone) led to deaths. CURB sought to introduce some form of licensing or registration for bouncers as part of, or alongside proposals from Bruce George, MP (and others) for regulation of a broad range of security-related occupations. However, even without association with this broader campaign, Matthew Bowles had two particularly sound points to make. First he had lost a brother as a result of wholly unnecessary violence; secondly, as he pointed out to the BBC's Tonight programme (12th March, 1979), if his wife who worked as a child-minder had to be registered he felt there was undoubtedly a case to be made for some similar scrutiny of those who could be employed as bouncers.

It is unlikely that even the Home Office would be re-assured by the statements of the bouncers interviewed in the Tonight programme -

"We never made it as boxers or wrestlers, but we are trained men," said one interviewed 'working out' in a South London club.

Or, in response to the leading question:

Question: 'Do you see yourself as a public service?'

Answer: 'I bloody well do!'

But, nonetheless, bouncers like bodyguards, specialist agencies, shady



agencies and the respectable establishment-minded companies, did not become, and are not now, a source of concern to the Home Office. Despite the range of activities across the breadth of the private security sector and the serious issues these raise, lack of control, accountability or even scrutiny is not a popular item on the agenda at the Home Office.<sup>1</sup>

'Insider Crimes and Fraudulent Practices'<sup>2</sup>

"All we are saying here is that the constraints of the rule of law, while accepted by the security industry, do not have the same inexorable and sometimes ironic centrality to its activity as in the case of the police. Hence, there is at least a greater potential for those constraints to be set aside in the course of activities based on entrepreneurial enterprise . . ."

(Carson and Young, 1976:48)

The conventionally recognised significance of private security sees its activities as related to the protection of property and the prevention of crime. However, such significance can be double-edged, for clearly - to any but the naive or wilfully blinkered - such tasks can give rise to a series of circumstances and contradictions conducive to their possible corruption. In this section I can only give some selected examples of the consequences of petty and substantial corruption of trust and ethics in the private security business (but see South, 1983). It is admittedly unlikely that licensing and regulations alone would eradicate all these problems. But, on the other hand, a wholly unregulated private security sector is certainly inviting abuse.

As Draper (1978) argues, one of the principal reasons why there should be concern about private security is that 'their work by its very nature provides for access to industrial premises, cash and high-value goods, and confidential information' (Draper, 1978:11). Draper's argument is well-illustrated by the experience of the ill-starred Purolator Security Company, which lost out in two major thefts, on both sides of the Atlantic, within two years of each other and both the result of 'inside information'. In October, 1974 its Chicago vault and highly sophisticated alarm systems were breached - a former



guard was part of the break-in team. Less than two years later Purolator was hit by an even more audacious insider-job, this time at London's Heathrow Airport. In June 1976 two men presented themselves as Purolator Couriers at airport vaults where \$3.5 million in various currencies were awaiting collection by representatives of the agency. Having produced the necessary papers and authorisation, the couriers left with the currency in an armoured van. The comfortable ease of such secure routine was rudely disturbed when, two days later, two more Purolator guards arrived to transport the money. This time they were the real guards. Neither the company nor the police were slow to realise that such 'secure routine' is in general 'secure' but to an insider, it is also 'routine' - and therein lies its vulnerability.

As the most desirable insiders imaginable in the perpetration of a neat crime, 'the protectors' themselves are prime targets for corruption. Intriguingly, this seems a source of concern across a fair range of opinion. A recent article in Police Review considered the nature of 'confrontation and co-operation' between the police and private security (Kerr, 1979) and observed that, while the

"apparently inadequate set of safeguards had proved pretty effective so far . . . there are (firms) who have no declared allegiance to any code of ethics or practice. In 1974, Sir Douglas Osmond, then Chief Constable of Hampshire, speaking at a fire and security conference said: 'Some three years ago, in one police region alone, no less than 69 persons with criminal records were identified as working as patrol guards.'"

In 1982, the Daily Mirror (10th August, 1982:6) reiterated its concern - shared at various times by the press of all political shades<sup>3</sup> - that ' . . . crooks are setting up their own security companies to help them pull off robberies from the inside - and possibly to make industrial espionage easier.' The same report expressed the concern of Derek Hunter, regional officer of the then General and Municipal Workers Union, who stated that 'we know of men who walk out of an employment exchange in the morning and are on duty in security guard uniform in the evening.' It seems reasonable to assume here that GMWU is not objecting to people finding a job within a day but rather to the impossibility of checking references or providing adequate training or briefing within a day. Both the GMWU and 'the Independent Low Pay Unit are pressing the Government to introduce licensing for the security industry'. (Daily Mirror, 10th August, 1982:6)



The concern of the Low Pay Unit is, and has been for some years, the low levels of pay in private security; presumably in the context of the Mirror report this concern reflects the suspicion that low pay for a job giving access to other people's property leads to temptation. Even the supposed 'rotten apples' who provoke this unifying moral horror seem to agree with such a proposition: "One guard asked to be taken off a cash run because he had a conviction and had been jailed for robbing a security vehicle," added Mr. Hunter (ibid.).

Some of these points are also recognized by various representatives of the private security sector. However, such recognition is usually to be found in the arguments that they have continued to put forward in campaigning for exemption from the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, 1975, concerning the law against disclosure of certain past criminal offences. While maintaining agreement with the fair and laudable principles of the Act, aspects of the argument for exemption maintain that it is unfair and a misjudgement to allow ex-offenders to be employed in the private security sector: unfair to customers and unfair to ex-offenders faced with the temptation.

At a potentially more costly level of the 'insider problem' - the easing of industrial espionage mentioned in the Mirror report - the private security sector is less concerned with such charitable understanding and more with the weakness of available legal recourse. The British Corruption Act, 1906, provides one of the very few legal bases for attempting to secure prosecution against in-house industrial espionage. Insider industrial espionage perpetrated by an employee is usually untouchable as trespass and if information is copied rather than being stolen in the form of tangible documentation, then there is no crime of theft (cf. Draper, 1978:112). However, 'if the company can show that the source of the leak was a bribed employee . . . the British Corruption Act 1906 provides for a maximum penalty of £500 fine and/or imprisonment for two years.' Trespass or breach of contract remain the principal grounds for legal prosecution in cases of industrial spying, though prosecutions have been brought employing the breadth of conspiracy law, successfully as 'conspiracy to obtain confidential information by corrupt and other unlawful means', and unsuccessfully as 'conspiracy to defraud' (Draper, 1978:112).



It is undeniably the case that forms of criminal infiltration and corruption are well-evidenced in various areas of the private security sector, and fairly liberally sprinkled throughout even its more creditable and reputable representatives. As it is principally from these 'reputable representatives' that the shocked and morally offended demand for official blessing of self-regulation comes, it is not surprising that their elitist vantage point leads them to attempt to preserve a case for the integrity of the 'profession' of security. The result is reliance on the old 'rotten apple theory'. This is the explanation invariably trotted out in most conventional discussions of police corruption, and is indeed best summed up in the report of the Knapp Commission (1972) on police corruption in New York:

"According to this theory, which bordered on official department doctrine, any policeman found to be corrupt must promptly be denounced as a rotten apple in an otherwise clean barrel. It must never be admitted that his otherwise individual corruption may be symptomatic of an underlying disease."

Given the peculiar and anomalous sense in which private security/investigator work can be one of the 'fiddle-prone' occupations par excellence (especially given the almost universal levels of low pay and low standards of qualification, training and incentive), then the confinement of criminal activity to the single individual who realises that they are 'on to a good way of making a bit (or lot) extra' seems a doubtful proposition. The general acceptance of the rotten apple theory, however, functions in a not dissimilar way for the private security sector as for the police, as an attempt to preserve the public image of the private security sector as a whole (and, by association, the integrity of our 'guardians' in general).

### Competition, Cutting Corners and Sharp Practice

The private security sector is heavily competitive. However, there is not the space here to consider the consequences of this across the full range of its activities; instead I can only offer examples of deception and cost-cutting within the largest and most visible area of private security, that of provision of guarding services (cf. Chapter 2).



Few business concerns are interested in personally involving their own management in the supervision of safety of their premises and property outside of normal working hours and are content to leave such matters to the police and private security. Hence, opportunities for (literal) short-service are numerous and are fully exploited by some companies. Some customers will pay for all-night guards, who leave the premises as soon as they are deserted and return shortly before work commences the following day. Visiting patrol services often have such long lists of calls that they are physically impossible to fulfil. On one occasion, one of the directors of a firm in my own research interviews had a case of a guard from a competing company offering a job to one of his staff, saying 'you come on at six, you go home at eight, and you get paid for four hours'; the contract to the company was actually for eight hours' guarding. Obviously, such arrangements increase profits for the company, keep wages low, and enable cut-rate charges to be offered to the firms employing the company, obviously an asset in under-cutting private security agencies who genuinely try to fulfil the terms and obligations of their contracts.

The prevalence of cost-cutting practices is substantially dependent on, and partially the reason for, the employment in private security of an abnormally high proportion of part-time and casual staff. Moonlighting from another job or taking on this kind of part-time work while formally unemployed are common in private security and employers knowingly exploit this. Unrecorded work and unrecorded payment are familiar in certain areas of the private security business, and obviously, for the firms themselves, employing on this basis produces considerable savings of outlay on insurance and pension contributions etc., allowing a lower tax-free rate of pay and lower charges in the under-cutting of competition.

In this section I have only had the space to cover some of the areas of petty and serious malpractice and so on. However, if there is any validity in applying the 'tip of the iceberg' metaphor to private security then the little that is known about 'insider crime' and fraudulent practice throughout the private security sector can be seen to offer substantial further evidence of the need for some form of regulation and scrutiny.



Some Civil Liberties Issues: Intruding on Privacy; Powers of Detention; Private Networks

Of the advanced western societies Britain has consistently been the most grossly negligent in promoting the legal protection of individuals with regard to the personal information that can be gathered about them and the use made of such information. This state of affairs has been of strong concern to a wide variety of parties for many years but government action under any administration has been virtually non-existent.

In an interview with Jane Walmsley of Capital Radio (20th May, 1979 - tape supplied to author), Patricia Hewitt, then General Secretary of NCCL remarked on the absence or inadequacies of laws governing such information gathering and cited in particular agencies like credit reference companies, one of which she gave as an example illustrating how information is collected on a large scale by the illegal impersonation of police officers and DHSS and tax officials.

The lack of effective controls over the ways in which information can be gathered was made notoriously clear in the Malone telephone tapping case of 1978. Here the judge was moved to comment that not only were there no effective controls over police telephone tapping (because with a warrant from the Home Secretary the police can tap telephones perfectly legally), but there are also no effective sanctions against the private individual resorting to telephone tapping. In this regard Britain does not yet meet the requirements of the European Human Rights Convention on the right of the individual to privacy. Recent government proposals may remedy this, but the reasons for any such move seem a complex tale of Westminster, Whitehall and Euro-politics rather than any simple recognition of human rights. Following pressures from Alliance and Labour peers to add amendments to the 1985 Telecommunications Bill covering this issue, the Government announced a limited Interception of Communications Bill in the Queen's Speech of 6th November, 1984 (Guardian). Specific rules may be formulated but the gesture is cosmetic. Certainly the electronic surveillance activities of private agencies seem to fall outside the offence of interception (Hilliard, 1985).



In the meantime the familiar overlap of the public and the private spheres finds this a particularly fruitful area for commercial compromise. As the Sunday Times (10th February, 1980) reported on its front page:

"Army officers in Ulster, frustrated by official restrictions placed on telephone tapping, have been buying their own personal tapping equipment so they can carry on their activities unhindered by the law. A Sunday Times investigation shows that the officers are among a rapidly expanding number of clients using private security firms to tap telephones. Other targets for private tapping have included:

- political activists in a key constituency;
- employees suspected by their employers of theft."

Numerous examples of such practices could be cited - as they have been many times before. But there is still no political wedge to drive home in pushing for legislation on this issue - and it is a political wedge that is needed. As the High Court judge, Sir Robert Megarry noted in 1979, there is nothing in law that prevents telephone-tapping and the subject "cries out" for legislation, "this is a matter for Parliament and not the courts to put right." Parliamentary legislation to regulate the activities of the private security sector might provide an appropriate political wedge to open up this issue to proper Parliamentary scrutiny and action. Current Home office proposals in this area are by no means specific (in the Interception of Communications Bill for example), about the activities of private agencies and individuals (cf. Hilliard, 1985).

Private security also services the public social control agencies in other direct and only slightly less legally dubious relationships. These too deserve serious examination.

In 1983 an Observer (27th March, 1983:3) story, 'Anger at Securicor Guard on Migrants', noted that "the use of Securicor . . . to guard and escort immigrants is being examined by the Commission for Racial Equality . . ." A number of MPs and civil rights and immigrant welfare organisations have expressed concern over the £250,000 per annum contract that Securicor holds from the Home Office to guard suspected illegal immigrants and escort them as they are moved about for detention and questioning.



The legal position occupied by Securicor here certainly needs to be clarified. In the Observer story, "Larry Grant, a lawyer and member of the National Council for Civil Liberties, pointed out that Securicor's legal position was curious. 'They have only the power of an ordinary citizen making an arrest.'" Physical force can only be used for self-protection according to the relevant Home Office rules covering Securicor's work on this contract. This makes it difficult to understand how Securicor can detain those who are unwilling to submit to detention. This is not a problem of powers available at most other ports of transit in Britain. Securicor only operates at Heathrow, Gatwick and Harmondsworth, whilst at other ports, official policing bodies have generally been responsible for performing such duties. It is odd then that the Home Office justifies the use of Securicor on the grounds that they "considered that the use of police to control people who were not criminals would be too oppressive and because it was felt that immigration officers, who are civil servants, could not be asked to perform such tasks." (Observer, 27th March, p. 3)

The real point of the story however is that it is not new. It shortly blew over as it has done many times in the past. In 1970 (28th August), Police Review, carried a report attempting to clarify where the Home Secretary (then Reginald Maudling) derived his authority for employing Securicor at Heathrow and other airports. A Home Office representative was, at that time, apparently only able to quote Section 13 of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, 1962, as authority:

"Any person required or authorised to be detained under this Act may be detained in such places as the Secretary of State may direct."

However, as Police Review commented,

"whether Parliament ever intended to permit 'private gaols' is unlikely because nowhere in the Act does it confer powers of detention on anyone other than an immigration officer or a constable."

However, in the Summer of 1973 the Protection of Aircraft Act was introduced to comply with the provisions of the international Montreal Convention on hijacking and aircraft safety (Bunyan, 1971:244). The Act was passed, with minimal consultation with interested parties by both Houses without a division. As in other cases concerning the



anomalous nature of private security the unconsulted opposition to certain provisions of the Act were a strange alliance. NCCL and several Labour MPs spoke out and so too did Reg Gale, chairman of the Police Federation, objecting to the powers extended by the Act to private security to search and detain airline passengers, and ultimately, some feared, to bear arms. Under the Act the Secretary of State can require airport management to provide sufficient and adequate personnel for searches of site, aircraft and persons. Such personnel need not be police officers and under a (deliberately?) general description in the Directive private security can clearly be used. The Act now provides a firmer legal basis for the state's commercial compromise in the employment of private security staff in roles fulfilling public security and public immigration service functions. As the Daily Telegraph (October, 1977) noted, the work that Securicor undertakes 'for' the Immigration Service comes out of the budget allocated to that public service.

Thus the issues raised in 1983 about this private immigration service have long been around and have not gone away. But they have once again been generally forgotten. Legislation should clarify the legal position of private security generally and as a privatised department of the Immigration Service!

#### Private Security and the Police: Links and Networks

The cross-over of roles and blurring of boundaries is also acutely evident when we consider the nature of the networks that exist, transcending the public and private services.<sup>4</sup>

The euphemism of the 'old-boys network' is a common and cosy metaphorical way of side-stepping issues that can often touch upon the corrupt abuse of personal position and privilege. Of direct concern here is the passage of information between private and official channels of information: the unchecked 'co-operation' between private and public sector - from local private security agencies feeding 'observations' and 'hearsay' to the police at local collator level, through checks run through police criminal records as favours to ex-policemen now in the private security sector, to other outcomes of the



familiar pattern of cross-over employment from the police and military to private security. All of this constitutes a significant system of violation of the security of personal and official information. The existence of the old-boys network also confirms the like-minded world-view shared by police, military and private security personnel.

As noted above this can contribute to the former seeking the assistance of the latter in the circumvention of certain rules (for example over telephone tapping). The up-market end of the private security sector, dealing in commercial intelligence and industrial espionage, also utilises the advantages of cross-over employment and old contacts and in many cases has some considerable disregard for either the ethics of the profession or the laws of the land, or both (although in some cases, such as computer privacy or telephone tapping, effective laws do not yet exist).

The link between private security and the police at local collator level is of obvious mutual and reciprocal advantage where the police can help out with the vetting of prospective employees, and anyone else of interest, in return for the security companies' own local information gathering. Obviously, such arrangements largely depend upon the willingness of the police to co-operate and indeed they rarely co-operate with very small, inefficient or particularly dubious agencies. Despite the fact that a small firm need not necessarily be justifiably regarded as dubious, nevertheless it could be denied this sort of co-operation, which simply means that in many cases (for there are many small firms) the claimed vetting procedures for hiring staff are either ineffective or non-existent. In the 'big league', however, as long ago as March 1971, J. Philip Sorenson, managing director of Group 4, acknowledged to The Times that 'there is no doubt that there is an old-boy network which helps us to discover whether a man has a criminal record.'

As Stenning and Shearing (1980, (a)) observe with regard to the Home Office Discussion Paper on Private Security (1979):



"No one who has any familiarity with the world of private security could take seriously the Paper's claim that what is involved in this regard is really no more than an 'occasional transgression' (para. 67), of confidentiality rules by the police, and on this issue the credibility of the Paper's authors is sorely strained. The fact that widespread practices of this kind are hard to prove - and security officials, being the kind of people they are, go to great lengths to ensure that they will be hard to prove - is no justification for ignoring their existence and the important implications for public policy to which they give rise"

(p. 265).

Public policy and clear legislation must address the implications of this system of frequent transgression of confidentiality and abuse of privilege.

## 2. The Current State of Self-Regulation in the Private Security Sector

### (i) The British Security Industry Association

The BSIA was formed in 1967 by eight of the major firms in private security. The idea was to create some sort of pressure group to generate an image of responsibility and integrity for the industry and to bring to bear on the government and, in particular, the Home Office, some pressure to recognise the industry as a force to be treated seriously in the field of crime prevention.<sup>5</sup>

The Association makes much of the fact that it represents between 75-90% (even BSIA estimates have varied) of the trade of the main areas of private security, by annual turnover. It is however difficult to obtain any certain figures to support such a claim and certainly by the estimate of the Director General, John Wheeler, after a survey that he conducted in 1978, there were then at least three hundred small to medium-sized firms outside the BSIA.

The aims and activities of the association as laid out in their introductory brochure are of course highly laudable:

"The Association was formed to give the maximum possible assistance to the public, the police and the government in the prevention of crime and to promote and encourage high



standards of ethics, service and equipment throughout the security industry. Other aims include the promotion of more public awareness of the importance and value of good security and the provision of a negotiating body to meet government, insurance and police representatives and indeed any other bodies interested in crime prevention."

Until very recently, with the appointment of one Inspector General in 1982, the BSIA has been a one man and his secretary operation, although a great deal of effort is put into suggesting that it is quite a complex and high-powered organisation. Their brochure suggests that the Director General of the Association is the focal point of communication with the Association of Chief Police Officers, the British Insurance Association, the Association of Burglary Insurance Surveyors, the Post Office, Government departments, Parliament, the EEC and various other bodies. What is certainly the case and of interest, is that the Director General does represent the industry on the Home Office Standing Committee on Crime Prevention and the sub-committee dealing with mobile property. Representatives serve on other committees and working parties concerned with technical aspects of security and crime prevention. There is then, indeed, a considerable degree of liaison between the Home Office, the civil policing network and the security industry but this neither warrants the BSIA's self-importance, nor many of the claims it makes for its effectiveness.

According to the rules laid down, the criteria for joining the BSIA are quite stringent. The application form for membership, an undertaking which prospective members must sign, indeed reads most impressively. However, there are sections in the form relating to methods and periods of screening of employees and to training which are essentially hollow as the Association has no effective means of checking the veracity of what is entered on the form. The BSIA nonetheless remains confident of its ability to regulate its members and hence a large section of the industry. It therefore looks upon its 'rival', the International Professional Security Association with its membership of individuals working in private security, as very much a poor relation - if any kin at all. Wheeler and the BSIA have on the other hand been quite enthusiastic about the degree of dialogue between their Association and Whitehall, especially on matters of training, licensing and safety, costing and efficiency standards.



At the same time, the BSIA has generally been quite uncomfortable about admissions by some senior figures in the security world that the extent of use of channels of dialogue includes gaining access to privileged information, particularly in vetting prospective employees. The BSIA grudgingly acknowledge that such practices may indeed be 'a fact of life', but as John Wheeler added in my interview with him:

"we wish it could be otherwise and look forward to a time when proper . . . procedures will make some of the Criminal Records Office data available to us, in some form."

Such 'hopes', typically unclear about the mechanisms or guarantees of accountability to be involved, are only understandable when placed in the context of the BSIA's concern for its self-survival and its claim that with stronger backing from the Home Office it could be an effective self-regulation body.

The BSIA certainly agrees that there are undoubtedly abuses within the security business and that some form of control and accountability is desirable. Criminal infiltration and unwelcome elements, especially in the more marginal, speciality sectors - providing for example politically sensitive services like personnel and surveillance can, from the point of view of the BSIA, bring the steady and stable image of security into disrepute and jeopardy. Indeed the security constituency that the BSIA represents strives very hard to stabilise its potentially rocky boat. This is especially so in its accommodation of trade unionism.

Unionisation has slowly, but in recent years more surely, begun to take a hold within the major security companies. As described earlier, MATSA in particular has organised in several of the larger companies and ASTMS have also moved into the managerial grades of some companies. Both operate closed-shops and have been willing to accommodate themselves to the structure of the companies and their 'need' for vetted personnel. They nonetheless remain vocal in their support for measures which could lead to improved conditions for their members and hence would favour licensing and regulation where this could serve as a means to improve levels of pay, benefits, status and so on.



Perhaps, unsurprisingly, John Wheeler and the BSIA have found it difficult to completely conceal their anti-union sentiments and suggested to me that the trade-unions have been "opportunistic in tapping what is a resource of independently-minded people," in other words, somehow taking advantage of them. It is not difficult for the BSIA to suggest that it already demands high standards or that it encourages a minimum wage on which to build. But at present there is little incentive to meet high standards and the minimum wages that have been prevalent throughout the industry have been indeed that - the minimum.

Obviously, the key issue for the BSIA with regard to their status as legitimately - and powerfully - representative of private security companies is whether they can deliver an effective system of self-regulation or whether some form of public licensing and regulation takes over. In general, but with some inconsistency over time, the BSIA has been highly sceptical of various proposals for licensing measures. In my interview with Mr. Wheeler (and recurring in subsequent BSIA statements and press releases) the familiar problem of how to re-negotiate the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act has been emphasized, and indeed Mr. Wheeler suggested that such a "great amount of consideration" and negotiation would have to be "given over to this problem" that it almost wasn't worth starting on the process. Although in more recent years the BSIA's position seems to have been moving to a position more receptive to some ideas about licensing - (after all under favourable arrangements the large companies could benefit strongly) it seems unlikely that there have been any fundamental changes in its early guiding inclinations.

Probably one of the most substantial criticisms which Mr. Wheeler and the BSIA have been able to level against the pro-licensing proposals has been that there would 'surely be problems with the extended bureaucracy which would be required, for the regulatory board would be unlikely to have sufficient staff to justify in practice setting high standards for the granting of licenses which it would then be unable to inspect and police' (quoted not verbatim: taken from notes of interview, 20th April, 1978). Mr. Wheeler, not wholly unreasonably, contended that the inevitable outcome of this practical dilemma would



be that the standards and requirements set by the board would tend to be low enough for just about all firms to fulfil them and gain their license. This seems a slightly extreme caricature insofar as there would at least be legislatively embodied minimum standards and requirements to fulfil so some positive contribution would still emerge, even from such a bleak scenario. The criticism really highlights the BSIA's reservations about any form of statutory intervention, for the market leaders would remain in their positions of dominance and respectability but with added government bestowed 'status' - at least within this 'weak' licensing vision. The fear then is probably of enforceable minimum standards being the 'thin end of the wedge'. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the criticism - as addressed to such an under-resourced regulatory board - is not without foundation. For example, in the USA, Scott and McPherson's (1971) study of licensing in Minnesota found that:

"The licensing agent (the State Crime Bureau and Director of Public Safety) feels that present statutes, court interpretations and shortage of manpower for enforcement (one part-time crime bureau staff person, has total responsibility for private police licensing and regulation) restricts its discretion in granting or denying a license and in regulating activity once a license is granted. Indeed the operative Attorney General opinion requires that every applicant fulfilling the minimum requirements must be granted a license."

(p. 274)

It remains unclear whether any licensing and regulation arrangements in the UK would benefit most from local accountability and knowledge or perhaps from some of the strengths to be obtained from centralised coordination and inspection. However, the possibility of a process of the bureaucratic reduction of licensing requirements to the lowest common denominator of standards occurring is not a remote one.

It can be argued in fact that a licensing programme would require a flexibility of standards. Fixed legislation would obviously limit such flexibility as was necessitated by the very momentum of private security's expansion. The standards and operational potential, as well as the activities of companies and arenas of activity within the private security sector, are constantly being up-dated and growing in scope.



Of course they are not always necessarily changing quite as the BSIA would hope. John Wheeler and the BSIA agree that the pre-war liberal interpretation of where police could or should patrol changed after the Second World War and led to an increasing division of policing labour, and clearly they feel that they could play a fuller part in these changed circumstances. For example, it came as a disappointment to some in the industry when a Home Office working party recommended that security employees should not be allowed the status of Special Constables. The failure to be granted such responsible recognition and special status by Whitehall and the Home Office still causes some irritation.

In an article in Security Gazette in 1977 (October, p. 325), John Wheeler concluded that:

"essentially the central problem of insuring public confidence in the security industry is the question of vetting. If that could be dealt with separately from the more complex matter of licensing and standards we might achieve a rapid advance to the benefit of all."

What Mr. Wheeler and the BSIA hoped for at this stage, and perhaps do again today, is a resuscitation of the mood of optimism which followed the formation of the BSIA, when it was hoped that the respectability of private security would be assured by what came to be seen as a 'dialogue' between its respectable representatives and Whitehall. Such a dialogue it was hoped would mean respectability, retention of self-control and rejection of licensing.

In the event the persisting dialogue has been remarkably low-key; the BSIA has Home Office recognition if no particularly explicit blessing, it still has its limited self-control over its own members and there is still no real prospect of a licensing authority being set up. On the other hand, the BSIA has not really gained anything and its critics can still make many valid and telling points against it. In the mid 1980s the BSIA seems a little unclear about its role; unsurprisingly, not for the first time.

In 1982 a report in the Home Office publication Crime Prevention News announced - 'Security Industry Acts'. Within the same week both the BSIA and the IPSA had announced "that they were taking steps to



improve the standards of the security industry" (p. 3). The BSIA announced a more rigorous pre-employment screening system and the appointment of an Inspector-General to "ensure that published standards were maintained." IPSA introduced a detailed set of standards for its members in an Ethical Code of Conduct, which it hoped would offer a yardstick for the industry. The report concluded that "Both moves were warmly welcomed by the Government, which has encouraged self-regulation within the industry."

It is too early to say what impact these measures may have made but it is not inappropriate to ask whether they could, genuinely, make any substantial impact. Despite the assurances of the BSIA that it is, and can improve as, an effective watchdog and disciplinary body, it must still lack the legal teeth which an independent adjudicating inspectorate might have in order to enforce its decisions. Neither the BSIA nor its new Inspectorate are independent bodies and they could not therefore usefully be vested with such powers. Similar points are acknowledged even by members of the BSIA's inner circle. As Peter Smith, Managing Director of the Securicor group and chair of the BSIA policy committee has said; for

"a professional body . . . to try an issue which may lead to expulsion of a member, the courts have always held that the professional body, since it is acting in a quasi-judicial capacity, must conform in all respects 'to the rules of natural justice' . . . It follows that, were they to try an issue potentially involving a later claim for damages, the Association's 'disciplinary committee' would have to be prepared to bring to the sifting of evidence, and to the deciding of issues of fact and law, all the skills, procedural and otherwise, which a competent judicial body would be expected to have, and to make available the necessary time required. Plainly this will generally be impractical."

(Smith, 1975:382-3)

The real impracticality however resides in the nature of the existing ineffectuality and partiality of self-regulation.

It should not be thought however that Smith advocates an alternative system. Rather he has eloquently argued the case against the need for increased regulation and monitoring. For example, a common concern raised by critics is that bogus security companies are frequently able to defraud customers buying their services in good faith. Smith



argues that this presupposes a naivety on the part of business managers which is simply wrong. Successful businesses check the suppliers of their services through their bankers, the Company's registry and, especially in the case of security services, they will usually require evidence of insurance cover. This sounds rather more like an account of how Smith wishes employing companies would act, for it remains the case that there have been, still are and will doubtless continue to be, security firms which defraud their clients, albeit to varying degrees and with varying degrees of impunity.

Most of the pro-licensing lobby also points to 'criminal infiltration' of other, otherwise respectable companies and argues that regulation with access to criminal records would allow for a thorough screening out of would-be 'infiltrators'. Smith's response is characteristically concerned with a sense of "moral fibre" which the absence of a criminal record will still tell the security company nothing about: the likelihood of succumbing to temptation,

"Likely sobriety, reliability as a time-keeper, amenability to discipline or general maturity and stability as an individual."

(Smith, 1979:29)

It is as likely, argue Smith and the BSIA, that an individual's record of previous employment for the past twenty years or back to school leaving will provide an indication of character and 'suitability' for security employment. But the real stumbling block for even this reference only system is again the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, 1974.

The central principle of the Act, as relevant here, allows for convictions for offences which have resulted in sentences of up to two and a half years for imprisonment to be 'ignored' if the offender successfully stays out of further trouble for a specified period of time after the original conviction, determined according to a sliding scale. Such a 'spent' conviction can then be ignored by applicants and past-employers for the purposes of giving references. This is, to the security companies, an absurd situation. Smith points out for example, that in relation to a probation order, the rehabilitation period can be just one year from the date of conviction or the date of



the expiry of the probation order, whichever is the later. "So it would appear," observes Smith:

"that an individual convicted of theft and put on probation for twelve months can apply for security employment the day after his probation order expires and can entirely conceal the fact of his conviction from a prospective employer."

(Smith, 1979:30)

Whilst in the main the pro-licensing lobby - including the National Council for Civil Liberties - would support the exemption of private security from the working of the Act if this was accompanied by statutory registration and regulation, the representatives of private security principally call for exemption from the Act as another aid to putting their own house in order without considering how they could ensure that such a provision could be used effectively, fairly and with due regard for civil liberties and personal privacy throughout the private security sector. A number of other industries and professions are exempted from the Act, and at first sight it does seem eminently reasonable to therefore argue that private security is as deserving of exemption as probably the majority of the others. However, successive Home Secretaries have rejected or ignored calls for private security to be similarly treated as a special case. I shall return to the role and position of the Home Office later in this chapter (and in Chapter 5).

At this point I continue to consider the issues of licensing and regulation from the point of view of organisations representing private security and turn briefly to IPSA - The International Professional Security Association.

#### (ii) The International Professional Security Association

Whereas the BSIA represents security organisations who favour self-controlled, self-regulation, IPSA represents individual security professionals and has generally taken a policy stance favouring some form of government licensing.

Formed in 1958 the Association aims to "establish, promote and encourage the science and professional practice of industrial and commercial security." Its membership is open to all employers of, or



employees engaged in, private security work on a full-time basis. It has a wide membership which can include private investigators and others working in the private security world - even internationally with its status of overseas associates. By the late 1970s it was claiming a membership of around 5,000. Uniquely it has consistently addressed the issue of the need for training in private security in a positive way by offering courses and conferences aimed at basic, intermediate and advanced levels. These courses have been recognised in the past by various government appointed training boards - a factor of importance in encouraging the take up of basic training opportunities particularly because it meant that the costs could be reimbursed to the sponsoring company. Enthusiasm for the provision of basic training however should not go untempered by reservations about the course content of advanced and managerial training.

In 1968 IPSA established the Institute of Industrial Security. Membership of the Institute requires membership of IPSA for one year and then the achievement of a certain standard in an examination. This covers questions on crime prevention, fire prevention, alarm systems, powers of arrest and search, theft, trespass, evidence and procedure, reporting and industrial relations (cf. Draper, 1978:128). The Institute also offers correspondence courses which are widely taken up whilst IPSA itself publishes one of the major security journals Security and Protection. IPSA's outreach activities have also included the arrangement of seminars for management in industry and commerce. It is at this level of 'training' and discussion that cause for caution about the promotion of 'advanced standards' in the private sector should arise. For example, in October 1975, IPSA held a conference in Brussels in association with the Management Centre for Europe, inviting an interesting series of speakers. These included: John Wilson of IPSA, Sir Martin Furnival-Jones (an MI5 man of twenty-five years experience), Brigadier S.E. Dufton, MBE and Lt. Col. S.G. Styles, GC (bomb disposal experts) of S and D Security Limited, Donn P. Parker of the (conservatively-orientated) Stanford Research Institute and Harry Welton of the (very conservatively orientated) Economic League (cf. Garner, 1978:113). Topics apparently included computer fraud, anti-kidnapping strategies, industrial espionage and so on.



Moving back to the perhaps more parochial issue of licensing and regulating such activities in the UK, the following section draws upon brief interviews with seven members of IPSA (with varying degrees of involvement in the Association) and a substantial number of conversations with other members at private security meetings, conferences and exhibitions. Of course, nothing that any of the people that I talked to can be held to represent, then (1979-1983) or now, the official position or opinion of IPSA.

Whatever the policy level support for licensing of private security within IPSA, it is perhaps inevitable that there should be a number of dissenting voices among the individual members. I certainly encountered quite a high degree of hostility to the broad range of factors which would be covered by legislation such as contemplated in the Parliamentary Bills introduced by Bruce George, MP and others. The dilemma is that individuals may see a basic form of licensing as both a public and a private good - cleaning up the industry and also bestowing status and credibility upon those licensed. However, any further encroachment into the world of private security may lay claim to the public good but is more immediately viewed as a private nuisance. In other words hostility to any substantial body of legislation emanates from those who can see no pecuniary advantage in it.

A reasonable subject to discuss with regard to the effects of any such legislation seemed to be the issue of vetting of personnel, and the use - and abuse - of the 'old boys network'. Most people seemed cynical about the role of the old boys network - it has always operated and it always will.

Security Officer: "If the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act was repealed then all our troubles would be over . . ."

"Why?" (I asked naively).

"Cos, we'd know then wouldn't we?"

"But you'd still need the machinery to check on people," I replied.

The response of the Security Officer to this was to turn away in amused disbelief. Security and personnel managers regard it as obvious that with a wink and a whisper in the right ear there already exists the basis for informal checking of applicants' references and



backgrounds. From this point of view licensing and any exemption of private security from the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act would simply facilitate degrees of access to privileged information. Without careful safeguards such a situation could be even more dangerously open to abuse.

For IPSA with its diversity of individual members there has always been a particular awareness of the anomalous position of 'In House' security staff who are employed not by security organisations but by other commercial and industrial enterprises yet who undertake several duties of a similar nature to those employed in security firms. Exploring this I talked to two ex-CID officers, one of whom now works for ChemPro (the fictional name for a major chemical processing company) and one who works for Plastic Credit (a major credit card company).

ChemPro Officer: "You can't exclude in-house security from the Bill or whatever, 'cos I'm both you see . . . I'm in-house security but I go round checking outside" (i.e. outside the company he works for).

Author: "What, checking on your employees outside?"

Chempro Officer: " . . . No . . . (laughs) . . . on our customers! I check their inventories and their stock - and reclaim for us what they say they haven't got! Like today, say, I did ten inventories . . . (pause), I should think I recovered £6,000 worth of stuff. Not bad for one man, eh?"

Despite some arguments advanced that in-house security should be excluded from licensing and regulation, it is clear that in-house security staff and private security firms' staff have no clear cut boundaries of operation. They cannot therefore be rendered distinct for the purposes of licensing and regulation. As the Chem Pro security officer was at pains to point out, he is by no means unique. Inevitably, a large number of 'in-house' security staff actually spend their working hours away from their in-house base visiting the premises of customers, sometimes asking for a straightforward inventory check but usually, and interestingly, just saying that "They're 'checking on what's selling.'"

The security officer from Plastic Credit highlighted the propensity of



the ex-police officer to carry over some of the role and authority of his former job to his new profession:

"Last week," he said "I was just sitting around talking to an old mate who works for a car hire firm - and this guy comes in to return a car - mark you - to return it, with what turned out to be a stolen credit card - after a routine check that was. Now in that situation somebody has to do something - somebody has to make a decision . . . So I arrested him (pause) . . . Of course, I could only perform a citizens arrest. That's the problem. And if he'd been innocent . . . if, like - the usual trick is to give some young yobbo a fiver and say 'take this car back for me' and I'd arrested him and then this young yobbo had stood up in court and said I'm innocent - then . . . (pause) . . . that's my problem see."

This security officer would not be drawn further on the issue of desirable powers for private security, and to give him his due, I certainly do not think that he was advocating that security personnel should enjoy the powers of any branch of the police - as an ex-policeman he had the benefit of two perspectives. But he did seem to imply that it might be desirable to have a system whereby security staff could perform arrests with perhaps a little more power and authority than the ordinary citizen, and where their 'professional position' - placing them in situations potentially more likely to lead them to seek to detain or arrest members of the public - would be viewed more favourably by the courts and the general judicial system. However reasonable such a hope may seem to some, to others it suggests but the thin edge of a bigger blue wedge. A form of licensing and regulation designed to serve the public interest before that of private security would have to sympathise with the latter sentiment.

One of the most frequent negative comments about licensing and regulation from these IPSA members (and others) relates to the claim that legislation could raise standards by removing the unfair competition of the price-undercutting 'cowboys'. In conversation with four security officers both a sceptical view and several counter-arguments were put forward:

"It's a market anyway - we will always have to contend with undercutting."

Advocates of the sceptical view tend to dismiss the 'undercutting by cowboys' issue on, first, the above grounds, and second, that:

"Customers are commercial businessmen too . . ."



(interruption - "not always!") " . . . and they know they're getting what they pay for."

There are however several well-known arguments against this position:

"Well . . . 'cowboys' undercut by more than the respectable companies can afford to compete at . . ."

So, undercutting in a market composed solely of 'respectable' companies would still provide higher levels of standards - and therefore, the argument hopefully goes - of pay and conditions for workers, of safeguards for the public and of service for the customer.

Others have little faith in the business acumen of commercial customers as a positive influence on standards in the security market place:

"Commercial business clients may be simply required to hire security because of insurance requirements - and they give scant regard to 'quality of service' simply because price and profits are the prime consideration."

Indeed, even the genuinely quality-conscious business will not necessarily know what it is getting if it has to rely solely on publicity brochures and a high price. Enforceable standards backed by accountable authority is the only viable solution to the exploitation of this particular - and particularly lucrative market.

### (iii) Other Associations - Locksmiths and Alarms; Private Investigators

The Master Locksmiths Association represents around two hundred members and a number of affiliate members who are manufacturers and wholesalers. Changes in the lock making industry throughout the post war period have severely reduced the specialist craft section of the trade and most locks today are mass-produced and then fitted by anyone advertising themselves as locksmiths. The Master Locksmiths Association remains the respectable membership body for the trade and seeks to maintain its credibility and independence, even drawing up rules relating to the representation that large companies can claim in order to ensure that no particular parties gain positions of dominance.



Although Codes of Practice supported by the Office of Fair Trading and the police cover the interests of the Association, it generally feels that these can be ineffective and certainly slow mechanisms for redressing any malpractice. As with other branches of the private security sector, locksmiths are concerned about the uncontrollable growth of a potentially, if not actually, disreputable source of competition. In this case it is the growth of shoe heel bars which also offer key cutting services. These have undergone massive expansion in the past fifteen years yet give only minimal training and require no authorising instructions to enable them to cut security keys. There are a number of true and apocryphal stories in the business about security keys for safes that have been cut at heel bars and have subsequently jammed in the safe lock. Certainly a perverse contribution to crime prevention. Other common tricks and sources of complaint and concern include the retention of spare keys by "cowboy outfits" who offer to fit household locks, incidentally failing to give advice about window locks and who, whilst fitting the locks, can be safely 'casing' the premises. The Association is therefore in favour of at least some form of licensing and regulation.

The National Supervisory Council for Intruder Alarms has over one hundred members, the figure fluctuating with the growth of the industry and the offsetting of increases following amalgamations of companies. The NSCIA is associated with the BSIA, the latter acting as a broad trades association for the private security industry as a whole (or at least its members) with the NSCIA seeing its brief as overseeing adherence to British Standards for alarm systems. Being an installer of alarms is the sole criterion for eligibility for membership, although acceptance follows some degree of scrutiny of the bona fides of the applicant company. Acceptance to the Council's Roll allows companies to display the seal of approval of the NSCIA and carries some recognition from the insurance companies and the police - and supposedly also, the general public, although this seems far less certain (see Chapter 3). Although the certainty of some of the NSCIA's claims are disputable, it does seem that obtaining insurance coverage without their approval could be a more difficult process.

The governing body of NSCIA includes seventeen members comprised of



four representatives of the industry itself, four from insurance and five from other relevant but independent institutes, such as the Institute of Electrical Engineers or Architects. There are also representatives from small installers who are not BSIA members, and the full-time Director General. The Chair alternates every two years between representatives of the alarm business and the insurance companies. Manufacturers are not allowed as members. Confident of its success and credibility, the NSCIA is generally unenthusiastic about licensing and regulation though it has obviously considered the issue (see below). But in any case, the NSCIA is probably best considered in terms of its affinity with the BSIA. In terms of wider policy relating to private security as a whole, where this would affect the NSCIA then it would probably follow the BSIA's lead.

The Intruder Alarm Installers Association is a small, independent rival of the NSCIA and has attracted criticism from the BSIA/NSCIA Directorate. It is comprised of small independent installers nationally, claiming to work to similar high standards to the NSCIA, such as installing to British Standard and operating an internal system of inspection and discipline. Its attitude to licensing seems equivocal but however much sympathy it might elicit as the underdog in a competition with the larger companies and the BSIA/NSCIA it is clear that it has no real powers of discipline over its membership other than expulsion from what is in any case a small organisation. It lacks the credibility and contacts of the NSCIA and certainly cannot be taken to contribute anything to the arguments against licensing. On the other hand the very fact of its existence demonstrates the ineffectiveness and non-representative nature of the NSCIA. Only a system of licensing and regulation could clarify the muddied waters of the alarm industry.

The Association of British Investigators has tended to adopt a liberal public relations approach in presenting its identity, has decried the non-professional standards of some private investigators and has seen the benefit of such a strategy in indicators of acceptance like use of its membership list by the Law Society. An impressive sounding code of ethics and conduct urges its members "to at all times conduct our investigations within the bounds of legality, morality and



professional ethics . . . (and) to guard against inadvertent disclosures of private information," and so on. Needless to say, there is no mechanism for more effectively encouraging adherence to these highflown principles. Indeed, an apparently well-known story from the early 1970s concerning a member of the ABI General Council, who in 1971 was fined £500 for entering premises through a window and frightening an unsuspecting woman, raises questions about why he was then made President of the General Council? Further questions might also surround other aids to the promotion of a professional image. For example, the Younger Committee (1972) heard evidence concerning private investigators which feared the possibility of misrepresentation if officially approved identity cards could be issued perhaps bearing a photograph and possibly being mistaken for possessing some police authority. As Draper, (1978:163) points out however,

"this problem is already with us. Members of the Association (of British Investigators) . . . are given identity cards to prove the membership of the holder and, although they are not very similar to police warrant cards, to the uninitiated they might be mistaken as such."

Such half-way house attempts to create respectability are not really very satisfactory on any criteria.

To some extent this is recognized by the Association which has gone on record in favour of some form of licensing system. In an undated report (circa 1978) the ABI notes that its

"efforts were acknowledged by the . . . Younger . . . Committee on Privacy . . . in July 1972:

"We also note the desire of the Association of British Investigators - apparently the only large organisation of private detectives in this country to have a licensing system."

The BIA's document, submitted to the Royal Commission on Legal Services, concluded its two pages with the following claim and request:

"With the exception of those investigators who are members of the Association of British Investigators, they are not bound by any code of conduct or ethics and it is therefore the wish of this Association that in the public interest, the Royal Commission on Legal Services support the various moves being made to control or license the private investigator . . ."



Of course, no control was, or is, imminently forthcoming. Private investigators, detectives and so on, remain unregulated in an occupation which clearly (as discussed) relates to a wide range of sensitive issues.

### The Role of the Home Office - Inertia and its Implications for Self-Regulation or Formalisation of a BSIA Inspectorate

Since the earliest soundings about the possibility of licensing private security in the 1960s the Home Office has remained unmoved by arguments in favour of active consideration of the merits of the case. Rather, regardless of political party in power, it has generally rejected the need to address the issue, and when occasionally moved to a token information-gathering gesture has opted for the minimal response possible. Even the 1979 Green Paper was a case of brief momentum gathered in a way designed to subsequently clog the wheels for years to come. With the publication of the report, leaving an open-ended but wholly uncoordinated period for consideration, response and consultation, the wheels ground to a halt again and static inertia was restored. To all intents and purposes - apart from some recognition of significance inherent in the preparation of a Green Paper - the status quo was resumed and the support of the Home Office, and the new Conservative and previous governments, for self-regulation was reaffirmed.

The Home Office has over time, argued that an established range of legislation already controls and regulates the status and power of private security personnel (and hence their organisations) just as it does all other ordinary citizens. To provide some brief examples:

Uniforms, it is generally agreed, give private security a sense of corporate identity. For good or ill they help the private security personnel to stand out and furthermore - and more importantly - they give "him (sic) some authority in his task" (Randall, 1976:140). It is of course also widely agreed that the wearing of uniforms deliberately designed to resemble those of the police in order to gain further authority, respect and perhaps lay claim to police powers is not the done thing. The fact that it happens - albeit with varying degrees of subtlety - can be neatly forgotten. For the Home Office



the matter is rendered unproblematic because Section 52 of the Police Act, 1964 makes it an offence for 'any person who is not a police officer to wear an article of police uniform or any article having the appearance of such an article where it gives him an appearance so nearly resembling that of a member of a police force as to be calculated to deceive' (Turner vs. Shearer, 1973; Bunyan, 1977:253).

Arms, and their use, present an odd case in the mid-1980s because although the public is more familiar today than ever with the idea of the police being potentially armed in certain circumstances (and the experience of the Northern Ireland conflict highlights that), it is often now forgotten that for periods in the 1950s and early 1960s a number of private security companies were issuing firearms to their payroll guard services. Undoubtedly other 'private security' services, then and now, had and have access to arms. But the important point in providing a backcloth of what is possible is that in a society which prides itself on its control of firearms, for quite a few years private security organisations were able to issue selected members of their staff with firearms in a legitimate fashion under the benign, half-closed eye of the Home Office. The Home Office subsequently discouraged requests for, or licensing of permits for firearms for private security organisations. But the role of the police is of major significance here as well. They have, of course, consistently criticised the issue to and use of firearms by private security. Wide-ranging criticism eventually led the BSIA to adopt a policy position which it evidently feels is sufficiently reassuring to reiterate at every appropriate point. To others it might be felt to contain an ominous secondary implication: "While the British policeman (sic) remains unarmed, the British security guard will remain unarmed" (cf. Bunyan, 1977:236).

Not surprisingly, ex-police officers now working in private security, fear a serious spiralling of use of firearms if private security companies are ever able to issue and use them on any scale. The most obvious example that might be given here is that bank and payroll raiders would be even more likely than they are now to carry and use arms if they knew or thought that the security guards were armed. With regard to the adequacy of current control however, the Home



Office (and others) feel that existing restrictions of firearms are sufficiently tight (although this assumption is currently being strongly questioned). Furthermore, this position emphasises that private security companies (by which they tend to mean the respectable companies), need to maintain good relations with the Home Office and the police and this acts as a most severe informal as well as formal source of proscription against use of firearms.

Truncheons, have also been issued to and used by private security guards in the past. The Home Office again argues that existing legislation is and has proved to be sufficient to control and curtail such practices. According to the Prevention of Crime Act, 1953, Section One, the courts shall be the arbiters of whether a person has 'lawful authority or reasonable excuse' to carry an offensive weapon, such as a truncheon. But generally it is held that "Any person who without lawful authority or reasonable excuse, the proof whereof lies on him, has with him in any public place any offensive weapon, shall be guilty of an offence." Security guards have been prosecuted on the basis of this understanding and in 1973 a Court of Appeal ruled that "the carrying of a weapon should not be treated as a matter of routine or as part of the uniform." Three guards working for White Star Security were convicted following this ruling having been prosecuted for carrying truncheons which were held to constitute offensive weapons (cf. Bunyan, 1977:236).

However, while truncheons no longer seem to be a part of any standard issue by security companies, it is the fact that there were few, if any, qualms about issuing - and potentially using truncheons, firearms and MACE canisters that was and remains disturbing. Private security guards are not the 'general public', who after all do not as a rule guard payrolls, night clubs and so on; rather they are a very specific case. Even if the preferable option of specific legislation pertaining to the powers, authority and uniform and accoutrements of private security is viewed as too complex, potentially cumbersome and anyway unnecessary, by the Home Office there is no excuse for not maintaining a publicly accessible, specific watching-brief overseeing the activities of and developments in the private security sector.



The standard response of the Home Office to such a case is that private security companies and personnel have no 'special privileges'. However, as legal commentators have often retorted, Common Law and the provisions of six Acts of Parliament provide for an individual's right to protect his/her property. This power can be made the responsibility of another party, such as a private security organisation, whose employees enjoy and can use the citizen's power of arrest and the right to use sufficient force as is necessary to prevent a crime being committed (cf. Sunday Telegraph Magazine, 8th December, 1973; Garner, 1978:126). Under the Criminal Law Act, 1967:

"Any person may arrest with reasonable cause any person suspected to be in the act of committing an arrestable offence" (2. (2)). "A person may use such force as is reasonable in the circumstances in the prevention of crime or in effecting or assisting in the lawful arrest of offenders or suspected offenders."

(ibid., Section 3)

It is not a question of 'special privileges' - the point is that private security are a special case! They do not act like ordinary citizens, indeed their *raison d'etre* is that they should not. I shall have more to say about the special status of private security, both *de facto* and *de jure*, in Chapter 5. Here I conclude this section noting how it seems to have suited both the Home Office and the BSIA to attempt to maintain a very low profile despite the importance of the relevant issues.

The Home Office Green Paper on The Private Security Industry issued in February, 1979 acknowledged that:

"There is no modern society in which a government can provide total protection against crime . . ."

(p. 10, para. 30)

("It is inconceivable that the police should be expected to meet all demands for protective services as part of their public duties and to do so at the expense of taxpayer and ratepayer").

(p. 11, para. 31)

Four months earlier, Sir Robert Mark had generated an apparent wave of shock through the media when he had said the same thing: the Daily Telegraph headline announcing 'Police Force Can No Longer Cope with



Thefts' (cf. Davis, 1980:21). Hardly a murmur greeted the Home Office echo of Sir Robert's statement yet this represented a statement of official state policy-thinking whereas Sir Robert was well-known as an outspoken individualist when it came to views on contemporary policing. This point is perhaps the very reason why Sir Robert's comment did make the news, but it does not explain why a report purporting to be a contribution to further debate and needed thinking on this subject somehow effectively dampened any such debate.

Perhaps part of the answer to this is that, like many bureaucratic documents designed to cover but stifle a subject and its debate, the Green Paper was simply very bland. Furthermore, the private security sector - or at least its 'establishment' end - has ultimately been quite effective in blurring what measures it itself supports: some form of self-regulation merges with promises of consumer protection and 'independent' inspectorates which merge with vague expressions of willingness to 'support' licensing.

However, proposals for self-regulation of abuses within the private security sector merely reflect an inclination and mechanism for the minimisation of the conflicts and revelations inherent in the real enforcement of regulation (cf. South, 1983). The operation of this pseudo 'ombudsman' or consumer-protection agency type of 'informal institution' is well described by Abel (1982:287) as based upon:

"scapegoating the exceptional enterprise that is totally irresponsible, thereby diverting attention from routine business practices and ensuring that regulation and publicity will have only a very limited general deterrent effect."

At the same time, it is clear, and no surprise of course, that where significant voices are raised in the private security sector in favour of some limited form of licensing (as opposed, it should be noted, to stiff regulation and limitation) it is because they are generally those of the figureheads and public relations departments of the larger companies who might well be very happy to take up any slices of the market left by any legislation which pushed smaller companies unable to 'make the grade' out of business. This cynical truism is well understood throughout the industry.



Carson's work on the history of factory legislation (1970;1979), illustrates a similar situation where large companies have over time been apparently happy to cooperate with the Factory Inspectorate. Quite simply, such companies can afford to come up to scratch whereas smaller companies often cannot. Ironically, the Factory Inspectorate in this respect can strengthen the monopolistic power of the larger companies as small competition is pushed out of business by the stringency of conditions that it cannot meet. The potential for abuse of regulations - and for hiding such abuse - increases as the dominant companies grow in size, respectability and power.

The prospect of a similar development within a self-regulating or legislatively minimally-controlled private security sector is an issue to be seriously concerned about.

### Towards Effective Licensing, Regulation and Accountability

#### Other Models and Jurisdictions

With regard to the provision of public safeguards concerning private security it is surely the case that Britain is out of step with many of its European neighbours, with provisions in the United States and with developments in countries with dissimilar legal systems, such as Israel and those with closely similar systems such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Of course, not all of these nations have comprehensive, omnibus legislation covering every aspect of the private security sector, as I have outlined its range of activities. Nonetheless, some exertion (and importantly symbolic effort) of control over some areas of private security activity has been made. At the same time lessons have been learned.

Before offering a short review of the principal criticisms and reservations about existing models of licensing and regulation I will first outline the major provisions of relevant international legislation. In doing so I shall follow the format of Hilary Draper's excellent and still authoritative discussion of this area (cf. Draper,



1978; ch. 8)<sup>6</sup>, initially outlining legislation relating to private investigators and then going on to consider control measures relevant to other forms of private security.

It is generally assumed that licensing and regulation are most strongly developed and well-defined in the USA where thirty-five of the fifty federal states currently operate some sort of relevant system. However, as Draper also observes (pp. 136-7), it is the legislation adopted by New Zealand which probably offers a more adequate example of attempts to control both private investigators and security. Furthermore, developed in a similar society and legal system, it is a model which it has often been suggested might be followed in the UK. This system requires anyone working in the detection field to be approved as a 'responsible employee' and to have obtained a certificate to this effect from the regulatory body. The employee may then work for any licensed private investigator agency. As Draper explains:

"the form of control laid out in this statute is similar to that adopted in many American states. No person is allowed to be a private investigator unless he is the holder of a private investigator's license and such a license will not usually be granted unless the applicant is twenty years of age or over and has had at least twelve months' experience in the field for which he is applying to be licensed. It is a bar to the granting of a license to have been convicted, within the ten years preceding the application of a crime involving dishonesty, or to have had a license or certificate of approval cancelled within the preceding five years . . . In the case of both the license and the certificate of approval, a copy of the application is sent to the police who may, within a certain time, file a notice of objection to the license being granted. If there are objections from the police (or in the case of a license) from any other persons, then there will be a hearing of the application for the license or certificate of approval."

(1978:136-7)

There is not the space here to go into the positive features or the shortcomings of this system, though the requirement of a period of basic experience is usually praised (although without monitoring of this aspect this could be a double-edged feature) and once again, characteristic of the field internationally, there is little emphasis on training development and the gaining of qualifications.



Far less attention has been paid to the activities - and control - of private detectives in Europe, and when compared to the situation in the USA where they are more common and active in wider fields, this is relatively unsurprising. The Scandinavian countries regulate their private security industry which has been a long established feature of their provision for property protection and crime prevention. However, neither there, nor in France, Belgium, Holland or the UK, is specific licensing legislation directed at private investigators. Germany's Central Association of Investigating and Detective Agencies operates a self-regulating Code of Ethics and private security organisations must be licensed by the Länder (Home Office, 1979:29); Spain requires investigators to pass a proficiency test, but as Draper points out (p. 137) the most elaborate system for licensing private investigators in Europe seems to be that which operates in Italy.

This system forbids the carrying out of a whole range of investigative services without the granting of a license issued by a Prefect. The Prefect must be satisfied that the applicant is of Italian citizenship, can be appropriately bonded and has not been convicted of a criminal offence. As possibly indicative of future developments here (for historically it is not implausible) and elsewhere, I shall just note the "two interesting features" of this legislation which Draper (p. 138) draws attention to. These are:

"firstly that an agency must keep a list of its current activities at all times and show this to the police if requested to do so; and secondly, that Surveillance and Private Investigation Officers are required on request to give their services to the police authority and to comply with all requests addressed to them by police officers or bailiffs. Private detectives in Italy are thus technically auxiliary policemen."

Legislation directly controlling the activities of private investigators in Europe is then, generally undeveloped except in Italy, and in the UK in any specific sense it is non-existent. In an earlier section I have noted how the issue of protection of privacy relates to the need for the licensing, regulation and control of the private security sector. Here, as in other fundamental matters of constitutional human and civil rights, Britain lags behind many other European and other western-style democracies. For present purposes I do not have the space to go further into this disparity, but again Draper (pp. 138-142) offers a very useful review.



When we turn to look at international examples of licensing and control covering private security companies then a now well-familiar picture emerges. Concomitant with their massive expansion and increasing significance as part of the division of policing labour, private security organisations are now the subject of some form of regulatory legislation in most European nations as well as the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

In Italy the same system of licensing which operates for private investigators also covers private security employees. Further it is sufficiently well-developed to not only lay down standards but also make extra provisions for different types of guards, including those who are 'sworn' and carry firearms. Where less elaborate systems exist elsewhere in Europe they nonetheless represent statutory requirements to be fulfilled by prospective employees seeking to be placed in positions of trust and which require responsible levels of sensitivity and discretion. At its most basic the favoured method for some form of vetting is generally the requirement that the applicant can show he/she has no previous criminal convictions. Providing evidence of this is either the responsibility of the applicant seeking employment or else, as with the New Zealand system, the prospective employer may be expected to take on responsibility for complying with certification requirements. While the latter system is held to have some advantages of bureaucratic certainty and efficiency it can also be criticised as involving too much invasion of privacy.

Draper (1978:143) argues this point, following Philip-Sorenson, Chairman of Group 4, who believes that making it the responsibility of the employee to provide his/her own certificate by applying at a local police station is the most acceptable method of vetting. According to Philip-Sorenson "If the applicant does not return to the security company to which he has applied, then no one is any the wiser. He may have failed to get a certificate or he may, on the other hand, have found another job" (ibid.). This is true, but at the same time, suggesting that this involves 'less of an invasion of privacy' by the security company is a dubious indication of concern for civil liberties, especially as once employed by major security companies like Group 4, the employee will be expected to undergo further and future vetting and checking procedures.



This is however the basis of the systems of licensing operating in most countries with regulatory legislation. As I have mentioned previously, its implementation in the UK would need to take account of the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. As a system it is far from adequate, but it does constitute at least a minimum step in the direction of control of private security and toward some degree of monitoring and accountability.

Slightly more developed systems operate in a few states in the USA and in Canada but the most advanced at present seems to be that in Sweden. Here the licensing system,

"requires that every . . . employee should undergo a minimum of 214 hours of a training programme that must be approved by the government. In addition, there is a stipulation demanding refresher courses every year and forty hours extra training for any specialist duty such as handling guard dogs."

(Draper, 1978:144)

Additionally, the amount of overtime that can be worked is also limited. For an industry which is often reliant upon, and exploits overtime working, this is a significant and positive provision. Thus in reviewing other models of regulation in other jurisdictions there are both lessons to be learned from mistakes and half-hearted responses, but there are also exemplary practices in existence which are proven to be workable and which can be followed.

This expanded legislation and licensing system now operating in Sweden is however still relatively new. To gain a different perspective on what is workable it is useful to turn to the experience of licensing in the United States and Canada.

In their major Rand Corporation study conducted and published in the early 1970s for the US Department of Justice, Kakalik and Wildhorn presented a clear picture of the inadequacy of then existing licensing. Following a survey which looked at procedures in thirty-one states, three counties and forty-six cities, they made the following observations:

"First, the regulatory agencies' effectiveness is limited because they typically do not have extensive data on the security industry's problems. With the exception of



reviewing license applications, the typical regulatory agency has very limited and, in some cases, no contact with the industry. Second, the agencies' effectiveness is limited because they very rarely invoke the post-licensing powers they possess to correct problems in the industry. Suspensions, revocations and fines are rare . . . the agencies have such limited resources and such ineffective channels for learning of problems that many specific problems do not come to their attention. Hence, controls are very rarely exercised. Third, there are wide variations in the toughness with which regulations are enforced among regulatory agencies. Finally, nearly every regulatory agency responding to our survey recommended that some aspect of the regulation of the industry be made stronger than it presently is in their jurisdiction."

(Kakalik and Wildhorn, 1972, Vol. 1:56-7).

Despite my earlier comments about the extent of licensing regulation abroad in relation to the British situation, cases of long established regulatory systems like the USA are instructive. Although it is sometimes assumed or inferred that the USA, in particular, has wholly embraced licensing, it remains the case that serious commitment to regulation and control of the private security sector has not really been embraced with great enthusiasm anywhere. Ten years on from the Kakalik and Wildhorn Rand Report, a municipal judge writing in The Police Chief (Schepps, 1982:26-7) was seriously concerned about the inadequacy of the regulatory system. Thus Schepps writes:

"Since only 62% of the states have regulatory agencies for security services, one-third of the nation must rely solely on local regulation. Widespread local regulation discourages uniformity and standardisation necessary for maximum effectiveness and control of security services."

(p. 27)

More broadly and fundamentally,

"While citizens have, in theory, some ability to alter police behaviour (through the courts, local government, political clubs, etc.) their control over private police behaviour is almost non-existent. Thus, if the citizenry is to have any success in halting the threats to individual liberties and privacy, it must create new mechanisms of control over private agencies."

(ibid.)

Progress, however, appears to be slow, even with the existing framework of State legislation to build upon. In a recent story in the New York Times, (4th June, 1984) 'Growing Security-Guard Industry



under Scrutiny', the New York Secretary of State, Gail S. Schaffer echoed familiar past criticisms: "It is an industry that lends itself to abuses." According to the Times story:

"The New York State Investigation Commission in its report said attempts to license guards and increase controls had been blocked by 'the vigorous lobbying efforts of the security guard industry.'"

Obviously, I cannot go into all the diverse provisions of different examples of existing systems of licensing, though there are many interesting issues here - for example - the extent to which licensing restricts and limits powers and activities versus the extent to which it enhances existing prerogatives and confers new ones. There is also an accompanying debate, so far little developed in the UK, which is less about whether private security should be licensed and regulated and more about whether private security arrangements and provision should be required by law. As Hamilton (1974), points out, such a system has been introduced in Israel where,

"amendments passed by the Knesset to the Licensing of Businesses Law, 1968 give power to the Minister of the Interior to designate businesses requiring a license in order to ensure the 'prevention of danger to the public peace and protection against robbery and housebreaking'. The Minister of Police is then empowered to make regulations for the prevention of 'danger to the public peace . . . (etc.) . . . including protection at the time of the transportation of money, diamonds, securities and other valuables, where licensed and certain other businesses are concerned. These regulations are enforced by the police but usually amicably and appeal mechanisms are built in."

(p. 95)

It is highly unlikely that this sort of model will develop in the UK or indeed in many of the other jurisdictions mentioned. However, it is likely that the requirements for security in certain businesses and homes imposed by the insurance industry will become increasingly stringent.

In general though, formal control, regulation and licensing of the private security sector has exhibited three key features in its concerns. To paraphrase the excellent discussion of these issues offered by Shearing and Stenning (1981:230-1 and passim), until very recently most regulatory schemes have tended to share several characteristic features. First, their focus on the contract security



side - upon contract guards and investigation activities. Second, they have reflected concerns about 'competition' between private security and the public police. This has been the case historically and remains evident today. Where licensing systems exist, some evidence for this is afforded by the frequency with which it is the public police who are designated as the licensing and regulatory authority. At the same time, in many jurisdictions, it is a high priority concern to forbid, or at least control 'moonlighting' by sworn police officers in the private security sector in off-duty hours.

Third, the breadth and lack of precision of regulations, (rarely accompanied by a breadth of actual powers and resources to back them up) has given rise to a high degree of discretion in the implementation of regulatory authority. Necessary baselines for effective assessment for certification are notoriously loose. Criteria such as character and competency have been consistently recommended or required yard-sticks, yet the bases on which they should be judged are equally consistently unclear. While this discretionary type of system has probably often worked to the advantage of private security companies it has generally been even more inadequate in lacking provision for fair appeals.

The point of this tour through 'other jurisdictions and models of licensing' has been to indicate that the UK is virtually alone in having no formal, legislatively empowered system of control over even the most visible and largest-scale operators in the private security sector - let alone those small-scale 'cowboy' and up-market specialist agencies that should elicit more concern. In conclusion however, it is only honest to admit that examination of the various existing schemes gives little scope for optimism about their real efficacy. As Shearing and Stenning (ibid.) conclude:

"Despite the apparently expansive scope of these regulatory schemes, research into the adequacy and effectiveness of such schemes has not produced encouraging results."

I have already referred to the findings of the Kakalik and Wildhorn (1971) Rand Report. Their conclusions have been broadly confirmed in the wide-ranging studies conducted over ten years by researchers at the Toronto Centre of Criminology (cf. particularly Stenning and



Cornish, 1975, ch. 6). This research into the regulation of private security in Canada concluded that:

"Regulatory agencies were typically understaffed and under-budgeted, with the result that they could rarely perform more than the most minimum of licensing functions. Administration of such regulatory functions as inspections, competency tests, the hearing and disposition of public complaints, and setting of standards for advertising, uniforms, and equipment was typically minimal or non-existent."

(Shearing and Stenning, 1981:233)

In going on to consider some of the pros and cons of proposals for licensing and regulation of private security in the UK, it should be borne in mind throughout that one of the most central issues is whether to provide the absolutely necessary resources to make any licensing scheme work if this gains supports and is intended to work. The metaphor of the 'toothless watchdog' is a particularly appropriate one to use in discussion of the private security business. Without the appropriate resources to do its job then any regulatory authority ever appointed might well appropriate the image for its crested letterhead.

#### Bringing it all Back Home: the 'Pros' and 'Cons' and General Issues and Principles of the Case for Licensing and Regulation of Private Security in the UK

Unlike the formal system of overview of the police (whatever its inadequacies) there is in the UK no prescribed means for ensuring the accountability of the private security sector. There is no constitutional calling to account, nor even a universal regulatory code governing the relationship between private security and public services - from which private security benefits in gross disproportion to its input into the relationship.



In 1978 I contributed to an unpublished Report on private security prepared by the Outer Circle Policy Unit and presented to the Home Office during the period that it was preparing its 1979 Green Paper - The Private Security Industry: A Discussion Document. One of the key issues which the OCPU report addressed and which the Green Paper minimised was that of accountability. Private security interests themselves, not surprisingly, consistently trivialise this issue. As the OCPU report observed,

"the claim by the Managing Director of Securicor that as a public company it is 'at all time most effectively answerable to the press' (Times, 10th June, 1978) simply demonstrates a failure to grasp the constitutional issues involved in the concept of accountability. Occasional scrutiny by the press does not at all resemble the conventional idea of accountability or that which (has been) called the 'explanatory and cooperative mode' of accountability which is written into the Police Act 1964."

(OCPU:10)

Formally the occupation and social role of the police is based upon the mandate of the state to appoint an agency to ensure the enforcement of its laws. In contrast, prima facie, private security has only a commercial *raison d'etre*. I shall explore this specific point further in Chapter 5, but it is reasonable to state that there is certainly no 'mandate' here which is primarily intended to be coincidental with the general public interest. Rather it is private interest that prevails. As the OCPU report pointed out, "indeed since the initial abolition of compounding an offence, even the most exiguous protection for the public is lacking" (*ibid.*:11).

Of course the question also arises of protecting the civil liberties of ordinary employees in private security work. At one level, there is an unusual coincidence of opinion on this issue between civil liberties groups, private security employers and representatives of employees such as the trade union MATSA and the independent association, IPSA. All these groups, albeit with different ends in view, would support some system of licensing which exempted private security employees from the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, (1974).

The most relevant part of this Act is Section 4. This lays down that:



"a person who has become a rehabilitated person for the purposes of this Act in respect of a conviction shall be treated for all purposes in law as a person who has not committed or been charged with or prosecuted for or convicted of, or sentenced for the offence or offences which were the subject of that conviction."

(Section 4.1)

"Where a question seeking information with respect to a person's previous convictions, offences, conduct or circumstances is put to him or to any other person otherwise than in proceedings before a judicial authority - (a) the question shall be treated as not relating to spent convictions or to any circumstances ancillary to spent convictions and the answer thereto may be framed accordingly."

(Sub-section 2) (cf. discussion in Draper, 1978:42)

The provisions of the Act do not extend to sentences of over thirty months and the length of 'rehabilitation' can be up to ten years. But what seems to keep this hurdle at the forefront of proposals about how to introduce licensing and regulations is not only that it makes it difficult to make a credible start on vetting prospective employees but also the fear that it is not necessarily 'major criminals' who may have received substantial prison sentences who will find employment in private security attractive, but rather petty, small-time, small crime offenders who may have a string of two year sentences behind them.

The 'clean slate' intentions of the Act are highly laudable but there have always been a number of occupations exempted from the Act. It is on the basis of pragmatic recognition of this that bodies like the National Council for Civil Liberties which has favoured a system of licensing for private detectives for some years (recommending this as part of their evidence to the Younger Committee), have more recently extended their support to the licensing and regulation of private security generally, including - with provisos - the exemption from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. In a letter of March, 1978 to Bruce George, MP supporting his proposed Private Members Bill to regulate private security, the then General Secretary of NCCL, Patricia Hewitt briefly stated NCCL's position:

"We do not believe that licensing would either confer an unwanted appearance of official approval on Private Detectives, nor would such a system involve an invasion of privacy. As you know, it is our view that only the



licensing body should have access to criminal records in order to find out whether an applicant should be licensed or not. We would, of course, be against any system where an employer could have access to criminal records in order to check the credentials of an applicant for a job as a detective or security agent."

I believe that the NCCL's position is the most proper one for a regulatory system with credibility, integrity and sensitivity to follow. It would however require far more resources than either kind of system allowing the employee or employer to apply for some form of certification from the criminal records system. Such large resources are unlikely to be forthcoming in the foreseeable future. It remains to be seen how much of a real dilemma any possibility of licensing and regulation which could not concede this proviso for fiscal reasons, might be.

There are, of course, other parties with an expressed interest in seeing the control, if not the complete doing away with, of private security. Not insignificant here is the opinion of many rank and file police officers. While attitudes to the private security sector seem to mellow, if not take on a glow, further up the promotion scale, the attitude of many junior police officers and of the Police Federation has frequently ranged from the suspicious to the hostile.

In familiar terms and with similar arguments, various representative voices of rank and file officers have demanded controls over private security through the past three decades and remain vocal over the issue in the 1980s. Perhaps the rank and file themselves have grown slightly apathetic about the issue or else come to accept, and to some degree welcome, the ancillary service functions of the contract private security industry. But on the platform of Police Federation conferences, and in the pages of Police and Police Review, the issue remains a live one.

Typical was the Editorial column of Police Review for 17th June, 1983 headlined 'Ban Bogus Police' and revivifying a whole series of arguments which turn upon the contention that private security is usurping the function of, and taking over, roles which should be the responsibility of the police. The scene is set in terms of public



confidence in the police - a concern which it is difficult to reasonably argue against.

"There is no law in this country to stop a private company setting up its own police force. There should be - if for no other reason than to maintain public esteem for genuine police forces. There are other reasons besides, but it is manifestly against the public interest to permit anything that might erode public confidence in the police."

Without the burden of having to acknowledge reasons for the growth of private security - including aspects of the law relating to access to private property and to police powers and responsibilities - there follows familiar invocation of section 52 of the Police Act 1964 concerning the wearing of police-style uniforms and of the Public Order Act, 1936 regarding 'associations of persons' who may be organised, trained or equipped to 'usurp the functions of the police'. It is not that these points do not have validity - either in law or argument, as I have indicated earlier; rather they are simply tired and by themselves, put forward from a relatively narrow interest group position, will receive little attention and less action. Nonetheless as part of a broader range of arguments and sources of pressure for licensing, regulation and control then the significance of this particular lobby is profound.

Where we could expect to find strong and clear opposition to any forms of licensing and regulation is among the free-marketeers and established figures at the helms of self-regulation organisations. I have already discussed the ambivalencies of the position of the BSIA and some of its key figures. But even in the arguments of those who seem most certain about the benefits of non-regulation or the adequacy of self-regulation, there are evident failings or concessions.

In several papers which have contained arguments against licensing private security - and indeed supported further privatisation of certain 'policing' functions, the economist, R.L. Carter (1974;1976) has viewed the private security organisations as providing a good and efficient service at competitive prices - the key to the fallacy of this argument is the belief that efficiency and good service can follow from uncontrolled competition.



Carter correctly points out that licensing would increase the cost of private security, as would proposals to create qualification barriers to entry into the business or the kind of proposal made by Seldon (1977) and others, to employ the police for certain security services, for they have higher standards, better pay rates and better conditions of work (Carter, 1976:35-7). Carter sees the current situation as beneficial for both security organisations and their customers.

"So long as entry to the market remains easy with low capital barriers there should be no fears of the restrictive practices characteristic of oligopoly situations. Competition between firms should keep both prices and profits low. Moreover customers can always exercise the ultimate sanction of employing their own security staff if dissatisfied with the prices charged or service provided. Therefore under existing conditions there need be no fear of the exploitation of firms by a cartel of security companies, nor can they afford to operate inefficiently."

(Carter, 1976:35)

However, with regard to these conditions promoting efficiency, surprisingly for an economist, Carter misses the point that in the most competitive areas of private security they are likely to lead to the opposite. Precisely because "competition between firms . . . keeps both prices and profits low" (though the latter is questionable), price-undercutting of rivals is necessary for survival and low pay and inadequate training are inevitable consequences, in turn tending to attract workers to the occupation who are, by the professed standards of the private security companies, unsuitable. In short, the competitive marketing of the mass, non-specialised private security services actually means that firms (to paraphrase Carter) 'cannot afford to operate efficiently'. What the arguments of writers like Carter expose is not the efficacy of the free-market, but rather the need for intervention in it in the form of minimum wages and standards legislation.

Of the self-regulation bodies, the National Supervisory Council for Intruder Alarms has - relatively speaking - perhaps been the most successful. However, in musing upon the possibility of it attaining broader powers through legislation, its former Director, Admiral D. Callaghan, was quite prepared to acknowledge its ineffectiveness in dealing with serious cases of abuse of standards and practice. As



Callaghan put it in a paper to the Edinburgh Conference on 'Major Property Crime':

". . . we are very much open to criticism for our impotence in the face of outrageous advantage being taken of a customer powerless to obtain redress without resorting to the Courts."

Once this admission is made the next step can only be recognition of the need for some form of legislatively backed powers of control:

". . . it could hardly be questioned whether a legislated supervisory body would have the necessary powers, either under its own control or by virtue of its official access to the various consumer-protection departments of the Government, and we must therefore conclude that an independent body (e.g. the NSCIA) is at a disadvantage in this respect compared with a legislated body when acting as a consumer protector."

(Callaghan, 1976:147)

Clearly the self-regulation bodies would prefer that they were the recipients of legislative authority. But at least recognition of the advantages of legislated powers of control over private security starts the debate at a more appropriate point than the non-intervention 'leave it to the market' stance. To quote the title of Callaghan's paper, it recognizes that fundamentally the issue is that of the 'Accountability of Security in Practice'.

#### The Green Paper, 1979 - A Document for Discussion on the Greying of a Debate?

In 1979, the then Labour Government published a Green Paper - The Private Security Industry - A Discussion Paper. The Introduction stated that:

- (1) The Government are publishing this discussion paper because they recognise that there is public concern about the recent growth of the private security industry in this country . . .
- (2) Arguments in favour of control are often based on the principle that the preservation of law and order is essentially a matter for the police and that if certain functions in this area are assumed by private organisations then at least these organisations should operate under strict government control . . .



(3) The present paper is designed to contribute to this debate by providing background information about the private security industry and discussing some of the issues raised by the question of control (p. 1).

Such a debate however has hardly flourished in the UK. It has instead kept relatively safely within its existing parochial boundaries. If the Discussion Paper was a sincere initiative then it should have had sincere support and sponsorship subsequently and genuinely encouraged debate involving all interested parties. Too often issues of legislative policy and criminological significance are debated by those whom the Home Office feels 'know best' but who in reality may in fact be those who know least about the day to day realities of, for example, policing, prisons, drug-use or - in this case - the private security sector.

Indeed, one of the major problems of the adequacy of the Paper - as with much of the 'debate' about private security - is that it has no conception of the significance of the breadth of the activities which private security organisations, agents and related bodies deal in. The parameters of its discussion are safely set out in a restricted view of "the private security industry." This very low-key approach did not surprise, but nonetheless disappointed, interested observers and especially those (including the present author) who had been involved in the compilation of information and evidence for submission to the Home Office with the precise intention of attempting to widen the working definition of private security that Home Office researchers had been briefed with.

It is certainly something of an indication of the damping as opposed to enlivening effect that the Discussion Paper had on debate that the most cogent response came from observers in Canada. In a paper entitled 'Private Security and Private Justice' published in the British Journal of Law and Society (1980 (a)) Stenning and Shearing provide a critique of the discussion document in the kind of detail which cannot be offered here. It is important however to take up some of the key points that they raise, both in agreement and disagreement.



Stenning and Shearing (1980 (a)) promptly identify the nature of the Discussion Paper as a "tentative governmental response to some quite specific pressures for the introduction of some form of regulatory legislation" (p. 262). Echoing the feelings of UK observers they go on to observe that,

"in such circumstances, there is often as much, if not more, comment to be made on what the Paper did not talk about (and why it did not talk about it), as on what the Paper did talk about."

(p. 262)

This is certainly true - and in regard to one of the key issues that Stenning and Shearing raise, there is a certain irony in some omissions.

As I have mentioned, earlier official sources, Ministerial statements and Home Office reassurances have at various times rejected the need for specific legislation pertaining to private security on the grounds that the existing body of laws are quite adequate to curtail abuses and illegalities. Up to a certain point, principally concerning one's definition of adequate, this argument is fairly sound. Yet the Discussion Paper makes relatively little of it. Indeed, in the view of Stenning and Shearing,

"in emphasizing that the law makes no distinction between ordinary citizens and private security persons, the Discussion Paper seems to ignore the importance of the general law as a vehicle for more effective control over the private security industry. In this way the Paper prepares the way for its exclusive focus on various forms of regulation in discussing the alternative forms of control available."

(p. 262)

As Stenning and Shearing suspect, the Paper was not designed to be an exercise genuinely considering the entire possible range of issues arising from the growth, activities and need - or not - for control of the private security sector. Its posture is defensive and purely responsive. It was not, whatever its claims to the contrary, intended to be part of or to stimulate debate. It was intended to reply to certain pressures and proposals and, in reasonable tones and terms, defuse them.



What must be grasped is that genuinely adequate regulation, control and accountability of the private security sector will not follow from the pursuit of 'either/or' options. Standing, general laws should always, in any case, be employed to protect civil liberties, curb the abuse of power and privilege and prosecute in cases of criminal violation. As Stenning and Shearing go on to recognize:

"If private security personnel are in reality no different from ordinary citizens, a law which treats them alike seems most appropriate. But if in reality they are not, and the law still treats them as if they are, it becomes inappropriate . . . We strongly suspect that in reality the personnel of modern private security organisations are growing increasingly less like "ordinary" citizens."

(p. 263) (my emphasis)

This latter point is pivotal to the argument for the necessity of specific regulatory legislation pertaining to the range of activities within the private security sector.

The very development of the private security sector has been founded upon the need of various interested parties to create agencies and mechanisms of protection, detection, policing and social control which are quite different to the public police controlled by specific laws or the general public controlled by general laws. Chapter 2 has already explored how ordinary employees working in the largest and most visible part of the private security sector, take on attitudes and are immersed in an occupational culture which encourage their sense of, and their actual differentiation from, 'ordinary citizens'. Chapter 5 will go on to explore some of the background ideological elements which help to sustain the private security sector's ability to work effectively at its various levels within the new division of policing labour as part of an acknowledged commercial compromise on the part of the State.

To some extent, this 'new' division of policing labour merely replays that 'new' division which took place in the 19th century when the 'new' public police began to displace some of the long established local, private arrangements for security, protection and the maintenance of order. The tremendous significance of this development must not be under-estimated. Nor should the medium and long-term social repercussions, adjustments in the criminal justice system and



other effects. But there is a need - and there is scope - for constructive legislative response now in order to provide public safeguards for private security.

### Conclusion: Beyond the 'Blind Eye' of History and the Home Office

Limited licensing and regulation can in the long-term view only be an inadequate stop-gap measure. It would nonetheless be a step in the right direction, even if only as a concession of recognition of the present and future significance of the private security sector. The current 'blind eye' of history and the Home Office is grist to the mill of suspicion and the musings of conspiracy theory. And their attraction is not confined to civil libertarians and the like. As the Editorial Comment of Security and Protection magazine put it in responding to the Home Office Green Paper, the document as a whole is "pretty uninspiring," it "ignores in the main the extensive arguments for and against regulation/registration," it "suggests the need for public debate but provides nothing for the 'public' to debate," and generally, "seems . . . an extended argument as to why the Home Office should not involve itself," (March 1979).

There is a familiar danger in much social science research, and in criminology in particular, that examination of an area which usefully finds hidden complexities and ramifications, tends to then conclude that more research is needed before useful and informed action can be taken (cf. for example on this particular subject, Shearing et al., 1980:252, para. 2). The only positive feature of Britain's current absolute lack of legislated regulation in this area is that it can develop a system of controls which takes on board the lessons, practice, experience and research available from elsewhere. More research information gathering and debate are essentials. But on the basis of what is already known of the relative failures of existing systems abroad and the identified areas of concern in the UK, we should be able to work towards a legislatively empowered regulatory system which truly regulates.<sup>7</sup>

Essentially such a system should set minimum standards; be backed by legal powers to regulate and enforce these; create a forum of



accountability, for the hearing of complaints and the initiating of appropriate action. In developing its role the system should examine and build upon the experiences of other jurisdictions. It must have adequate resources to maintain a credible and effective Inspectorate with an efficient administrative back-up. These should be paid for out of licensing fees, imposed fines and central government funding. Legislatively empowered regulation and procedures for ensuring accountability are necessary because it must be recognised that private security are not simply private citizens. Their expected role and function makes them a special case requiring special public safeguards.



## Chapter 4 - Notes

- (1) The analysis offered in Chapter 5 explores some of the reasons why this has been consistently so, regardless of the political party in power.
- (2) This section draws upon South (1983).
- (3) The research reported in this thesis is not centrally concerned with media images of the private security sector, however in its early phases the cuttings libraries and back issues of leading daily and Sunday papers were searched and documentary and magazine reports collected or abstracted.
- (4) The following draws on South, 1983:49.
- (5) The following section draws on an extended interview with John Wheeler, Director General of the BSIA, 20th April, 1978; subsequently issued BSIA reports; and access to some of the files of Bruce George, MP relating to his campaign to introduce licensing for private security.
- (6) Draper's starting point here follows from her particular interests as a lawyer; (and hence the detailed exposition found in Chapter 8 of her book). From an interest in legislative control alone then initial consideration of private investigators and issues of intrusion of privacy is quite necessary and logical, for this is where most legal interest has been directed. Having outlined the broader dimensions of the private security sector earlier then this same starting point can suffice here also. It must however raise one or two questions. One obvious and key question that Draper asks is why quite a lot of legislation has been focused on private investigators. She suggests that for the UK at least, anxiety over security companies "is of a more sporadic nature, manifesting itself at intervals whenever a particularly worrying story hits the headlines . . .", whilst on the other hand, "the activities of private detectives have come more regularly under review in Parliament and elsewhere, usually in the context of the controversial question of the invasion of privacy" (Draper, 1978:146). What seems a more interesting and fundamental question is why, in the UK - and even in those countries which have developed some legislative control - activities engaged in by private security sector agencies do not generate more concern, and on a more consistent basis. Certainly the influence of the media in its selection of stories has something to do with it. Clearly also there is a more obvious link in the public eye, and to a large extent in practice, between the private investigator and issues like the invasion of privacy. However, there are other dimensions of the private security phenomenon which must be explored in order to be able to raise the appropriate questions and then attempt to answer them. Chapter 2 offers exploration of the occupational dimension of work in private security and the following Chapter 5 offers an attempt at a broader analysis of how and who the private sector works for. In offering the latter



analysis I seek to go beyond Draper's legalistic concerns (and additionally the economic analyses of others, like Spitzer and Scull (1978), and offer an account of the political-economic significance of the contemporary private security sector which also helps to explain its relative and apparent 'insignificance' in the eyes of both the public and the State.

- (7) Arriving at a model for the regulation and accountability of private security is clearly no easy task. It faces many of the great difficulties which arise out of debates concerning the accountability of the public police. This point could lead onto a whole separate study of the nature of accountability, but clearly developments around both issues ought to be informed by common and dissimilar aspects of the two debates. For it is undoubtedly the case that progress and set-backs with regard to one will have implications for the debate surrounding the other.



PART 4

CHAPTER 5

'Private Security, the Division of Policing Labour and the Commercial  
Compromise of the State'



## Introduction

In this chapter I seek to develop an analysis of what private security is; how and for whom it functions and how it does so in relation to capital and the state. Having elaborated on the development and diversity of the private security sector such an analysis might most usefully start by attempting to clarify the concept of private security.

This is crucial, for if we speak of private security as fundamentally distinct and divorced from the public policing of society then, by virtue of re-enforcing the private/public dichotomy, we are in danger of misconceiving the nature of private security and obscuring its relation to, and position within the state (cf. Weiss, 1984:3).

Thus the purpose and pursuit of clarification at this point is to go beyond what private security does (as described in chapters 2 and 3), and to locate it in relation to other agencies of social control concerned with deviance, crime and the protection of life and property. In other words, where it fits within society's division of policing labour.

There are numerous criminological studies of 'policing', by which we tend to mean studies of state empowered, organised and paid police forces. There are, however, relatively few studies of private security 'policing' and its functions and activities. One of the purposes of this chapter therefore, is to locate private security policing within the broad context of its relationship to the state, defining its place in the continuum of social control thereby literally relating it to other systems of policing and social control.<sup>1</sup> I shall also discuss (or re-iterate) some of the structural factors which have been conducive to the post-war growth of private security in Britain. Like private security itself, however, many of these factors are not nationally specific but are part of broader and international post-war developments. Thus there is a strong, albeit implicit, comparative basis to this chapter. Probably most importantly with regard to Europe, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where the same private security phenomena have developed in



relatively comparable ways, the issue of private security control of policing and security raises similar and equally disturbing issues for those concerned with civil liberties, (cf. Chapter 4).

### The Private Security Sector and the Social Control Continuum

I start here by positioning the private security sector within the spectrum of 'formal' to 'informal' institutions of rule-enforcement, investigation, adjudication and discipline. Such a 'locating' exercise is important not only in terms of this particular chapter but also because of the narrow-alley 'beat' which police research in general, has tended to unimaginatively 'pound'. Examples and the resulting deficiencies of such a tendency have been emphasized in an erudite discussion of studies of policing by Maureen Cain (1979). Here Cain observes that in such studies,

"nobody questioned what 'the police' meant. Thus private police forces, citizen protection groups and other government policing bodies were ignored."

(Cain, 1979:145)

The narrowness of focus has extended throughout the posing of problems with policing and in the nature of the questions asked. For example,

"the posing of the problem as 'do policemen break the rules?' and 'are policemen prejudiced?' enabled the police to develop their 'rotten apple' theory as a defence."

(Knapp Commission, 1972). (Cain, *ibid.*)

It is interesting, and disturbing to find that whilst the belief has been widened, so now academics may consider a wider range of civil liberties issues related to different forms of policing organisation, the problems and questions are posed in a remarkably similar fashion and, not surprisingly, receive similarly styled defences and responses. As Cain (1979:145) concludes of earlier studies:

"in sum both the problem of policing and its solution were conceived in a non-social way. Relationships and structures were not conceived as problematic in themselves."

It is certain problematic aspects of these relationships and structures in the case of the private security sector which have been considered in this thesis and which are addressed at a more theoretical level in this chapter.



Private security seems at first sight distinctly different from civil provision of policing services in its general relationship to the state - its organisation, control, 'mandate' and central object to make profit. In fact, I would argue that it is useful to employ a model of a continuum of policing organisation in society - in which both the public and private contributors exchange expertise, key personnel and, importantly, accommodate each others shifting parameters of operation and priorities in action.

In one of the final reports of a ten-year study of private security in Canada, Shearing, Farnell and Stenning (1980:14) have similarly suggested the utility of conceiving of policing as a continuum of activity. Thus, at one end:

"it is the coincidence of special powers and public accountability that defines the public police, while (at the other end), private security is defined by the absence of special powers and accountability to private persons and organisations. In between these two poles lie a number of security forces which are neither strictly public nor private . . . This ambiguous status applies to all 'private security' persons who have been granted special constable (or 'deputy') status as well as to those employed by Crown (government, state) corporations and other organisations whose character as either private or public institutions is uncertain (e.g. railway police, parks police, harbour and airport authority police)."

These ambiguous and anomalous policing statuses are found not only in the UK and Canada, but also in the USA, Australia, New Zealand, most European nations, the USSR and Soviet block and also in curious forms in 'community' orientated courts and policing in various other socialist societies.

The rationalisation<sup>2</sup> of social control in the past thirty years and the unfolding decade, occurring from pole to pole across this continuum, must be explored in terms of the articulation between the state and capital of a newly re-asserted compromise and symbiosis in the field of social control. Re-asserted because the employment of commercially organised 'private police' forces by ruling groups has a long history (cf. Chapter 1; Bowden, 1978; Draper, 1978; Little and Sheffield, 1983; South forthcoming; Weiss, 1978, 1981, 1985). Private policing arrangements pre-date public policing by centuries and were never wholly superceded by the latter (South, forthcoming). In the



post-war period a variety of private security services have expanded throughout western industrial societies. Most evident are the visible and now wholly commonplace uniformed guards, armoured vans, patrol cars and alarms etc. (cf. Chapter 2). But the historically familiar figures of private spies and mercenaries also flourish in clandestine fashion within the private security sector, whilst the sophistication of visible and invisible surveillance is new, sinister and also much in demand. Theoretical assessment of the contemporary significance of private security therefore presents, first of all, an important definitional problem.

A number of commentators, principally representatives of the 'industry' maintain that the term 'private police' is inappropriate because this promotes confusion with the public/civil police and the business of 'private security' is, very straightforwardly, the 'security' of property and persons. Clearly, such a source of confusion is unhelpful; on the other hand, the assurance and maintenance of 'security' is a very broad enterprise and the concept of 'security' itself far from unproblematic. I argue here that 'private security' is a more appropriate term because the provision of services it represents is wide but not specific to policing. Other commentators seem to prefer to refer to 'private policing' partly because in the USA 'private police' have often had the status and legitimacy of legal deputisation from the civil police, but also, more dubiously, one suspects because of the polemical attraction of referring to 'private police' (Klare, 1975; Spitzer and Scull, 1977 (b)).

Shearing et al. (1980:16) attempt to clear this definitional ground. Moving from the inadequacy of simply listing what is comprised within a broad category of security services, these authors suggest that:

"If we are to move to a definition of 'security', we must make explicit the common theme which makes all (such) services . . . security services. This theme is protection, and in particular, the protection of information, persons and property. Thus, security, may be defined as those activities which serve to protect these valued goods."

This focus alone however is insufficient to dispel ambiguity in terminology - and indeed potentially compounds confusion, for



'protection' is also a part of public policing duties. As these authors observe:

"the argument for the use of the term 'private police' as opposed to 'private security' has tended to emphasize the similarity of functions of public and private security. The conclusion drawn is that if one group performing policing functions is to be called 'police', then so should the others."

(1980:16)

The critical point is that public and private policing may share aspects of function but crucially differ with regard to control and legal status. More precisely the term 'police' has, they argue, come to be associated with members of a "government constabulary" (Parks, 1970):

"that is, persons with a special legal status employed by governments to preserve the peace . . . To talk of 'private police' rather than 'private security', given the connotations we associate with the term 'police' thus tends to be misleading."

(1980:16)

This significant and powerful connotative 'sense' of what policing 'is', or more precisely 'who the police are', derives in large part from the historical origins of the term 'police', and the "connotations of government control and governmental authority that derive from them" (1980:17). It is worth observing here that this point should raise the question of the relationship between private security, government and state, but this opportunity is missed. Shearing et al. (1980:17) therefore opt for use of the term 'private security' as more accurate than the term 'private police', but retain the broader concept of 'policing' as appropriate to the description of the activities of private security.

In this thesis I have accepted the point concerning inappropriate confusion with the public police as well as suggesting that in many ways 'private security' is a broader enterprise, with a wider range of functions than the public police. I have therefore adopted the term private security or, more adequately I have argued, 'private security sector', precisely because it encompasses not only provision of 'policing' services but also more than conventional commonsense ideas of policing. Thus the private security sector embraces the opening of



a market based on the idea that ordinary office cleaners cannot be trusted anymore so clients need the services of 'security-vetted' cleaners, through the multiple role of 'crime prevention', 'rule observance' and fire-prevention advice, the checking of rules relating to health and safety at work, to services of surveillance, on-site plant observation, personnel profile compilation, and industrial espionage consultation and counter-attack (Chapters 2, 3 and 4). Many of these services coincide (and often compete) with the formal policing responsibilities and operations of the state, but their immediate accountability is not to the representative legislature but to individuals in the commercial market place (cf. Chapter 4).

### The Anomalous Position of Private Security and Commercial Justice

The private security sector undoubtedly represents the structural organisation of private security policing services outside the formal parameters of state provision of policing. Is it therefore part of what has been identified as a system of informal private justice (Abel, 1982; Henry, 1983)? The answer is that it does not seem to fit here either and hence, the extent to which it can be considered an 'informal' system of justice, of investigation, adjudication or rule-enforcement, must be clearly distinguished from those institutions more properly and accurately seen as representing forms of informal justice. Abel (1982) provides a comprehensive overview of the relevant parameters of this alternative and developing sphere. According to Abel (1982:2):

" . . . informal justice is said to be unofficial (dissociated from state power), non-coercive (dependent upon rhetoric rather than force), non-bureaucratic, decentralised, relatively undifferentiated, and non-professional; its substantive and procedural rules are imprecise, unwritten, democratic, flexible, ad-hoc, and particularistic. No concrete informal legal institution will embody all these qualities, but each will exhibit some."

Private security may seem to exhibit some of these qualities, and different aspects of private security may apparently display different qualities. The subject is open to tentative and suggestive analysis in terms of the general characteristics of informal justice, sharing features of the mutual interpenetration of ideologies, forms and practices of justice which exists between the informal, private and



formal spheres of justice and 'legal' regulation (cf. Henry, 1983). Nonetheless, the private security sector and its distinctive private justice can be clearly distinguished from 'informal' justice by its necessary inclination towards formalisation.

The centrality of the profit-motive means that the formalisation of commercial organisation is paramount, along with attendant professionalisation, hierarchical and office bureaucracy, and differentiation within the market-place in order to stress the 'uniqueness' of services; the adoption of (if not necessarily adherence to) a body of rules which are in line with formal law, are precise, written, not open to discussion, and (ideally) inflexible, routine in use and general in coverage. Furthermore, the private security sector also works for and within the wider ambit of the state's organisation of social control and certain elements within it have no aversion at all to the use of coercive force. The distinction between the formal (state/civil/criminal) justice system and informal justice is of serious importance in the case of the private security sector precisely because it lies clearly and logically within the parameters of neither. Rather it lies between them, penetrated and penetrating, metaphorically a hybrid, born out of tensions and conflicts over definitions of justice between the state, capital and various forms of populism (left and right).

It is not, however, neutral or neuter. While the modern private security sector has antecedents in historical forms of private justice and private police today's private security is, in range and form, unequivocally born of the age of modern capital and it represents capital's own policing of, and in, its own interests. It is a conservatively oriented, privately employed and directed, form of private commercial justice (cf. South, 1983).

#### Some General Conditions for the Growth of Private Security

The very scope for the existence of the private security sector has been related to the state's management of the conditions of the economy, capital's use of resources and the ways in which it benefits from state workers production of 'luxuries' (e.g. 'protection') (Gough, 1975). As Ian Gough (1975:85) has argued:



". . . the balance struck between direct state provision of a service, state finance of private provision or untrammelled private operation will depend upon the balance of class forces and the political structure of each individual state."

Thus the policing of complex, constitutionally democratic societies turns heavily on the legitimacy of the means employed by the state to regulate social order, oversee the observance of its laws and be seen to be making efforts to fulfil public expectations of creating a 'safe society'.

Borrowing from the classic Weberian formulation of legitimacy and authority, Etzioni (1968) has focused upon two "bases of power":

"On the one hand, power is based on the actual or potential use of instruments of coercion by the holder of power. On the other hand, power is based on, and is used, in "accord with the subjects values and under conditions that he views as proper" (Etzioni, 1968:360). It is this latter form of power, which has its bases in the subject's values, that we refer to as authority or legitimate power."

(Turkel, 1980:22)

A key aspect of the legitimacy of private security is therefore found in the resonance of its avowed aims to protect property, prevent crime and so on, with 'right and proper' social values. Such aims are laudable and 'a good thing' ergo private security is a 'good' - or at least - acceptable thing. It can therefore claim some de facto, if not de jure, authority so necessary to its private policing modus operandi. As Parsons observed, authority - as required here - is "essentially the institutional code within which the use of power as a medium is organised and legitimised" (Parsons, 1966:249; cf. Turkel, 1980:22-25). Therefore, the state's forbearance and tacit approval of private initiatives is also necessary to accord widespread legitimacy to them. Over time such tacit approval takes on its de facto character; the initiative of private enterprise is even welcomed by governments conscious of fiscal constraint.

Legitimacy accrues as private security is linked to the legitimate protection of private property, including "mass private property" to which the public has access (e.g. shopping centres or malls, cf. Shearing and Stenning, 1983). As in the USA, Canada and elsewhere it can acquire (or has long enjoyed) the legitimacy of licensing by the state.



However, measured against the ultimate sovereignty and power of the state, it never achieves such legitimacy as truly de-jure. It may claim right and lawful title for its activities but it does so within the state's framework of legality. The increasing internationalisation of private security confuses this issue, but nonetheless, all states seek to oversee the exercise of power within their borders. Thus private security has a crucial relationship, not simply with capital, as its principal employers and owners but also with the state. For the state is not 'giving way' to private security but is continuing to act through it. To understand this, we must first be mindful of the artificial construction of the private/public dichotomy, as if the former were outside and the latter inside 'the state'. In an analysis paraphrasing Gramsci, Louis Althusser (1971:144) argues that:

"the distinction between the public and the private is a distinction internal to bourgeois law, and valid in the (subordinate) domains in which bourgeois law exercises its 'authority'."

The state itself is identifiable with neither the public nor the private (Weiss; 1984:13), "on the contrary," Althusser argues, "it is the precondition for any distinction between private and public." On the basis of this understanding, I argue that the state is not as some argue receding; it is not giving way to 'creeping capitalism', to the encroachment of informal institutions or to diminution of its power through 'reformist' engineering (of the left or the right).

As I shall indicate, state moves to rationalise, cut costs, pull-back and so on, have their undeniable place, impact and importance. But in considering the growth and significance of private security, as in other matters, our analysis is crude and short-sighted unless it also appreciates the dialectical nature of change, the interpenetration of state and civil society, of the formal and the informal and of the public and the private.



## The Expansion of Private Security as a 'Sign of the Times'

Within the post-war period, and particularly the recent decades of economic inflation and stagnation, private security has enjoyed a "recession resistant" boom (Kakalik and Wildhorn, 1971) and has meshed well with a number of state moves to rationalise the cost of policing throughout western societies. In an analysis of the growth of the demand for private security in the USA, Klare (1975) suggests three factors have been of major importance. First, the decade of the 1960s in the USA was a period of social upheaval and violence. The coincidence of political and cultural turbulence marked the period as one of significance for those concerned with social control and economic reproduction. In this context an executive of the Burns security agency offered the following explanation of why the private security business was booming:

"Look at what's happening today. The headlines are enough to tell you. There are all kinds of civil strife and turmoil, bombings and disruptions. Isn't that enough of an indicator of why businesses want protection?"

(Washington Post, 1970)

The Burns executive offers a 'context' - which apparently satisfies a number of commentators on private security: what is not answered is why such 'protection' should legitimately come from the private sector. It should of course be noted of 'explanations' from such sources that for all that private security is in the business of privacy, and invariably fights shy of media interest for fear of 'bad press', it is, on the other hand, by no means averse to publicising 'bad news' for the rest of society. Such is the bread and butter not only of the media but of private security as well.

A second, but related, growth phenomenon in the USA was 'street crime'. 'Muggings', 'hold-ups' and increases in rape offences all gave rise to increasing public and policing concern and consternation. Though again, why private security should be seen as the legitimate or obvious solution to such problems is unanswered. A more plausible connection might be with the growth of vigilantism, community patrols and the like.<sup>3</sup> Thirdly, the late 1950s and 1960s saw the 're-discovery' of 'commercial crime'. Robbery, violence, burglary and



vandalism are consistently 'alarming' crime problems, but suddenly, massive hidden losses to business were miraculously discovered by security consultants as arising from employee theft, industrial sabotage and shoplifting.

For the UK it is most evidently in the latter context of growing concern about crime problems, offences against property and the person, the decline of old standards and values, and, relatedly, a dramatic (re-) discovery of 'crime at work', that the development of the private security sector appears to have emulated expansion in the USA. Concern over rising crime and moral decay is not new and recurrently brings with it calls for moral re-armament and tougher action against the predators (cf. Pearson, 1983). Private initiatives have always played their part in such responses (cf. Little and Sheffield, 1983; South, forthcoming; Weiss, 1985). The post-war boom and proliferation of private security services finds a historically logical and expected place among these 'signs of the times', although, as I shall indicate, there are deeper factors and a broader context to also take account of.

But in one very real sense, the development of private security has been the development of policing work and, more grandly, the private property environment which increasingly embraces areas of mass public access but privately-owned space (e.g. shopping precincts).

Well developed in the USA, the private policing of the workforce and the work-place breeds a philosophy which sees the surveillance and control of employees by a quasi-policing set of arrangements as a commercially logical extension of, and adjunct to, the traditional and formal organisation of supervision and discipline at work.<sup>4</sup> For example, an annual report for the Burns agency in the USA offered undercover agents to investigate certain kinds of "managerial problems" which it listed as "inventory losses, pilferage, theft, fraud, falsification of records, forgery, poor employee morale, wilful neglect of machinery, waste of time and materials, theft of tools, unreported absenteeism, supervisory incompetence, inadequate surveillance" and what are referred to as "delicate investigatory matters" (Burns, 1972). A pot-pourri of work-related 'problems' which



have coherence and connection only in a sinister marriage of F.W. Taylor's prescription for efficient production and Jeremy Bentham's scheme for the 'panoptic' surveillance of society.

In the UK and the rest of Europe, private security organisations offer similar if generally less eye-catching lists of services. Massive profits are made in the provision of such services, but then, the argument runs, in the long-term, security saves money. Within the commercial ideology, investment, in 'loss prevention' is the key rationale underpinning the appeal of security to efficient management. As one senior British politician put it, "There is good evidence that security measures are a good investment which earn a rate of return at least comparable to that on other investments."<sup>5</sup> But the 'rationale' is more than simply concern over profit margins.

"It is natural to feel most concern and to commit most of our efforts to what seem to be the most serious offences: major robberies, frauds and arsons. But let us not forget the lesser crimes. In isolation these may seem trivial, but when, as now, they accumulate in great numbers, they are serious. Petty pilfering is not as dramatic as bank robbery, but on a large scale it can be even more harmful to the fabric of our society."

(Ibid.)

This concern with the "fabric of our society" is, I shall point out, something which the private security sector is particularly concerned about, a factor belying its avowed apolitical commercial neutrality. There is no neutrality here. There are questions to raise. As an early writer on the subject asked, are private police "a legal anomaly, a constitutional contradiction?" (Shalloo, 1933:vii; cf. Weiss, 1984:2). I have raised some issues related to this question in preceding chapters. In the following sections I shall explore further the position of private security as embraced by and embracing anomaly and contradiction.



"The best way of achieving power for the Trade Unions . . . is to ensure that they have access to relevant management and government information, nearly all of which is processed and stored in computer centres. The picture is not an entirely gloomy one. At least one can say that the advent of the violent protester, the urban guerilla, the militant school child, the frenetic female, the campus incendiary, the highwayman trade unionist and all the other overturners of the world, has created a bonanza for the security man and the industry which supports him. They must be, and indeed are trying to be, worthy of their calling."

(Hamilton, 1972:111-112)

This quote, from one of the major security theorists in Britain, has an interesting historical resonance. Radzinowicz (1948:28) quotes Smollet, the 18th century novelist, as describing the England of the 1730s as "infested with robbers, assassins and incendiaries, the natural consequence of degeneracy, corruption and the want of police . . ." Hamilton's view of contemporary conditions almost suggests that the presence of a public police force has made little discernible difference. The point is that the same rhetoric which stimulated private initiatives pre-dating the establishment of a public police in the 18th and 19th centuries, is curiously little changed in the 20th century.

The private security sector developed rapidly in the UK, USA and Canada throughout the 1950s and 1960s and it is worth briefly re-examining some of the conditions which helped to stimulate this growth. On one level, there is little that is remotely odd about the expansion of private security. In the history of policing in Britain and the USA (and, indeed elsewhere) private initiatives and policing arrangements pre-dated public policing<sup>6</sup> and the likes of the privately paid night-watch, factory police and the systematic organisation of informers and information gathering for private purposes, never really disappeared. In this sense the new organisation of private security has merely involved the more intensified selling of these services as a more economically rational form of security, offering immediacy, personal service, control, standby support, 'risk-free' undercover and detection work, consultancy, and provision of technical equipment and expertise (cf. Chapters 2 and 3).



A significant structural factor arises out of changes in the infra-structural organisation of production in the post-war period. The movement to larger units of 'horizontal' and 'vertical' production systems on single sites, alongside the growth of "mass private property" (Shearing and Stenning, 1983), (such as shopping complexes, condominiums, private residential estates etc.), has meant a greater demand for internal security on private property than ever before. A role expanded for the policing function to fill which the police themselves were unable to move into, partially because of the relatively small base of legal powers on which they can routinely claim access to private premises. Above and beyond this, other obvious pressures on their resources came to be prioritised, generating considerable formal, and informal, reluctance to embrace a further demand for their services.

The pressurising 'other problems' faced by the police were part of the developing post-war awareness of social problems and political tensions, of both an internal and external nature. In this climate, the private security sector has sold itself well, identifying threats to corporate security and profit. It is undeniable that modern industrial development has made business and industry more 'vulnerable' to theft and sabotage (if only in terms of scale) and, hence, more security conscious. Massive 'discovered' increases in pilferage and forms of fraud - minor and major - have been identified and, in times of economic crisis, when the Keynesian orthodoxy has broken down and recession and slump squeeze high profits (Gough, 1975), then such high 'shrinkage' become unacceptable. Attacks on payrolls ill-protected by pressurised police resources, heralded a boom in armoured car services. Further, the fostering of the idea in society that technical advancement and administrative rationalisation are 'neutral' matters and without far-reaching consequences, helped this reorientation of policing power.

For Spitzer and Scull (1977, b), two key orientations in the development of the modern corporation have been particularly significant in contributing to the accompanying growth of private security. First, a process of concentration "making more efficient use of labour power through 'scientific management' . . ." and



secondly, "extending control over many factors of production, distribution and consumption external to earlier forms of business enterprise" (p. 25). As Christopher Lasch (1979:Chapter 7) observes, American managerialism in the 1950s (a commodity soon imported to the UK) embraced a cultural turning point in the socialisation of industrial authority and these sentiments have been strongly internalised in the theory and practice of industrial security. One highly influential book of the end of the decade, 'The Human Side of Enterprise' by Douglas McGregor (1960), responded to conservative alarm about the apparent abdication of authority in society generally and managerial relations in particular, by arguing that this apparent trend, in fact, "represented instead a transition to a more effective, scientific, therapeutic form of control" (Lasch, 1979:314). According to Lasch:

"reactionary businessmen predictably denounced the new softness imported into business by industrial relations experts, demanding a crack-down on unions, a reversal of the New Deal, and a return to the good old days of industrial autocracy, McGregor had no patience with this outmoded outlook. It rested, in his view, on a misunderstanding of authority and a simplification of the alternative modes of exercising power. 'Abdication is not an appropriate antithesis to authoritarianism . . . Only if we can free ourselves from the notion that we are limited to a single dimension - that of more or less authority - will we escape from our present dilemma."

(Lasch, 1979:315, quoting McGregor, 1960:31)

By the 1960s and early 1970s management had learned the lesson (it seemed) that there was a negotiable and judicious optimum level of authority which needed to be exercised - and no more. For security consultants, always in any case constrained by cost considerations attached to recommendations for improving security, such a message made commercial as well as sound theoretical sense. Thus, Wright (1972:19) compares government security and commercial security in these terms:

" . . . in government security the end (preserving secrets of national importance) justifies the means (the creation of an expensive security defence). In commercial security, however, the end is subject to a means test: for if the losses are not likely to be serious, it is not worth spending a lot of money to prevent them. Government security, therefore, aims at maximum security levels, while commercial security aims at an optimum level of security in each individual business."



So changes in the organisation of production, in technology and in the hard and soft edges of the management of industrial relations, alongside increasing consumerism and the moral panics surrounding real and imagined growing crime rates, have all contributed to the legitimate and largely unchallenged expansion of private security. In Britain the recommendations of the 1962 Royal Commission on the Police pressured the existing 158 forces to re-structure and re-appraise their priorities. They subsequently discontinued a range of escort and social-function services, and increased the cost of their services when available for hire. The 1964 Police Act was a gift to private security's growth.

More generally, several social themes, or perhaps more descriptively 'paranoias', occurred around the late 1950s and early 1960s, further boosting conditions of growth. The Welfare State and its provisions were humane outcomes of post-war social reconstruction, but there was a clear limit to be set to the acceptability of state intervention and control. The ideology of the period of the 1950s, stirred by the suppression of the 1956 Hungary Revolt, conscious of involvement in Korea and enmeshed in the politics of the Cold War, was distinctly anti-totalitarian, in particular, anti-Soviet. Individualism (within the consensus) and private choice (within the parameters of accepted 'rationality' and morality) were key-notes. In the UK and other European countries, the nascent 'national security' consciousness was also stimulated by the beginnings of the so-called 'brain-drain' to overseas competitors, principally, and ironically, its war-time allies, the USA, Canada and Australia. This particular corporate headache went hand-in-hand, and often symbolically merged in the imagery of cut-throat competition, with the seemingly new practice of industrial espionage. The spectres of defection and betrayal haunting capital's consciousness were given more substance by the spy-scandals of the 1950s and the 1960s. Fear of 'Reds' and 'homosexuals' occupying key positions in the state took little effort to translate to the boardroom. National security was clearly a priority for capital; private choice to make provision for private security was wholly consonant with the prevailing ideology and disturbing trends. 'Security begins at home' might have been the watchword.



The further growth of private security since the 1960s has also occurred in a period when, as Cohen (1979) has observed, the 'public' and the 'private' show general tendencies of merger. In policing in particular, the police are re-presented as 'ordinary citizens', subject to the same laws and facing the same problems of life as everybody else. In turn, as 'crime prevention' has become more and more a matter of being "your business", and people are exhorted to report suspicious events and set a good example to others, especially to youth, so are the citizenry moving toward 'social policing'. The breakdown of traditional roles and expectations which the police themselves are able and willing to fulfil has contributed significantly to the acceptability of private security (cf. Home Office, 1979).

It should not be assumed however, that this is a trend towards mutual appreciation, nor that public services do not fear the consequences of erosion of their own resources both for themselves and those they serve. A recent report in the New York Times drew attention to these issues, which have clear correspondence in the UK. 'Private Guard Forces are Feared as Drain on Money for the Police'

"The rapid growth in private security forces may lead to reduced financial support for public police services that would be particularly harmful to poorer communities, a panel of experts has warned. 'Security firms and personnel are now commonplace,' said 13 law-enforcement specialists in a report on "The Future of Policing". "The messages in this are disturbing: those with resources to protect their pads do not trust the public police, and those without such resources can expect still less from the public police tomorrow."

"The more those who can afford private security services put their money there, the less they will support municipal public services" the report said. "Those who will lose most when this comes about are those already losing the most: the people in the poorest, most ripped-off neighbourhoods."

(New York Times, 5th February, 1983)

But importantly, beyond the filling of a day-to-day policing vacuum, the private security sector reflects a strong concern for the stability of the consensus. Its concerns embrace not only the security of private property but the security of a morality and ideology also. Thus, Hamilton (1968:123) defines "the purpose of



security in its widest sense" as being "to protect a way of life". Similarly, but more specifically identifying the aggrieved worker as merely the pawn in a larger game, another security commentator, Slee-Smith (1970:121) makes the classic analysis that such workers will be:

"manipulated by sinister outside forces to twist and distort facts so as to cause industrial unrest and to wreck all attempts by legitimate trade union officials to negotiate with management."

Such 'political corruption' is inextricably entwined with 'moral corruption'. As Slee-Smith (1970:115) puts it:

"Many factors can contribute to a lowering of moral standards; political associations, emotional background, mental instability, drink, sex-perversions, drugs etc. There can be no doubt that political associations play a significant part in influencing the course of actions to be taken by the employee intent on 'hitting back' at his employers."

(emphasis added)

But it is not only the recognisably polemical spokespersons of private security who publicly avow a commitment not only to the protection of life and property but also to the moral and constitutional fibre of society. The usually 'moderate' managing-director of Group 4, Philip-Sorenson also expounded a more generalised concern in his 1972 address to the Cropwood Conference on Private Security:

"Our service is more than a protection against crime in all its forms. At a time when the frontiers of decency and morality are being breached on every side, the manned security services of the industry are a bulwark against declining standards of behaviour and they offer to the industrial and commercial society of this century a reassurance and a quality of protection which no prudent management can afford to ignore."

(Philip-Sorenson, 1972:46)

Thus, the theoreticians and practitioners of the private security world repeatedly and explicitly link their programme of the defence of a threatened economic base with offences against morality, all within an aggressive attack on the political 'subversives'. Private security may make its money in the commercial market-place but the concern of the security mentality, from control room to board room, is (almost) equally the protection of the values of stable conservatism.



It would be highly misleading however to characterise private, commercial security as heavy-handed, or their utilisation by the sophisticated corporate managements of the 1960s and 1970s as anything like old-style company police in the USA circa the turn of the century. Whilst in the sensitive atmosphere of the 1950s social change and the 1960s turbulence, it is easy to discern the unease and insecurity about economic and political instability which contributed strongly to the resurgence of demand for commercial security, the mood of corporate 'liberalism' focused the corporate utilisation of private security on its discretionary advantages. It should go without saying that such a mood and the manipulation of private security's discretionary advantages represent precisely that "transition to a more effective, scientific, therapeutic form of control" which Lasch notes in discussing McGregor's Human Side of Enterprise. While discretionary justice is of course nothing new in the workplace - the owner's right to hire and fire on personal preference and whim has only relatively recently been challenged by legislation - the emergence of a third party, a business itself, in business precisely as a mechanism of alternative, commercial, private, discretionary justice, was both a logical extension of the capitalist division of labour and enterprise and a welcome service. As Shearing et al (1980:164) note, this is well understood in the promotional strategies of the private security sector. Thus:

"Contract security companies tend, in their advertising literature, to avoid the language of criminal justice. While they sometimes argue for the necessity of private security by pointing to the 'rising crime rate', in describing their services they seldom talk about crime or crime prevention, but rather of 'loss prevention'. This language acts to define private security as a service that operates within a framework that is designed primarily to meet corporate needs and objectives and is not confined by the objectives and concerns that define criminal justice."

Shearing et al. are reporting a study carried out in Canada but, along with the internationalisation of private security itself, its language, imagery and modus operandi speak to a corporate sector that itself thinks internationally and which, even at more parochial levels, inherits a legacy of workplace discretionary justice with which private security can resonate as simply a modern expression.

In one of the few serious, critical appraisals of the private security



phenomenon - an essay on the privatisation of social control - Spitzer and Scull (1977, b) suggest that "private police":

"can deal with many transgressions extra-legally, minimising the risks and costs of public processing while maximising the probability of restitution."

"Private policing" also responds to its "consumer demand" more efficiently and with more flexibility than public enforcement in terms of organisational "adjustment". It seems probable that this is the case, though Spitzer and Scull do not indicate whether such "adjustment" entails lay-offs of staff or calculated advantage taken of the 'casual' nature of labour turnover characteristic of private security such that staff can be lost with relative alacrity and amenability (cf. Chapter 2). Presumably 'organisational adjustment' would rely on both features rather more than the police can. Private security also undoubtedly, borrows the "halo and symbols of authority" of the police (Chapter 2) and benefits from exchanges of information and the 'cross-employment' of retired police officers (Chapters 3 and 4). Such points of comparison are extremely valuable; however at this level it remains important to consider the distinctiveness of private security from the police in modern society.

In its day-to-day operation private security presents itself as primarily involved in straight-forward loss-prevention and as engaged in detection and surveillance work in a 'service' capacity to suit commercial interests. The question can now usefully become, how does private security relate to the other major employer of such security and policing services in society, i.e. the state?



## The Commercial Compromise of the State

The recent UK Home Office Discussion Paper (1979) on the 'Private Security Industry' is quite clear in first emphasizing that it is the mandate and responsibility of the public police force to maintain law and order but that under present conditions the police cannot meet the total and growing demand for protection which has come from society. The "private security industry" should therefore be viewed as a realistic and reasonable 'private adjunct' to public police: "to plug the gaps' left by an unfortunate incomplete police presence" as one commentator from the police service puts it. As the same writer astutely continues:

"The irresistible conclusion to this argument is that with an increase in public police resources, the needs and justification for private security would simply disappear, but in reality we are aware that such an expansion of the role of the police has been foregone, mainly for reasons of economy."

(Slater, 1982:19)

Shearing and Stenning (1981) are critical of this "plugging of gaps", "filling of vacuums", type of explanation for the growth of private security (cf. South, 1979). "This argument", they suggest:

"typically identifies the "economic crisis of the state" as the principal, if not the only, reason for the re-emergence of private security in the latter half of the 20th century . . . The difficulty with this vacuum theory of the development of private security, as Carson and Young (1976) have pointed out, is not so much that it is wrong but that it is too narrow and limited. Certainly the fiscal restraints that have affected public police budgets are real enough and this most assuredly has had some influence on the growth of private security. However, a limited focus on this, and other "proximate causes" (Carson and Young, 1976) of modern private security, in the absence of a historically grounded analysis of the structural changes at work, results in both an inadequate explanation of the development of private security and a distorted picture of the historical nature of the relationship between private and public security forces."

(pp. 226-227)

Crucially here, Shearing and Stenning cast doubt on the "fiscal crisis" explanation of the growth of private security most strongly developed by Spitzer and Scull (1977, b), (although perhaps in the end



they minimise it too much). They also see the need for a full historical picture of the "relationship between private and public security forces." But if history implies, as it should, a social, economic and political contextualisation, then noting the forces of paternalism and capitalism is inadequate without also referring to the political relations with the state within which private security is employed by capital. I shall say more on this point after further consideration of the fiscal crisis argument.

Commercial interests in the post-war period have obviously had a keen awareness of the "fiscal crisis" affecting the public service sector. In this context, Spitzer and Scull (1977, b:27) note that "productivity in labour-intensive organisations rises considerably slower than in their capital-intensive counterparts." Thus, it is argued, greater levels of expenditure are required to maintain the same levels of service of public policing, in real terms. When this particular accountancy problem is coupled with the growth in militancy and effectiveness of organisations representing the interests of police officers (unions and federations, cf. Reiner, 1978), seeking better pay and working hours for their members, then it becomes more understandable why public policing is hard-pressed "to provide the kind of sophisticated and expensive services that modern corporations require" (p. 25).

Throughout the 20th century corporate enterprise has attempted to 'rationalise' (Kolko, 1963) and, as opposed to the 19th century aim of simply reducing the cost of labour supply, modern corporations have sought efficiency through 'scientific management' and the extension of control beyond the concerns of early commerce and manufacture, to embrace factors in the processes of production, distribution and consumption. It is in terms of these developments then, that Spitzer and Scull (1977, b:27) argue that "privatisation of policing must be understood in relation to the organisation of society on a market basis." Thus, these authors basically argue that the growth of private security can be explained by an analysis of "the fiscal crisis of the state" as occurring at the same time as the extension of corporate hegemony.



It is suggestive to note, however, that such a position is peculiarly reminiscent of a neo-Galbraithian analysis of 'The Affluent Society'. Galbraith's (1969) dialectic is one of private affluence co-existing with, indeed thriving upon, public squalor. The theory according to Galbraith, and strangely paralleled by Spitzer and Scull, is that at a time of high inflation and general economic crisis the state exerts economic 'brakes' on expansion and public expenditure. The public sector is naturally most directly affected because this is where state control is most immediate. In this analysis there is no reason why the police would not be treated as any other state agency, suffering a reduced budget and cuts in resources with which to expand. Overall, this clearly has not happened. Furthermore, the increasing division of policing labour to which the private security sector is contributing new levels of unskilled and 'specialised-service-policing' has also allowed for certain branches of the public police to actually enjoy increased budgets and increasingly specialised functions.

#### Private Security, Public Policing and the 'Fiscal Crisis': Some Comments on the 'Privatisation' Thesis

Spitzer and Scull's thesis of the "privatisation of social control" (1977 (a) (b)) as directly related to state responses to the fiscal crisis has drawn a few questioning comments. In particular, Stanley Cohen (1979) has noted the developing trend toward the merging of the public and the private in social control, but is sceptical about the extent to which this has resulted in a genuinely significant degree of privatisation of functions across the social control spectrum. It seems correct to suggest that there has been the beginning of a trend away from the 'concentration' of the apparatuses of social control intervention at the level of the state, which began in the mid-19th century, toward what is in a sense a 'dispersal' of some of these activities back into the commercial and community arenas (Cohen, 1979). But for Cohen, one must still have reservations about this development.

The general conclusions which can be drawn from this in an analysis of social control under advanced capitalism remain limited. The ideology of the 'community treatment' movement which Cohen summarises,



interestingly reflects in a partial - though politically at odds sense - some of the private security sector's legitimating justification for greater commercial intervention into the former preserve of the state. As Cohen (1979:26) puts the community treatment case, "the ideology . . . implies this: on the one hand, the repressive, interventionist reach of the state should be blunted, on the other, the 'community' should become more involved in the day-to-day business of prevention and control." The private security ideology would argue that on the one hand the interventionist reach of the state - (they would be unlikely to concur with the opinion that it was repressive) - in fact is stretched as far as it can go and that whilst it actually needs to reach further, it is bound by legal and financial considerations to stretch in some directions rather than others, so that, on the other hand, it is therefore necessary that commerce and community (in the form of residents associations etc.) should become more involved in the day-to-day business of prevention and control, for example, by hiring private security patrols.

Interestingly (and perhaps ironically), public policing has swiftly become a part of this movement in its guise of 'community policing'. In the UK, the USA and elsewhere, community policing initiatives have encouraged "Neighbourhood Watch" schemes involving local residents to act as the eyes, ears and alerters of the police.

Thus, whilst 'creeping capitalism' may indeed be a force for the 'privatisation' of certain former public service sector functions, the extent to which this is really going on and the extent to which it is significantly eroding the power of the state in the accepted public/private sector equation are questions deserving close attention.

It may be instructive to consider here another anomalous case within this equation; the so-called 'civilianisation' of police staffing'. While civilian police staff remain clearly within the state sector, this anomalous case is relevant here because, according to some observers, not only does it contribute to breaking down the police/public distinction (and the attendant 'negative' consequences of that opposition) but significantly, it is also a response to the concern of the state over the cost-effectiveness of policing per se.



In the UK the civilian component of the police force has been rising over the past few decades; the 1970s in particular saw a substantial rise in the number of civilian staff employed, from a 1971 figure of 16,417 to 21,173 in 1980 (State Research, 1981:166). Such a process of 'civilianisation' (Ray, 1977:69) is even more advanced and apparent in the USA. According to Ray, this

"policy of transferring jobs held by uniformed sworn personnel to non-uniformed civilian workers . . . is one of the ways in which the labour process of policing is being reduced to increasingly distinct tasks subject to closer and more centralised managerial control. Many clerical, traffic control and station house jobs are now held by civilians, and others, such as finger-printing, may soon join the list . . . This sector of the police institution now accounts for 12% to 20% of the labour force in municipal policing and it is increasing."

Ray argues that this process of 'civilianisation' "is actively promoted by the police policy makers of monopoly capital because it makes it possible to expand the coercive potential of the police apparatus without a commensurate increase in the size of the wage bill" (my emphasis), such civilian personnel generally being lower paid. It is difficult to see, however, how stabilising the size of the sworn force and increasing clerical and traffic control positions of a civilian nature actually "expands the coercive potential of the police apparatus" in any way other than to, say, possibly free more duty time of the sworn personnel and ensure a 'smoother' administrative and bureaucratic back-up. This may well have some net effect in this direction and it may emanate from the budgetary constraints of the state, but why 'police policy representing the interests of monopoly capital' should seek to cut the size of the police wage bill at the same time as 'monopoly capital' is increasing corporate expenditure on private security is a different question. Nor does this analysis contribute to explaining real increases in budgeting for specialised sections of the police in the UK, the USA and Canada where, as Taylor (1979:44) points out, there has been:

"an increase in expenditure on policing, within an otherwise stable, or reducing, public expenditure on health, education and social welfare (and control)."

Taylor is quite rightly sceptical of the effects of state budgetary constraints on its overall social control expenditure, but this does not mean that, at the same time, the state is not also likely to



support and foster a space for commercial intervention to provide an ancillary service sector. This supplements what remains after all, an extremely expensive commitment for the state. While Spitzer and Scull, and others, emphasize this point most strongly, they fail to identify the bifurcating trends in state expenditure which Taylor details.

It is indeed tempting to explain such developments, along with the resort to supplementary commercial services by the state and capital, in terms of the recent 'fiscal crisis' of the state. Yet 'civilianisation' is really an unsurprising development as a logical reaction to the increasing administrative, technical and policing division of labour. Moreover, to return to the principal concern here, as I have already observed, forms of private security policing continued to exist through boom and slump even after they were first overshadowed by the formal organisation of the 'New Police'. Furthermore, such arrangements have had several flourishing phases, and their provision has been slowly on the increase since the turn of the century in the USA and more modestly throughout the post-war period in Britain and elsewhere. The crises of the 1960s and 1970s explain much regarding the 'boom' growth of private security, but there is a broader canvas of social trends and under-currents to consider, as Spitzer and Scull recognise in considering the orthodox differentiation between public and private 'policing' on criteria of 'who pays'. Distinctions based on the nature of economic support from private rather than public expenditure "are less and less defensible," they argue:

"as changes in the economic structure of capitalist societies have blurred the boundaries between the public and the private sector (and as) private organisations (i.e. corporations), expand their ability to 'tax' the public, either directly through state subsidies or indirectly through administered prices."

(Spitzer and Scull, 1977, b:18)

For Spitzer and Scull the reality of the changing functions of the state appears to become the object of inquiry, but this reality is not conceived in any broad sense. Instead it is restricted to the extent to which the state has to change to adapt to new demands or recognitions of failure. It is true that the way in which the



organisation of policing labour has been changed can, to some extent, be well understood by this analysis. However, there is much 'unfinished' about this approach. Understanding the connection between the commercial security sector and the arrangements that the state makes for policing requires a stronger emphasis on the political relations and mediations involved.

Certainly, differences in the financing of policing arrangements in society do not sufficiently distinguish between the civil police and the private sector of policing as, respectively, one, part of the state and two, divorced from the state. As I have suggested in introducing this chapter, private security policing occurs within the state and within its legal framework (even where it exceeds the limits of legality it refers to that legal framework). It thus operates indirectly in relation to the state, and also directly in its frequent employment by the state (at national and local levels). It is quite logically located therefore within the 'unity' of state relations. As Nowell-Smith (1980:9) puts it,

"The boundaries of the state are constantly shifting and vary with the standpoint from which it is viewed. There are various forms of state relation, and of relations which have a state aspect to them . . . The 'power' of the state is therefore very much a question of the extent to which the aspect of centralised juridico-political ordering dominates over others that might be in play at any given time."

Private security or policing (in whatever manifestation) has a political relation to the state. Robert Weiss (1978), in a highly suggestive analysis of the history of 'Private Policing in the USA', also seeks to clarify this relationship. For him, the key point is that the state has and does permit capital to use 'extra-governmental violence' (or more moderately, one might add, extra-governmental surveillance or the institution of a private justice system of detection, prosecution, adjudication and punishment). For Weiss, the use (or even possibility of use) of 'extra-governmental violence' (in, for example, cases ranging from industrial disputes through evictions, to debt-collection or the patrol of public functions, cf. Chapters 2 and 3) means that private security 'policing' becomes, in Weber's terms, part of the state's "monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" (Weber, 1972:78; Weiss, 1981:13). Weiss argues that:



"if police power can issue only from the governing authority i.e. the state, then we must conclude that private police possessed state power and functioned as part of the state. This power was not under the control or direction of the government but under the direct control of private interests."

(ibid.)

Weiss is, of course, offering an analysis of a case-study within a specific period of the history of a specific state (the USA, 1850-1940). However, the assumption of 'police' powers of a more apparently moderate form: the fulfilling of functions of surveillance, discipline, punishment (within the senses developed by Foucault, 1977) draws out, in the contemporary state, a similar presumption to the 'formal' power of the state.

So what else is happening here? Shearing and Stenning have described the growth of private security in relation to policing functions in society as "a quiet revolution" (Stenning and Shearing, 1980 (b)). I would rather refer to it as a profound development in the securing of society. It is a commercial compromise between the sovereignty of the state which constitutionally represents the status-quo and those sections of society whose commercial interests are most benefited by the maintenance of that status quo. In accommodating the development of the private security sector, with whatever mixed degrees of caution or enthusiasm, the state is not simply 'saving money'. It is not reducing its commitment to more social control intervention - economically or politically. As the state accedes to a new (or at least renewed) dimension of capital's assertion of its relative autonomy, capital, in turn, seeks the means to safeguard its interests, (literally) on its own account.

On two mundane but contributory levels the private security sector has grown in response to this need. First, it has built upon the importance of ensuring the security of the conditions under which profit maximisation can be pursued. The principles of physical security are brought to bear to protect property, plant, stock and information against theft, threat, intrusion and loss. Secondly (and perhaps more importantly), private security policing affords capital both the symbolism and mechanism of discipline (cf. Foucault, 1977),



primarily through control and surveillance of labour and, increasingly, wider populations with legitimate access to 'public' private property and selected populations about whom interested parties wish to 'know more' (e.g. credit applicants; competing companies etc.).

Its 'supervisory' function is not that of the manager but that of 'symbolised authority' bearing the role of guardianship of both workers as employees (as labour value and property) and of the interests and property of capital. As 'ordinary workers' private security are 'good blokes/nice women'; if not the fulfilment of the role of 'philosopher, guide and friend', then at least someone that you can sometimes find to be 'OK', helpful and so on. On the other hand, they are also an authorised, intrusive presence with a wage to earn and a responsibility, allegiance and hierarchy of managerial direction which are external. Even unionisation in private security defers to this state of affairs and this is not an industry in which an 'oppositional' working-class consciousness is well-developed. Irresolvably, a primary and explicit function of private security personnel is that of 'watcher', of observer and of reporter. The specific mandate of private security has at its very core, the practice of surveillance over some to ensure the protection, property, privacy and security of others.

#### The Perpetuity of Private Security: Three Key Propositions

Contrary to the implications of the fiscal crisis argument it now seems highly improbable that even the most substantial increases in state expenditure on the police would result in any significant reduction in private expenditure on private security. Quite apart from capital's response, it is unlikely that the state or, more specifically even the police themselves, would welcome any such reduction. This contention is based on three general propositions, which reflect the core of my argument in this chapter. First, as I have pointed out, forms of privatised security or policing have always been around, flourishing to varying degrees, even as the provision of public policing has increased dramatically in size, scope and sophistication. Latterly, their growth has actually been stimulated



by changes in the operational priorities of the public police who have increased their selective concentration on certain, specific duties. Second, the increasing complexity of social and economic life 'demands' a correspondingly complex division of policing labour and expertise (though the form which this must necessarily take could of course be debated, cf. Taylor, 1982; Lea and Young, 1984). Thirdly, of course, and very simply, the provision of law and order maintenance by the state must 'universalise' itself beyond the immediate interests of individual components of capital and be directed to securing those conditions best suited to facilitating the reproduction of capital and its position vis-a-vis class relations as a whole. For individual components of capital, the market offers arrangements for more direct contractual relationships with the private security sector.

The relationship between the state and private security is, at its simplest, one in which a 'buffer' function is performed. The private security sector works directly on behalf of capital, on the visible level (i.e. at least in its visible activities) seeming less formally threatening to the 'industrial balance' and social consensus than common resort to the civil police or courts. The moral philosophy of any 'social contract' or ethos of commercial freedom and enterprise is naturally unsurprised by the idea of industry and business keeping its own house in order. Further, commercial crime, theft, embezzlement and fraud, industrial espionage, the new difficulties of protecting large-scale plant or the expanding range of 'private-public' spaces (such as shopping precincts) etc., have all presented problems generated out of a changing set of economic relations - from the opposition of capital and labour, the nature of competition between corporate interests and from changes in the commercial use of property. At the same time, police priorities have led them to patrol those crimes more 'evidently' threatening the social consensus - from street crime and burglaries to organised crime, and drug distribution. More significantly, and increasingly, the public police (across international boundaries) have overtly sought to control and restrict political challenge, regulating demonstrations and compiling political dossiers. Throughout the 1980s they are likely to continue to prioritise the policing of unrest and maintenance of social order in the inner cities and of protest around nuclear and ecological issues,



etc. Such priorities are priorities of the state. Capital, not unnaturally, has its own more parochial concerns, and private security, with a heritage dating back to the privately subscribed parish night-watch, responds to those concerns. Such a sense of 'parochialism' does not of course limit the proliferation of the private security sector's provisions for the internationalisation of capital and, thereby, the internationalisation of private security itself.

### The Legitimation of Private Security

In the London of 1833, a Parliamentary Committee discussion of the new public police had warned of any form of policing involving "the employment of spies . . . as a practice most alien to the constitution." One hundred and fifty years after these constitutional fears were expressed, not only is such a practice institutionalised in public policing (Scruton, 1982), but such services are also offered on the market on a private, commercial, profit-making basis (cf. Chapters 2, 3 and 4). In the UK, private security operates without any specific legislative control and even where licensing systems do operate (e.g. in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, parts of Europe), control, in practice, is limited (cf. Chapter 4). Today, such developments seem peculiarly unproblematic for elected guardians of the 'constitution'. Even in terms of the laws of the market-place, it is no great source of comfort or reassurance to find an experienced commentator like Lipson (Director of Security at American Express, and former US secret-service agent) observing that:

"The paradox of the private security industry is that on the one hand it prescribes methods for the protection of individuals and property from harm and theft while on the other hand it uses for this purpose personnel that the industry itself proscribes as high risks when evaluating or surveying business operations."

(Lipson, 1975:168)

Thus, not only is private security structurally anomalous but in its practice it also reflects a number of contradictions. The legitimacy of the private security sector might therefore be potentially problematic. However, when it is viewed, and occasionally presented by its own representatives, by police commentators and in government



reports, as a commercial compromise between an impoverished state and growing private sector demand for protection within a mixed economy, then this problem of legitimacy is significantly reduced. Drawing together some of the points raised earlier in this chapter, the deeper roots of this legitimation can briefly be examined further for the case of the UK (though the trends are similar for the USA and Canada).

The commercial success of private security in the late 1950s and the 1960s was born within a political and cultural atmosphere of hybrid social democracy and progressive conservatism.<sup>8</sup> Central ideological themes of the period included the celebration of consumerism, a faith in the prospects for economic security, the ideal of the middle-class family and promise of a better future through harnessing the 'white heat of technology'. Issues of a law and order nature which seemed to pose threats to such promise in this period were most clearly seen as being related to rebellious youth, racial tension, the affrontery of 'organised' crime and tremors of political subversion and the militancy of labour. In Britain, the criminal statistics for the period 1955-1965 showed the greatest increase in crime generally since 1915, with an annual average increase of about 10% (McLintock and Avison, 1968:18-19). Such conditions were 'naturally' conducive to the legitimation of private security.

At a broader level than the new consumerism of this period, the general inviolability of private property rights holds sway. On the basis of this fact alone, the legitimation of the property-protection functions of private security is as deeply ingrained in the 'collective consciousness' of society as every other 'taken for granted' value. In all capitalist societies private security has hence had the advantage of developing as an unsurprising commercial, mediatory, expedient to protect and maintain the existing pattern of property distribution. Legitimacy then, is accorded, at least partially, because private security appears to fulfil only this low-key and restricted policing function - however numerous the operators, the number of people employed, or the variety of services offered. It is less obviously intrusive or repressive intervention (as police action is quite commonly seen), and is hence, to most, relatively unremarkable. Assurances of probity and self-regulation from private



security itself (cf. Chapter 4) and from its sympathisers, generally pass the ultimate 'media-disinterest' test - because they are not an 'issue' they are not pursued as something worthy of the agenda of 'issues'.

I have referred to legitimation accruing to private security by virtue of their performing a 'mediatory' function. A simple but suggestive parallel may be drawn between this and some of the conditions which promoted the growth of the civil policing force in the England of the 19th century. In the 18th and 19th centuries the contours of its society were re-organised as the system of paternalistic local order and traditional institutions of control were weakened.<sup>9</sup> The Enclosure movement, unpopular corn prices and laws, the rise of the factory system and attendant general social dislocation heightened class antipathy and unrest. In such a climate it became apparent that in the absence of organised alternatives, continued reliance on the Army as the first-resort force for the enforcement of order, was dangerous and damaging. As Silver (1967:12) comments, employment of the military in cases of civil disturbance could only produce "an alternation between no intervention and the most drastic procedures - the latter representing a declaration of internal war with lingering consequences of hate and resentment." Mather (1959) points out that direct forms of personalised social control tend to exacerbate class antagonism, and this may be especially true where it is the direct agency of the state intruding into workaday life. In the acutely sensitive realm of policing, clearly the 'mediatory' role of private security may be perceived as a less drastic intrusion.

#### Conclusion: the Contradiction of the Commercial Compromise

Ultimately, the commercial compromise entered into between state and capital in facilitating and developing the organisation of private security, cites its foundation of legitimacy as being the 'right' of the individual (including the corporate 'individual') to make whatsoever (legal) arrangements the individual party feels necessary to secure and protect personal life and property. The acceptability of recourse to such private arrangements is premised on the principle of 'free choice' within a supposed 'free market', with equality under



civil governance and formal law. However, the 'free' nature of the market as in any sense approximating equality of access and opportunity has been well demonstrated as mythical. As Adam Smith recognised a long time ago, the system has a certain degree of bias.

"Civil Government, so far as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor, of those who have some property against those who have none at all."

(Adam Smith, The Wealth of Nations, 1776)

Freedom within the market is subject to the developing relations of capitalism, which since the 19th century has demanded changes in its mode of discipline (cf. Fine et al., 1979) including the need to make arrangements for the marshalling and surveillance of 'free' labour and for the protection and security of that profit and property born out of that labour's production of surplus value.

But private security is not simply a phenomenon of 'creeping capitalism', privatisation or the 'rolling back of the state'. To the contrary, in the interpenetration of the formal and the informal (cf. Henry, 1983) and the shifting parameters of appearance of the public and the private, private security functions and develops within the unity of state relations and relations to the state. Accounts of private security from historical, economic or social administration perspectives are valuable contributions but a more adequate political economy analysis can only begin from relating private security to capital, the market and their various dialectical relations with and within the state.

#### Beyond 'Policing by Consent'?

Increasingly capital (nationally and internationally) and with legitimacy accorded by states' (nationally and internationally), resorts to arrangements beyond those made for 'policing by consent' and tempered by effective safeguards for civil liberties. Such a development has disturbing implications for the wider, traditional relations which are expected to exist between institutions of policing and society.



In the following, concluding chapter, I shall briefly discuss some of these implications, reiterate some points already made and - with cautionary intent - add a few more, suggesting a new and realistic direction that policy could take in this area in moving away from the focus on private security towards an integrated scheme for social security.



## Chapter 5 - Notes

- (1) This chapter is a substantially revised version of a working paper 'Private Security, Private Policing and Social Control', 1982, Department of Sociology, Middlesex Polytechnic, London, which was itself a revision of South (1978 (b)) and another paper entitled 'Policing the Crisis - Privately' (delivered at several meetings in 1979). I should like to thank in particular Stan Cohen for his extensive comments on this material; also Gerry Mars, Jock Young and for early directions, Paul Wiles. The original papers were first drafted together in 1980 whilst I was a visiting lecturer in the Sociology Department, Hofstra University, New York. I would also like to thank the Department, Hy Enzer, Will Petry and Jeff Rosenfeld for making my visit such a pleasure. Finally, I am indebted to Steve Spitzer and Andrew Scull for encouraging me to develop the critique and position presented here and for publishing a shorter version, despite its criticism of their own work (cf. South, 1984).
- (2) For interesting discussions of the idea of 'rationalisation' related to social control see Cohen, J., (1972); and Spitzer, S., and Scull, A., (1977 (a) and (b)).
- (3) Thanks to Stan Cohen for his comments of this point.
- (4) There is in fact a background of management philosophy which berates management practice for putting employees in 'positions of temptation'. This dates from at least 1922 in major management journals e.g., Hartshorne, J., (1922); Factory Management (1954); Friedlander, M., (1965); Gregory, A., (1962). I have summarised some of this literature elsewhere, South, N., (1982).
- (5) Merlyn Rees, former Labour Home Secretary, in his address to the International Professional Security Association in 1978.
- (6) Briefly on the nightwatch and voluntary associations pre-dating the police see Tobias, J., (1979); South, N., (forthcoming); such phenomena are quite clearly still with us; for the USA see Weiss, R., (1978, 1981, 1985); on early informers see Thompson, E.P., (1963). Modern private investigation, industrial espionage etc. remains reliant on informers, as increasingly does police investigation, witness the phenomenon of the 'Supergrass'. The author is currently working on a more detailed treatment of this relatively unbroken history.
- (7) In the UK, other than registration as a private company there is no specialised form of registration as a business involved in the private security field. There is no system of licensing (cf. Chapter 4) and the details of operation and accounts lodged for companies can be minimal (and hence deceptive). There is thus no way to estimate with any precise accuracy the number of security firms operating in the UK (cf. Chapter 3). According to one estimate, by the late 1970s, there were over 700 agencies with resources of approximately 200-250,000 uniformed staff and over



10,000 armoured vehicles operating in Britain (Bunyan, 1977:230). The figure outnumbers the civil police force establishment. Even the more conservative estimates produced periodically by more sympathetic observers offer a picture of a very sizeable, active work-force in private security and, significantly, police observers now estimate that private security sector operatives outnumber or closely rival the figure for the police establishment. It should be remembered though that, as with all left-versus-right-wing debates relying on statistics, manipulation is not a talent restricted to one or the other. In particular, in some estimates of private security versus police the figure for the former represents an estimate of all employees, including for example, administrative staff. Figures taken for the police establishment however are usually the official ones for sworn-officers excluding civilian staff. There is no doubt that the number of private security personnel rivals and may exceed the police officer establishment, but there is a danger in unclear presentations of statistics indicating this. For the USA, Spitzer and Scull (1977, b) note the variance of estimates of size and number of officers (partially dependent on who is included - guards, investigators, store detectives etc.) as between 350,000 and 800,000 (derived from Kakalik and Wildhorn, 1971:6). It is also worth noting, however, that as a recent journalistic study of 'private spies' has indicated, the private security sector harbours a highly specialised and secretive dimension of ex-government security and intelligence agents which may make this a literally dangerous under-estimate, not numerically, but because it is based upon examination of the more visible operations of the private security sector (cf. Hougan, 1979).

- (8) See Hall, S., (1979) for a discussion of some of the political trends of this period in Britain and their relationship to popular and policy thinking on law, order and morality.
- (9) For a fuller discussion of property law, paternalism and social control in relation to the working class and forms of 'popular' crime in the 18th and 19th centuries, see Scraton, P., and South, N., 1981 (pp. 26-36), (cf. also Scraton, P., and South, N., forthcoming).



## Chapter 6

'Conclusion: Limits, Possibilities and Cautious Proposals'



The post-war expansion of the private security sector has revolutionary implications for the nature of modern social control and the policing of society. For the foreseeable future, such a significant resurgence of private arrangements for ensuring security, has fundamentally changed society's division of policing labour.

In this thesis I have described examples of private security at work (Chapter 2), detailed the recent development and practice of the broader private security sector, and presented the case for regulation and accountability (Chapters 3 and 4). I believe that I have brought together a wider range of sources of material and original research on this subject in the UK than has previously been publicly available. But private security's continuing development and significance will ensure that future work in this neglected area will be essential. As Chapter 5 has indicated, such further work must make sense of a complex diversity of social, economic and political trends and developments. For this particular project, the analysis presented in Chapter 5 represents one form of conclusion.

In this final chapter I do not intend to summarise what has already been said, rather I shall draw out some points about policy and what might be done. I shall not re-iterate the arguments for regulation and accountability as broadly presented in Chapter 4. To make their case they are best left to stand together as presented, perhaps to be added to or - in particular circumstances - be used selectively. But there are some obvious points about the limitations of what might be done that should be noted whilst some possibilities should be raised for inclusion on the policy agenda. Of course, limits and possibilities should also always inform each other and if on the one hand we should take seriously the 'limits of the possible' then on the other, in the case of this particular subject, we must also consider the desirability of the possible. With this in mind, my concluding comments must be cautionary, although, at the same time, they harbour some ambition to move beyond a concern with private security per se and towards considering how crime-prevention, insurance and victim-support services could be more universally provided to contribute to a greater ensuring of social 'security'.



From the late 1970s and through the 1980s there has been a growing acceptance by police and public of the respectable and visible operations of the private security sector. Police disapproval of the less reputable understandably persists and public opprobrium is occasionally aroused when media revelations point to particular abuses, shortcomings or practices that challenge the comfortable notion that 'things like that can't happen here'. Meanwhile the private security sector expands rapidly, benignly encouraged by the state and increasingly indispensable both to its more parochial and multi-national, public and private employers. The contribution of private security to crime prevention is welcomed as a public good and its role in systems of management, surveillance, protection and control is embraced as a contributor to private profit.

Safeguards to protect the individual against abuses, intrusion into their private lives and so on, do exist. For example, the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, legislation concerning data protection, credit references and the like, the new telephone tapping regulations, civil and criminal law regarding powers of 'stop and search', interrogation and detention and a variety of other provisions in law (and custom) should all counter the extension of private security activities beyond their supposedly right and proper limits.

In practice, such piecemeal safeguards are themselves the real subject of limitation. It is the necessity of establishing an effective system of accountability and regulation to safeguard civil liberties and curtail certain specialist (and not so specialist) activities that is my primary concern. But in a highly diverse area, with a bewildering array of positions, views and personalities, there are many other issues that deserve or seek attention. Some are of urgent importance, some chimerical, some deviously diversionary and some a foolish waste of time. Draper (1978) for example, cogently juxtaposes two of the 'important' issues thus:



"The biggest danger of the present situation is not, in my view, the possibility of persons with criminal records infiltrating the industry, although this is, not surprisingly, the aspect which receives the most publicity, and is indeed very worrying. No, the real threat lies in the incidence of poor-quality services and inadequate training and instruction in what now constitutes a second-string police force in this country."

(pp. 167-8)

It is clearly problematic to be in a situation where the choice is between uncontrolled inadequacy and controlled efficiency - especially if part of the 'problem' is the threat to civil liberties posed by very efficient private security services. However, Draper is talking here principally of the mass, non-specialised services which, as she points out, are playing (and will increasingly play) a significant role in the provision of services which affect the public as private citizens, employees, taxpayers, consumers and so on. They must therefore make the grade of acceptable public service standards - and, correspondingly, be made accessible to an effective mechanism of public scrutiny. At the same time, precisely because certain parts of the private security sector are already highly competent and efficient in the specialist services that they offer, but are not subject to public scrutiny, the case for regulation and accountability is strong here also.

Obviously, serious doubts can (and in a constructive frame of mind, should) be entertained about the role of private security as a 'public service' and about the adequacy of systems of public scrutiny, regulation and accountability. Such doubts hinge on realistic perceptions of the situation but can also embrace what, at present, seem rather optimistic prescriptions for really effective change. For example, Flavel (1973), in what is otherwise a most astute and realistic paper, can ultimately offer little that can be done now.



"If organised private security is seen as an exercise in selective policing, biased in favour of wealth and power, then for example developing a superficial system of public accountability, or improving police-security relations will make no difference. Radical change would seem to be necessary in the ownership and control of property, in the meanings attached to the term security, and in the aims and motivations of security organisations, before the systematic application of property security could be seen as a broadly based social service . . ."

(p. 15)

One can but agree, but such "radical change" is unlikely to happen next week and in the meantime the power and impact of private security as a "biased" and "selective" system of "policing" increases.

In similar vein, the important work of Shearing and Stenning ultimately eschews practical policy in favour of a somewhat utopian recommendation that the nature of changing forms of property be reconceived. As Weiss (1984) notes,

"in the face of the threat to individual liberties that private security poses, Shearing and Stenning suggest as a remedy not the attempt to regulate the private security industry, but to declare "mass private property" as "new property", hence subject to the "elaborate protections of publically-owned public space." Just how such a revolution is to be achieved is left to the reader's imagination, but even if such a transformation were to occur, it would be a dubious achievement."

(p. 18)

Even with a re-conceptualisation of property and legal and other forms of 'protection' surrounding it, such a proposal offers little in the way of tangible action for dealing with the private security sector and its growth, power and activities. Unless within this vision it has simply disappeared from society, which seems an unlikely consequence, such a proposal produces no effective system of accountability or guarantee of civil liberties. Changes in the nature of property form and distribution would undoubtedly have profound implications for private security - as for the entire social, economic and political structure of society. But in the absence of likelihood of such change we have to bear in mind the immediacy of influences that private security currently has on aspects of social inequality, policy matters and everyday visions of the way that society is ordered and policed. As Flavel puts it,



" . . . a secondary system of policing which provides unequal protection to different groups in society is in itself socially divisive but it also has a direct influence on the operational priorities of the public police and perhaps affects people's attitudes to policing in general."

(1972:15)

Realism and practicality dictate that while we might look to change in the future there are matters to recognise as priorities for more immediate intervention. The private security sector is not going to 'go away'. It is expanding rapidly and massively. As it does so it seeks to make itself and its services more indispensable, proselytising about its contribution to crime prevention, public safety and security in what it can point to as an ever-more dangerous and unstable world. As Table 6.1 illustrates, rising crime as a precipitant factor in the growth of pressure on a 'hard-pressed' police force and concomitant 'need' for private security, does indeed seem demonstrable.

Table 6.1: Crime Figures - England and Wales

Year	Violence Against the Person	Robbery	Burglary
1971	47,000	7,500	451,500
1972	52,400	8,900	438,700
1973	61,300	7,300	393,200
1974	63,800	8,700	483,800
1975	71,000	11,300	521,900
1976	77,700	11,600	515,500
1977	82,200	13,700	604,100
1978	87,100	13,100	656,700
1979	95,000	12,500	549,100
1980	97,200	15,000	622,600
1981	100,200	20,300	723,200

Source: Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1982  
(Table 4.1, p. 76)

This statistical context (whatever the problems with such data), has important implications for both public policing and private security.

In his Annual Report of H.M. Chief Inspector of Constabulary for 1977, Sir James Haughton, referred to the original crime-prevention objective of the Metropolitan force when first established and noted a re-awakening of interest in preventive aspects of policing among some



forces in England and Wales. Haughton's Report was confident that prevention would receive "increasing attention throughout the police service," yet in the same year Sir Robert Mark was drawing public attention to the difficulties that the police were facing in being able to provide anything more than 'fire brigade' policing. In an interview with the magazine Security Gazette in July, 1977 Sir Robert commented on the role to be played in crime prevention by private security and on the 'limited educative role of specialised crime prevention activities'. One implication of this piece-meal, half-hearted state of affairs, according to the Editorial in the same issue of Security Gazette was that,

"the results of applying preventive measures to particular types of risk is to divert crime to other targets and to encourage the development of new forms of criminal activity."

(Security Gazette, July, 1977, p. 215)

This is, of course, a widely held view and to tackle 'the problem' there have been various suggestions concerning wider cooperation and coordination between the police and other agencies operating with crime-prevention, or related functions. The recent inter-departmental document (Home Office (et al.) Circular 8/9/84; etc.), is only the latest in a stream of proposals from various sources urging the need for cooperation and coordination. In its 1977 Editorial, Security Gazette suggested that crime-prevention should become less a separate police departmental function and more one of the 'everyday duties of the police' in "active cooperation" with other contributing agencies which:

"would undoubtedly include a reliable, competent and fully accountable security industry, which through licensing or other means would be acceptable to the police as a partner."

(Security Gazette, *ibid.*)

Subsequently, James Anderton, Chief Constable of the Manchester force, suggested the establishment of a 'Central Crime Prevention Agency'. This would coordinate and disseminate information to the affiliated network of agencies. In Anderton's view there is no reason why the police service should not assist in this manner those security companies which wish to improve the range and standard of their services. If Sir Robert Mark's pessimistic portrayal of the ability



of the police service to stretch to protect property from burglary and similar crimes, has only half the validity that it seems to have had, then these proposals, from both sides of the policing fence - private and public - may well still be important pointers to real trends in the development of the private security sector. Indeed, the comments of Sir Kenneth Newman, the current Commissioner, quoted in Chapter 1 suggest that there is some growing momentum in this direction.

Besides the trends in 'inter-agency' proposals, other initiatives and possibilities are encouraged, sharing at least one principal consideration - that of reducing cost. The USA is often over-played as an indicator of 'the shape of things to come' in the UK, but in the current economic climate there is no shortage of reliable parallels, and approaches to dealing with crime problems may seek to emulate some US developments. In the most recent major USA study of private security (cf. Cunningham and Taylor, 1984), 384 law enforcement administrators were surveyed and "indicated a willingness to discuss (some) transfer of responsibilities to private security." (Ibid., p. 4)

"They cited a number of police tasks 'potentially more cost-effectively performed by private security' - among them public building security, parking enforcement and court security . . ."

The off-loading of crime-related prevention and detection services from the public to the service sector is limited and cautious even in the USA scenario - although privately run prisons are a new growth phenomenon, (Weiss, personal communications, 1984, 1985; New York Times, 25th February, 1985). However, even in the UK, the increased availability of private security services has commended itself strongly to advocates of the general privatisation of public services as a means to reduce direct taxation.

Whilst such advocates tend to be unclear about the extent of public expenditure cuts which are workable and about the remaining adequacy of public provision of services for the less well off, there is one element of the argument which should be highlighted here. Seldon (1977), for example, presents the argument that 'You pays your taxes, but you gets no choice' (p. 106). In relation to crime prevention services he argues, quite reasonably, that:



"generally police patrols seem in principle to be a typical public good from which all in the patrol area benefit, from which they cannot be excluded, and for which they cannot be charged. But patrols benefit homes or buildings not according to their size (roughly reflected in their rates) but according to the value of the property (and life) protected. These values are reflected more accurately by insurance cover."

(p. 108)

According to Seldon's proposition then, "police charges could therefore be made to reflect the varying value of patrol services to individuals or firms in the area according to the lives or property at risk." However, such proposals to privatise public services, especially in key areas of state responsibility such as health and criminal justice (cf. Adam Smith Institute, 1984) inevitably reproduce - and compound - existing and familiar inequalities and contradictions. But such proposals do not come only from 'neutral' economic commentators. Proposals similar to Seldon's - to charge for policing services, whether with public and private police in commercial competition or having integrated them - have also come from and been discussed by senior representatives of the police force.

Philip Knights, Chief Constable of the West Midlands force, for example, in a paper (1979) to a joint conference of the Association of Chiefs of Police, Association of Metropolitan Authorities and Association of County Councils, noted that,

"the police committee of the AMA in 1976, when considering the role and development of local authority police forces and private security felt that it would be desirable for all types of policing to come under one large umbrella, and interest was expressed in establishing a multi-tier police force comprising, for example, police officers as we generally understand the term, existing 'private' police forces, private security forces and traffic wardens, together with, perhaps, persons to patrol high-rise flats, covered shopping centres and the like. It was felt that the total cost of running the full, proposed organisation would be the same as now and charges could still be made to firms and individuals for the services of the 'security' section of the force."

(p. 7)

Knights suggests that:



"such a move would no doubt have its supporters, but it does of course raise the whole politically sensitive question of 'municipal trading' and whether it is right that in the matter of police protection the more affluent citizen should be able to purchase a better service from his local Police Authority than that which the authority might be able to make available to the less affluent."

(p. 7)

Here Knights echoes (knowingly or not) a comment made by the United Nations Committee on Crime Prevention and Control, quoted in a circular to the 5th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention (Stead, 1975:381). The Committee observed that:

"the development of private law enforcement very often introduced an inequality of protection, since the richer groups in the society could afford additional security services while the poorer sections were left to manage with whatever services the state could provide. In a modern, complicated society, private services might be required, but they should be carefully supervised by the official police and standards should be established by Governments for their recruitment and performance. Too much private security, favouring some groups against others, could foster insecurity on a large scale."

#### Possible Policy Considerations, the State, Private Security and Public Benefits

'Self-policing' and 'community protection' seem to be the sort of slogans emerging out of long-overdue debates about how to provide accountable systems of crime prevention for local communities, particularly the traditionally disadvantaged. The future development of these debates must be considered elsewhere, but they resonate with policy orientated observations which have been around slightly longer.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s a wave of research - most evidently in the USA - has been directed at the 'link between crime and the built environment' (cf. Murray et al., 1980). Such studies occasionally offered familiar conclusions ('not enough is yet known about this area . . . etc. '), but nonetheless suggested eminently reasonable and desirable minor policy goals, such as installation of better locks as cheap and cost-effective, and the reduction in the number of families per floor or per building. In the UK, the Department of the Environment saw the need for rehabilitation of housing estates, including resources for elementary security fixtures,



as embodied in its Priority Estates Programme. But as Kirsch (1983:2) points out,

"resident caretakers, adequate Direct Labour Organisations to cope with speedy repairs, and more council officers based directly on estates and in neighbourhoods are precisely those services which have been hit by the Tory government squeeze on rates and the rate support grant. As for safer designs of new estates, with public housebuilding ground to a halt by Tory policy there is a grim irony in this suggestion."

The point is not that I have 'the answer' but that community action and concern that has found a new voice cannot and should not get into the dangerous position of talking to itself. It must engage with local government and national levels of policy planning and implementation. Correspondingly, the state must - and we must work towards ensuring that it does - listen to the small voice from below. The issue of private security, and more broadly issues around crime prevention and privatisation of various public services, must be viewed, and hence promote realistic responses, within a social, economic and political context which contains powerful cross-currents. If on this basis the following suggestions seem ambitious it is only because there is nothing wrong in having grand goals as long as we have the sense to accommodate and work on small-scale incremental gains.

Just broadening the policy focus in one direction would suggest that perhaps the insurance industry can provide us with some idea for alternative systems of offering forms of financial and social security as well as security from crime. This is not to deny the need that communities may feel and genuinely experience for increased provision of physical security. However, in providing for the 'protection' of life, limb and property it is reasonably common and reasonably advisable not only to seek a good lock but also a reasonable insurance policy of some sort. Yet more desirable would be a universally accessible scheme which provided for both physical security and insurance.

According to Pease, (1979:32):

"the position of the insurance company is clearly critical (in the field of crime prevention), since it is the only agency in a position to offer the householder who wishes to



be insured, financial incentives for crime prevention measures, in the form of reduced premiums."

Pease goes on to project some imaginary - and imaginative - 'futures' for the contribution of insurance to crime prevention. I would like to briefly take up one of these futures - one in which the provision of a particular kind of insurance is a nationalised enterprise. As Pease outlines this particular model:

"in this future the insurance companies are nationalised. Many insurance surveyors join the police as specialised crime prevention officers and the crime prevention units take over the responsibility of surveying properties for theft insurance purposes. Theft insurance on properties becomes compulsory along the lines of third party motoring insurance and crime prevention officers have annual right of access to all properties for the purpose of survey. Actuarial rate of the calculation of premiums is available but social factors are incorporated into the calculation of premiums. In this way, insurance is no longer a fully commercial enterprise. For example, those living in inner cities are subject to high rates of crime but only low premiums are exacted, although premiums do vary with precautions taken by the individual property holder. Certain classes of citizen, for example, old age pensioners, are allowed free crime prevention devices to bring them to the lowest premium rates. Lack of competition between companies means that high-risk individuals cannot use their insurance brokers in such a way as to allow them to minimise the required levels of crime prevention measure."

In my conception of this 'future', the insurance industry is nationalised as a wholly or majority owned state-directed enterprise. I say 'directed' because for the purposes of any transition for such a complex system of financial institutions, from being a literally capital intensive and orientated body to a re-organisation as a system of 'social' security and insurance, then retention of some existing expertise and administrative processes would clearly be needed. A system, not unequatable to a fairer structuration of taxation could bring a categorised range of property forms under the provisions of legislation requiring subscription to a system of National Property Insurance, with subsidy or free subscription in cases of the unemployed, low-incomed, elderly and so on. A similar arrangement could provide for life and health insurance taking the kind of benefits expected from private schemes into the arena of provision given by state schemes. In what would presumably still be a mixed economy financing of the schemes could come not only from the state



sector but also from the kind of investment that private insurance engages in currently.

As a medium-term development this is not a far-fetched proposition. As Bottoms (1983) observes, schemes set up to provide criminal injuries compensation in various Western countries, have

"run into substantial criticism, especially on the ground that if the state is to make grants to the victims of misfortune, there is no reason to single out the crime victim; rather, it is argued, the movement should be (as in New Zealand it has been) towards a more general scheme of state insurance and compensation for personal injuries . . ."

(p. 171)

Such a shift could be profitably accommodated - in a socially profitable and useful way - within a system of Nationalised Insurance. Private security, private insurance plans and selective and discretionary criminal injuries compensation could provide the basis for a nationalised and universally applicable system of provision of their whole range of services.

The cautionary point here lies in the suggestion that Smart (1983:80) finds in Foucault's later work that society has seen,

"a relative decrease in the significance of techniques of discipline, and a concomitant increase in the importance of mechanisms of insurance and security; (this) represents the insertion of a "principle of cohesion" in the very fabric of society, the constitution of a particular kind of solidarity."

The argument for optimism lies in agreeing that social cohesion has its desirability - that what has to be changed and developed is the accountability of the institutions which 'shape' that cohesion. Another and different "kind of solidarity" can be worked towards, constructing and constructed by a different 'social fabric'. Significant, realistic and just social change can take place through some reorganisation of existing social and economic institutions.



## Conclusion: Beyond 1984 . . .

Apparently, George Orwell arrived at his choice of year for the depiction of the totally surveilled and security-conscious society by simply reversing the last two numerals of the year in which he was writing. Hence, the significance of 1984 as a motif for totalitarian society was less strict prophecy than simple ironic gesture in the hands of a prescient writer.

I make no claims to be a prescient writer, for here I have only reported what has already happened and what might be proposed by way of response. Indeed, although there has not been the space to present the relevant material, this thesis has been partly premised upon the idea that some significant sense of contemporary trends in social control can be made by looking back. Hence, writing in the wake of 1984 I look back and, as an 'ironic gesture' (which does not diminish the significance of what is said) note a quotation from Phillip Selznick writing in 1948,<sup>1</sup>:

"Do we need or want agencies of control so efficient . . . that every actual offence has an equal chance of being known and processed? . . . I am concerned that we do not respond too eagerly and too well to the apparent need for effective mechanisms of social control. In the administration of justice, if anywhere, we need to guard human values and forestall the creation of mindless machines for handling cases according to set routines. Here vigilance consists in careful study of actual operations so that we may know what will be lost or gained . . ."

(p. 84)

As I hope to have demonstrated, in the modern spectrum of 'formal/commercial/private/informal' dimensions of social control and justice, the actual operations of the private security sector have a significance demanding very serious vigilance.

A call for the accountability of such agencies is obviously a call for the establishment of machinery to administer such a procedure in a democratic fashion. A goal might be accountability guaranteed by public right of inspection, for example of training, information collection, operational activities and so on. It would however be to simply reproduce the '1984' nightmare to follow Bentham's solution to



the old question of 'who guards the guards' by pursuing the ideal of "omnipresent inspection, of everyone, by everyone." (Ignatieff, 1978:78)

Beyond 1984 it is precisely this 'future' that democratic accountability can and must guard against.



## Chapter 6 - Notes

- (1) This quotation is edited insofar as Selznick refers to "impartial" agencies of control - which, as I have tried to show, is precisely not the point of private security.



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