

STEPHEN SCHÄFER¹

THE WORLD WAR AND CHILD DELINQUENCY IN HUNGARY

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The second World War was not fought only by land, sea and air. There was also a theatre of war in men's souls. We take stock now of the losses incurred not only in the millions of dead, and the burnt-out ruins of houses, but also, and perhaps first of all, in our moral values. One of our chief moral assets lies in children untouched by criminality. At present we see ever more clearly that the influence of the war, and the events connected with it, have had grave consequences for these young people.

This was also our experience in the first World War. Thus twice as many juveniles appeared before the Juvenile Court at Budapest during the last year of the war as in the last peace-year, And the average of the five years following that war still showed an increase of 20 per cent. as compared to the last peace-year.

The second World War has had an even sharper effect on juvenile criminality. The juvenile crime-wave has become almost a world-wide phenomenon. Statistics show that juvenile criminality in Hungary increased as and in the same measure by which Hungary increased her war effort, and also as and in the same measure by which German propaganda increased within the country, inciting to outrage and atrocities. In 1940 the statistics show little change. From 1941 the records of the Juvenile Court at Budapest show an increase of 15 to 20 per cent. The greatest increase of juvenile criminality doubtless occurred during the last year of the war, but for this we have no reliable statistical evidence. At that period the courts functioned with growing irregularity, and finally they ceased to function at all. Apart from this, reliable statistics are unobtainable, because at that time, for about a year, the juveniles were not only authorised. but incited, to commit many grave and brutal crimes, These were legalised crimes held to deserve praise, not the sentence of a court. So they were not included in the statistics. It is merely as a suffering eyewitness that I can state that young people committed many more crimes in 1944-45 than during the full period of the war. And when military operations ended, some time elapsed before the public prosecution of crime could revert to normal. This again made official statistics incomplete.

¹ Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Budapest, President of the Supervisory Board on Juvenile Delinquency in the Hungarian Ministry of Justice. A lecture given before the Howard League in June, 1947. *Report not corrected by lecturer.*

Nevertheless police reports, the circumstances revealed by a few cases brought to the courts, environmental studies made by the Supervisory Board, press news and, last but not least, experiences of everyday life supplement the statistics.

It is reasonable to believe that the number of crimes indicated by the official data lags far behind the reality. True perspective of long range and mass observation are absent, but data, originating from the most different sources, throw a flare light upon the fact that, in Hungary as elsewhere, juvenile criminality increased and became more ruthless during the war, that it did not decrease even when military operations were over, and has reached in quantity as well as quality such a climax as has never been experienced, even after other wars.

The parallel increase of crime with the increase in military action may be explained by the fact that war, on the surface, is nothing else but murder, pillage, arson and destruction on a gigantic scale. All these are bound to affect the sensitive mind of the young. Thus juvenile love of adventure was stimulated by false war – romanticism and a disposition to violence formed. The savage scenes of the battlefield, hitherto known only by hearsay, but now personally experienced almost everywhere, undermined the nervous system of the young and all this weakened the forces which hold them back from committing outrages. Wartime ethics which proclaim that on occasion it is commendable and good to kill, have taken a firm and deep root in the receptive mind of young people, long outlasting the duration of the war. War has diminished, in their minds, the moral quality of penal sanctions. The militarist spirit realised to full extent in the Nazi countries, where even quite young children were taught to love war, has, in general, failed to teach idealistic and moral aims, and has encouraged juveniles in the materialist purposes of war, such as killing, assault and other atrocities. Love of war is not innate in human beings, they are educated to it.

Moreover, under the stress of rushing political events and of war, parents and teachers became more irritable, impatient and careless, so that children were brought up in an ineffective or evil way. They saw a power which was a greater master than their father or tutors, and they did not accept the socio-ethical standards of the adults. Often youths were compelled, owing to the father's absence as a soldier, to work for a living and even to support their family. Consequently they earned high wages at an early age. Unaccustomed to it, thrown into the whirl of the every-day struggle for life which requires a more mature mentality, they went astray.

From the point of view of criminality, the German occupation and Hungarian Arrow-cross régime, as well as the anti-democratic education preparing the ground for them, may be considered as the gravest consequence of the war. First they began to preach the apotheosis of brute force, hatred and outlawry instead of peace, humanity and justice. Thus they implanted the seed of easy opportunity so that during the last year of the war, the young people, instead of reaching for their school-books and tools, grabbed the machine-gun and hand-grenade. By their doctrines they trampled into mud the moral ideals of humanism. And the young, already tainted by those doctrines, watched the suffering, the humiliation and murder of their fellow human beings as a diverting sensation, and as an example to be followed. From being mere uncritical onlookers, the juveniles soon became emotional and active participants. Finally, for months on end, the streets were full of juveniles proudly pa-

rating the green shirt of Hungarian Nazis, brandishing the machine-gun, hand-grenade or whip. Those boys, aged between fifteen and eighteen, took part in large numbers in the carrying out of those horrible crimes you have heard so much of, but which you would hardly believe. But I, who was driven out of my flat by youths like this, while they tore up my scientific library, was not surprised when, after the destruction of the books, a little later, with the same ease of mind, they destroyed human beings also. Even up till now it was impossible to establish with exactitude how many hundred thousands of innocent people were first tortured, later murdered and then stripped by young gangsters like these.

After operations ceased, war consequences, lack of appropriate food and the economic crisis paved the road to perdition for children and juveniles. Simultaneously, with unspeakable misery, the possibilities of easy gain lured them to crime. The fact that the police force could be revived but slowly also encouraged juvenile crime. So did the break-up of family bonds. After the war the number of divorces increased. Parents were lost, exterminated by deportation or killed on the battlefield, and ten thousands of children and juveniles became destitute. These forlorn young people missed from the family home the warmth, support, education and discipline which all normally exercise a restrictive influence upon depravity and delinquency.

The grave situation cannot be cured easily. I think the choice of the right way to use the appropriate crimino-therapy depends on the extent to which juvenile crime has undergone changes caused by the war. In cases where juvenile criminality is only an episode engendered by the opportunity offered by war, or if it is but the coming to the surface of some older criminal inclination, or if there is not even a causal connection between juvenile criminality and the war, and the time connection is pure coincidence, the problem is, relatively, much simpler.

For it may be assumed that when certain factors causing an increase in juvenile delinquency are eliminated, this will have a good effect. If the juvenile is not cold, he, probably, will not steal fuel. If he is not hungry, he will not steal food. Further, it may be inferred that when the whole machinery for the prevention of juvenile delinquency again comes into operation it will exercise an effective influence, even on that mass-criminality produced by war.

To attain to this end there is hard work, even feverish activity, in Hungary to-day.

A new law, reorganising the Juvenile Court, is pending. Henceforth the court for juveniles will be an absolutely independent one. The Supervisory Board on Juvenile Delinquency in the Ministry of Justice is also under reorganisation. Since the end of the war, as the president of this authority, all my endeavours have been hindered by lack of adequate staff. I have good hopes, however, that during this summer my scheme for staff training can be realised. I hope soon to call into being the organisation of after-care, which has so far been badly neglected.

Occasionally we are able to improve the food and clothing situation of juveniles in prisons and in reformatories. The greatest of all our evils is the lack of reformatories. Before the war we had twelve reformatories in Hungary, with room for 2,500 in total. Today we have but four of them, with room for 350 in all. This is due to the fact that our reformatories either became useless by war damage, or the equipment was stolen by the Nazis. This means

that, while before the war we had far too few reformatories, we have, at present, only 14 per cent. of those we possessed in pre-war times. It is unnecessary to state in detail the grave situation arising out of the 1055 of 86 per cent. of our reformatories. This is the reason, why, above all, we make endeavours to establish such institutions. Here a difficulty arises, for if somehow or other we secure emergency buildings, that means bare walls only, empty of any equipment.

A little group which, upon my initiative, founded the Hungarian Howard League, has set a good example. Its president is Countess Catherine Károlyi, its chairman, Mr. Péter Németh, member of the Hungarian Supreme Court, while I am its deputy-chairman and legal adviser. One of our first functions was the establishing near Budapest of a new reformatory for boys.

This is, however, but a drop of water in the ocean. We need many and specialised reformatories. And if we have not an appropriate number of such institutions, all the rest of our work, is, so to speak, done in vain.

This concerns the so-called normal delinquents. Quite different is the case of those juveniles whose criminal activity had its roots in the soil of political propaganda. The lowering physical and moral effect exercised on the sensitive mind of the juvenile generation of the war years by the conspiracy directed against human dignity, fundamental human rights and human solidarity, will, presumably, pass neither easily, nor spontaneously, nor by the usual educational or penal methods. Of these juveniles only an occasional one is brought to court. The vast majority have disappeared in the great mass of the population. Countless youths are going to school or work-shops of whom we do not even guess that grave crimes burden their conscience. In those juveniles a criminal tendency has come into being and, as we do not know them and cannot know their minds, there is no reason to suppose that their criminal tendency has passed away.

We have to reckon, therefore, with the fact that numerous young people have a hidden life wherein unrevealed criminality lurks. This situation is extremely dangerous to society. For, when these young people (led astray, with allegiance sworn to the ideals opposed to human rights and character shaped by the denial of human solidarity) grow up, they may take part in moulding a society where disorder will prevail over the security of law, where young people cry more often than they laugh, and in which, seen from the eternal ethical basis of criminal law, there is a desperate prognosis of the criminal population of the future.

The social order might eventually be jeopardised by the threat which lurks in the wartime criminality of youth. This supposition is by no means purely theoretical, as, during the last two years, there have been brought to court such juveniles who, influenced by the old slogans, denied the idea of democracy and were yearning for the revival of the Nazi régime. They did not like the hard fact that to-day they can no longer kill and strip their fellowmen, but that they have to learn and work. Against such a danger the forces of criminopedagogy cannot be, in my opinion, sufficient by themselves. One of the principal causes of juvenile criminality of that kind is blind ignorance and stupid viciousness. The dispelling of those dark clouds obscuring human thinking cannot be brought about successfully by the usual crimino-therapy.

In order to prevent war-time criminality of this category of juveniles from becoming acute, or at least to reduce this threat to a minimum before it is even manifest, the social environment of adults must lend a helping hand. In all those countries where German influence prevailed, a general and democratic public education, including adult education is imperative. This kind of criminality of juveniles has been developed by public education. Let a new public education support criminal law in its struggle against juvenile delinquency, so as to reduce the number of the criminals of the future.

This public education is an important item in Hungary's reconstruction plan. Yet after all the things which have come to pass, its realisation cannot be easy and it cannot even be swift. For its realisation, however, a single country's isolated efforts are not sufficient. To assure the success of the public education of even a single country, a calm and lasting peace as well as the sincere collaboration of all the countries of the world is necessary. Hungary is a defeated country. You may have heard some evil about her in the past. Therefore, I would not be surprised if you told me now what the famous French criminologist, Lacassagne, said once: "Each society has the criminals it deserves". But we are now trying to accomplish all that is within our power. And for this reason I believe that the time is perhaps not so far away, when I, too, may quote and proudly quote Lacassagne's saying.