
It now appears, at least in Montreal, that if the police stay home, the people will riot.

An editorial writer for the Ottawa Citizen speculates that the "police... had no way of knowing what havoc their absence would create." Apparently the events in Montreal on October 7 were a surprise.

But that goes against all the facts.

All that Tuesday, on Montreal radio stations, there were constant urgings that citizens be cautious, that they stay in their homes, that elderly people living alone spend the night with neighbours.

In the Quebec legislature, opposition leader Jean Lesage was talking of the "threat of anarchy" posed by the striking police and firemen...

Laws were already on the books making it possible to force the police back to work, with heavy fines for officers, heavier fines and jail terms for union officials, and possible decertification of the unions if the police and firemen did not return to work on orders from the legislature.

The army was ready to move in.

The government and the media were more than cautious about the ramifications of a police strike. It would be foolish to assume the police were not aware of what they were doing.

The kind of violence that swept downtown Montreal is not new to major cities in North America these days. It was not even new to Montreal.

The events of St-Jean-Baptiste day during the federal election campaign, the massive student demonstrations with 5,000 to 10,000 people in the streets, the ongoing bombings in the city — all these indicated to the police a climate of dissent which they constantly had to face at constant personal risk.

Montreal has the most murders and bank robberies per capita of any city in the country. Gangland killings have been frequent front page news.

The Mathematics of Law and Order

$2 + 2 = 5$

(or when the police stay
home the people riot)

That is why the police struck — to make that point.

If the police are absent, they don't "create" the havoc, they merely stop keeping the lid on it.

The Montreal police have become very efficient at keeping that lid on. They demonstrated how efficient they were when they didn't show up for work Tuesday (October 7).

By the end of one day in the middle of the week, the newspapers were only reporting 'major' holdups and robberies — 23 of them.

Two persons had been shot to death, millions of dollars of property had been burned, smashed or stolen...

When the police came back at 1 a.m. the 'riot' ended. They arrested twice as many people in a couple of hours as the Quebec Provincial Police, on duty with reinforcements for the entire day, had made.

There is, it seems, a delicate relationship between mass violence and the number of cops that can be mustered to keep the lid on it.

Montreal was not devoid of police protection on October 7, the QPP were there and the army had been called in.

But the cops were too few and too ill-trained to keep the reaction in the streets from occurring.

What is unnerving in the wake of the events in Montreal is the analysis of what was wrong: somehow it is seen as the fault of the police for "not being there."

From one end of the telescope that kind of deduction could be made; the police were absent, violence occurred, therefore the violence was 'created' by the absence of the police.

So the way to make certain, 'that this never occurs again' from that point of view is to do what-ever is necessary to keep sufficient numbers of police on the streets.

That can be done through force, or through higher and higher salaries.

That solution begs very important questions, makes some very questionable assumptions.

First of all, it assumes that the violence is only related to the number of police.

Secondly, and related to that assumption, we are required to adopt a view of man who is only orderly in the presence of police.

Thirdly, it ignores other possible causes for violence. The police may act as a lid keeping the pot from boiling over, but perhaps the heat is coming from somewhere else.

Three years ago, when the Watts riots erupted, there was an investigation of the roots of the unrest in the community — it may have been superficial, but at least it was done.

Now, the causes in the community from which the dissent and the militancy erupt are no longer examined. They are merely assumed without being articulated, and ignored.

The response to violence now is that there are either not enough rules or not enough cops to enforce them.

At Sir George Williams University, the response to the destruction of the computer center was a new discipline code, repressive in the extreme, which in no way answered the discontent of the students who had occupied the building — it merely laid on more explicit and severe retribution for such actions.

In Montreal, the response was to get the police replaced immediately and forced back on duty as soon as possible.

In Ontario, the Committee of Presidents of Universities of Ontario issues a working paper entitled "Order on Campus".

If you weren't careful, you might think there was a plot.

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Canadian University Press