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Private Security: Implications for Social Control

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Abstract:

Private security has become a pervasive feature of modern North American policing, both because of its rapid growth since 1960 and because it has invaded the traditional domain of the public police. Because this development has been viewed as an addendum to the criminal justice system, its significance for social control has not been recognized. This paper traces the development of private security in Canada and the United States since 1960, examines the reasons for its present pervasiveness, and explores its essential features: it is non-specialized, victim-oriented, and relies on organizational resources as sanctions. We conclude that private security is having a major impact on the nature of social control.

* This is a revised version of a paper presented at the 33rd annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology in Washington, D.C., November, 1981. The authors thank John Gilmore and the anonymous Social Problems reviewers for their comments. Correspondence to: Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto, 8th Floor, John Robarts Library, 130 St. George Street, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A1, Canada.



One of the most striking features of social control in North America is the pervasive presence of private security, which embraces a wide variety of services from security guards to computer fraud investigators, from home burglar alarms to sophisticated industrial and commercial surveillance systems, from anti-bugging devices to anti-terrorist "executive protection" courses.

Private security offers protection for both persons and property which is often more comprehensive than that provided by public police forces. Internal security - so-called "in-house security" - has traditionally been provided by "corporate entities" (Coleman, 1974) such as profitmaking corporations, and public institutions such as schools. Since the early 1960s there has been an enormous growth in "contract security," which provides police services on a fee-for-service basis to anyone willing to pay.

Private security is not a new phenomenon. Self-help and the sale of protection as a commodity have a long history (Becker, 1974; Radzinowicz, 1956). Even after the state sought to monopolize public protection through the establishment of public police forces in the 19th century, private interests continued to provide additional protection for themselves through private security (Spitzer and Scull, 1977). What is new about modern private security is its pervasiveness and the extent to which its activities have expanded into public, rather than purely private, places. In urban environments at least, private security is now ubiquitous and is likely to be encountered by city dwellers at home (especially if they live in an apartment building or on a condominium estate), at work, when shopping or banking, when using public transit, or when going to a sports stadium, university, or hospital.

In this paper we consider the extent and nature of modern private security in Canada and the United States and its implications for social control. In doing so, we draw on the findings of research which we and our colleagues have undertaken since the early 1970s in Canada. This has included a series of studies of the legal context within which private security operates (Freedman and Stenning, 1977; Stenning, 1981; Stenning and Cornish, 1975; Stenning and Shearing, 1979); a major survey of the contract security industry-guard and investigative agencies-in the province of Ontario during 1976, which involved interviews with security agency executives and the administration of a questionnaire to their employees (Shearing et al., 1980); a similar, but less extensive, survey of "in-house" security organizations in Ontario in 1974 (Jeffries, 1977); an examination of the available national statistics on the size and growth of private security in Canada between 1961 and 1971 (Farnell and Shearing, 1977); and three related studies of police, client, and public perceptions of private security, focussing primarily on the province of Ontario, using both interviews and questionnaires during 1982. Most studies of formal social control within sociology have focused on systems of state control.

They view law, justice, and the maintenance of public order as having been virtual state monopolies since early in the 19th century. Even those studies focusing on private forms have



typically examined those instances in which state functions have been contracted out to private organizations (Scull, 1977), thus implicitly reinforcing the notion of a state monopoly over such functions (Cohen, 1979)¹.

The few sociologists who have studied the modern development of private security (Becker, 1974; Bunyan, 1977; Kakalik and Wildhorn, 1977) have, with few exceptions (Spitzer and Scull, 1977), broadly followed this tradition and have treated private security as little more than a private adjunct to the public criminal justice system. They assume that private security is essentially a private form of public policing, and that it can be understood in the same way as the public police.

We argue that this approach to understanding private security is inadequate because it fails to account for some of the most important differences between private security and public police and, more importantly, between the contexts within which each operates. The context in which private security functions is not public law and the criminal justice system, but what Henry (1978:123) has called "private justice." We follow the view of legal pluralists who maintain that "in any given society there will be as many legal systems as there are functioning social units" (Pospisil, 1967:24).

We begin by examining the size and growth of private security in Canada and the United States. Then we look at changes in the urban environment which have been associated with the involvement of private security in maintaining public order. Finally we consider various features of private security: who supports it, its authority, its organizational features, and its relationship to the public police.

SIZE AND GROWTH OF PRIVATE SECURITY²

While private security has probably existed in one form or another in North America since the continent was first settled by Europeans, little is known about its practice prior to the mid-19th century. Older accounts contain no reliable information about the size and growth of private security (Horan, 1967; Johnson, 1976; Lipson, 1975.) It was not until 1969 that the first major study of contract security was undertaken in the United States (Kakalik and Wildhorn, 1971), and not until these researchers revised their findings in 1977, in the light of 1970 census data, that a reasonably complete picture of size and growth trends became available. For Canada, the available statistical information is even less adequate.

¹ An exception to this is the research on dispute resolution, especially that done by anthropologist (Nader, 1980; Pospisil, 1978; Snyder, 1981).

² For a more detailed analysis of current statistics on the size and growth of private security see Shearing and Stenning (1981:198).

Table 1 provides a summary of the statistics available for the United States and Canada respectively. We emphasize, however, that because of definitional difficulties and unreliable record-keeping practices, these figures are at best approximate. Table 1 shows that in the United States in 1960, private security almost equalled the public police in number. By 1970, both sectors had experienced substantial growth, with public police outdistancing private security. The early 1970s show a significant slowdown in the growth of public police, but a continued escalation in the growth of private security, especially in the contract security sector; by 1975,

TABLE 1
Public Police and Private Security Personnel, in Thousands (Rounded)

	Police		Security				Ratio of Police to Security	Ratio of In-house to Contract	
	% Increase	In-house	% Increase	Contract	% Increase	Total			
UNITED STATES									
1960 ^a	258		192	30		222		1.2:1	6:1
		51			15		103		
1970 ^a	390		220	61		281		1.4:1	3.5:1
		5			18		187		
1975 ^b	411		260	175		435		0.9:1	1.5:1
CANADA									
1971 ^c	40		25	11.5		36.5		1.1:1	2.2:1
		30			14		65		
1975 ^d	51		29	19		48		1.1:1	1.5:1

Sources:

- a. Adapted from table 2.11 "Security Employment Trends by Type of Employer" (Kakalik and Wildhorn, 1977:43).
- b. Police strength figure derived from U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (1976:26). Private security figures, which are estimates only, adapted from Predicasts, Inc. (1974:26).
- c. Adapted from Farnell and Shearing (1977).
- d. Adapted from Friendly (1980).

private security outnumbered public police. Between 1960 and 1975 the ratio of in-house to contract security diminished from 6:1 to 1.5:1, indicating a major restructuring of the organization of private security.³

Directly comparable data on the growth of private security in Canada from 1960 to 1970 are not available.⁴ Census data suggest, however, that growth rates within the contract security sector may have been as high as 700 percent (Farnell and Shearing, 1977:113). By 1971, however, there were almost as many private security as public police in Canada, but in-house personnel still outnumbered contract security by more than 2 to 1. Within the next four years,

³ Reliable data for the United States since 1975 are not yet available.

⁴ Although 1961 and 1971 census data are available they cannot be compared to establish growth rates due to changes in category definitions (Farnell and Shearing, 1977:39).



both public police and private security personnel continued to increase, at approximately the same rate (30 percent). Within private security, however, contract security increased 65 percent, a rate almost five times that of the rate of growth of in-house security.

While reliable national statistics since 1975 are not available, statistics for the province of Ontario (which have in the past proved a good indicator of national trends) indicate a levelling off of contract security growth during the latter half of the 1970s. Overall, contract security in Ontario appears to have increased 90 percent from 1971 to 1980, while the growth rate of public police during the same period was 29 percent (Waldie et al., 1982:8). Assuming that there has been no absolute numerical decline in in-house security, this almost certainly means that in Ontario (and probably the rest of Canada) private security now outnumbers the public police. Furthermore, contract security alone now rivals the public police numerically. In Ontario, by 1980, there were three contract security personnel for every four public police officers - 15,000 contract security, and just under 20,000 public police officers (Waldie et al., 1982:9).

These findings indicate that in Canada and the United States the public police have for some time shared the task of policing with private organizations, and that private security probably now outnumber public police in both countries. The major change has been the rapid growth, since the early 1960s, of policing provided on a contract basis, for profit, by private enterprise (Spitzer and Scull, 1977). This has established private security as a readily available alternative to public police for those with the means to afford it, and has made private security a much more visible contributor to policing than it has been hitherto. The result has been an unobtrusive but significant restructuring of our institutions for the maintenance of order, and a substantial erosion by the private sector of the state's assumed monopoly over policing and, by implication, justice.

MASS PRIVATE PROPERTY

To understand the locus of private security it is necessary to examine the changes that have taken place, particularly since the early 1950s, in the organization of private property and public space. In North America many public activities now take place within huge, privately owned facilities, which we call "mass private property." Examples include shopping centers with hundreds of individual retail establishments, enormous residential estates with hundreds, if not thousands, of housing units, equally large office, recreational, industrial, and manufacturing complexes, and many university campuses. While evidence of these developments surrounds every city dweller, there is little data on how much public space in urban areas is under private control (Bourne and Harper, 1974:213, Lorimer, 1972:21). However, the available data does indicate an enormous increase in mass private property.



Spurr (1975:18) surveyed 60 major companies producing new urban residential accommodation in 24 Canadian metropolitan centers:

Forty-seven firms hold 119,192 acres (186 square miles) of land, including 34 firms which each own more than one square mile. . . . Forty-two firms hold 95,174 apartment units including 13 firms with 123 apartment buildings. Twenty-nine firms have 223 office and other commercial buildings, while 23 firms have nearly 26,000,000 square feet of commercial space. While these commercial and apartment figures may appear large, the survey is particularly incomplete in these areas. Finally, twenty-seven firms have 185 shopping centres and sixteen firms own 38 hotels.

Gertler and Crowley (1977:289) used data collected by Punter (1974) to study four townships within 40 miles of Toronto, from 1954 to 1971. They identified

. . . two striking changes in the ownership patterns. Absentee ownership by individuals increased from less than 5 per cent of total area to about 20 per cent; and corporate ownership of the land which was negligible in 1954 increased to more than 20 per cent in 1971, with increases occurring particularly in the investment-developer category.

Martin (1975:21), in a study of the north-east Toronto fringe, found that corporations represented 22 per cent of all buyers and 16 per cent of all sellers. He argued that these transactions represented "the nucleus of land dealer activities in the study area between 1968 and 1974" (1975:27). Gertler and Crowley (1977:290) comment on these findings:

Land development has changed from an activity carried out by a large number of small builder/developers in the 1950s to a process in the seventies which is increasingly shaped by large public companies. These firms are vertically integrated, that is, organized to handle the entire development package from land assembly to planning and design, construction, property management, and marketing.

The modern development of mass private property has meant that more and more public life now takes place on property which is privately owned. Yet the policing needs of such privately owned public places have not been met by the public police for two reasons. First, the routine "beat" of the public police has traditionally been confined to publicly owned property such as streets and parks (Stinchcombe, 1963). Therefore, even when they have had the resources to police privately owned public places - and typically they have not - they have been philosophically disinclined to do so. Second, those who own and control mass private property have commonly preferred to retain and exercise their traditional right to preserve order on their own property and to maintain control over the policing of it, rather than calling upon the public police to perform this function.



Because more and more public places are now located on private property, the protection of property - which lies at the heart of private security's function - has increasingly come to include the maintenance of public order, a matter which was, hitherto, regarded as the more or less exclusive prerogative of the public police. With the growth of mass private property, private security has been steadily encroaching upon the traditional beat of the public police. In so doing, it has brought areas of public life that were formerly under state control under the control of private corporations.

LEGITIMATION OF PRIVATE SECURITY AUTHORITY

The close association between private security and private property provides its most important source of social legitimation as an alternative to systems of public justice, and helps to explain why its development has proceeded with so little opposition. Because the development of modern institutions of public justice (during the early 19th century) necessarily involved the conferring of exceptional authority, such as police powers, on public officials, it has required legislative action and all the public debate which that engenders (Baldwin and Kinsey, 1980). By contrast, the development of private security has required virtually no legislation and has generated little public interest. This is because the authority of private security derives not so much from exceptional powers as from the ordinary powers and privileges of private property owners to control access to, use of, and conduct on, their property. While modern private security guards enjoy few or no exceptional law enforcement powers, their status as agents of property allows them to exercise a degree of legal authority which in practice far exceeds that of their counterparts in the public police. They may insist that persons submit to random searches of their property or persons as a condition of entry to, or exit from, the premises. They may even require clients to surrender their property while remaining on the premises, and during this time they may lawfully keep them under more or less constant visual or electronic surveillance. Before allowing clients to use the premises (or property such as a credit card) they may insist that clients provide detailed information about themselves, and authorize them to seek personal information from others with whom they have dealings. Private security may use such information for almost any purpose, and even pass it on, or sell it, to others.

In theory, the public can avoid the exercise of such private security authority by declining to use the facilities, as either customers or employees. In practice, however, realistic alternatives are often not available; for example, airport security applies to all airlines. This is a function of both the modern trend toward mass private property, and the fact that more and more public places are now situated on private property. Between them, these trends result in a situation in which the choices available to consumers are often severely limited. Employees and customers alike must submit to the authority of property owners and their agents as a condition of use. Thus, because private security is so pervasive, and because it is found in so many services and facilities essential to modern living (employment, credit, accommodation, education, health, transportation), it is practically impossible to avoid.



The fact that private security derives so much of its legitimacy from the institution of private property involves a profound historical irony. In the United States and Canada, state power has historically been perceived as posing the greatest threat to individual liberty. The legal institutions of private property and privacy arguably evolved as a means of guaranteeing individuals a measure of security against external intrusions, especially intrusions by the state (Reich, 1964; Stinchcombe, 1963). These institutions defined an area of privacy to which the state was denied access without consent, other than in exceptional circumstances. On private property, therefore, the authority of the property owner was recognized as being paramount—a philosophy most clearly reflected in the adage, "a man's home is his castle."

The validity of this notion, however, requires a reasonable congruence between private property and private places: a man's home was his castle, not because it was private property as such, but because it was a private place. However, as more and more private property has become, in effect, public, this congruence has been eroded. The emergence of mass private property, in fact, has given to private corporations a sphere of independence and authority which in practice has been far greater than that enjoyed by individual citizens and which has rivaled that of the state. The legal authority originally conceded to private property owners has increasingly become the authority for massive and continuous intrusions upon the privacy of citizens (as customers and employees) by those who own and control the mass private property on which so much public life takes place. Nevertheless, the traditional association between the institution of private property and the protection of liberty has historically been such a powerful source of legitimacy that, despite these important changes in the nature of private property, the exercise of private security authority is rarely questioned or challenged. What little resistance has occurred has been mainly in the workplace, and has taken one or both of two forms—one an "underground" movement, and the other a more open and organized phenomenon. The underground movement is apparent in a "hidden economy" (Henry, 1978) of systematic pilfering, unofficial "perks," "padding" of claims for sickness benefits and other forms of compensation, as means of circumventing the formal structures and procedures established to protect corporate assets and profits. While such resistance sometimes occurs on a grand scale, it is mostly informal and individualistic.

Labor unions have posed a more formal and openly organized challenge to the unrestricted exercise of private security authority. They have fought private security processes and procedures through industrial action, collective bargaining, and arbitration. For example, in our research we have encountered collective agreements containing clauses specifying in detail the occasions on which employees may be searched, the procedures to be used in such searches, and the processes to be followed in the event that employees come under suspicion (Stenning and Shearing, 1979:179). Indeed, the growing body of so-called "arbitral jurisprudence" suggests there may be a trend toward a greater degree of accountability within private justice in the industrial and commercial sectors, just as the growing body of



administrative law suggests a similar trend in the public domain (Arthurs, 1979).

To regard such developments simply as resistance to the growth of private security, however, is obviously overly simplistic, since in an important way they serve to institutionalize and legitimate it. When private security has been negotiated rather than imposed, its legitimacy is enhanced, co-opting the unions in the process. Furthermore, as private security procedures become more formalized and institutionalized they are often abandoned in favour of newer, less formal, and more flexible ones. An example of this is the replacement of formal arbitration by informal on-site mediation processes. Other researchers have noted similar reactions in the fields of administrative and labor law (Arthurs, 1980; Zack, 1978).

THE NATURE OF PRIVATE SECURITY

Three characteristics of private security reveal its essential nature: (1) its non-specialized character; (2) its client-defined mandate; and (3) the character of the sanctions it employs. We discuss each of these in turn.

Non-Specialized Character

The criminal justice system is divided into many specialized divisions and employs people in distinct roles, such as police, prosecutors, defence counsel, judiciary, and correctional officers. In contrast, we have found that private security is often integrated with other organizational functions, as the following example illustrates.

One of the companies which we studied operated a chain of retail outlets selling fashionable clothing for teenagers and young adults. Officials of the company emphasized that security was one of their principal concerns, because the company operated in a competitive market with slender profit margins. The company tried to improve its competitive position by reducing its losses, and boasted that it had one of the lowest loss-to-sales ratios in the industry. In accounting for this, officials pointed to the success of their security measures. Yet the company employed only one specialized security officer; security was not organizationally separated into discrete occupational roles. Rather, officials attributed responsibility for security to every employee.

Moreover, employees typically did not undertake security activities distinct from their other occupational activities. Security functions were regarded as most effective when they were embedded in other functions. For example, officials believed that good sales strategies made good security strategies: if sales persons were properly attentive to customers, they would not only advance sales but simultaneously limit opportunities for theft. The security function was thus seen as embedded in the sales function.

What, then, is the role of specialized persons such as security guards?

Our survey of contract security guards indicated that, while they frequently engaged in such specialized security functions as controlling access to commercial facilities (26 percent), they were employed mainly to supervise the performance of security functions by non-specialized personnel (Shearing et al., 1980). Thus 48 percent reported that the problem most frequently encountered was the carelessness of other employees. An important element of the security function, therefore, was to check on employees after hours, to see whether they had kept up with their security responsibilities by seeing whether doors had been left unlocked or valuable goods or confidential papers had been left in the open. When they discovered such failings, security guards would inform the employee's supervisor, using strategies such as the one described by Luzon (1978:41):

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.

This feature of private security is reminiscent of the pre-industrial, feudal policing system in Britain known as "frankpledge," in which policing was the responsibility of all community members, was integrated with their other functions, and was supervised by a small number of specialized security persons - sheriffs and constables - designated to ensure that community members were exercising their security responsibilities properly (Critchley, 1978). This nonspecialized character of private security, however, creates particular difficulties in numerically comparing private security with public police and in attempting to measure the extent of the shift in policing from public to private hands.

Client-Defined Mandate

The mandate and objectives of private security, we found, were typically defined in terms of the particular interests and objectives of those who employed them. Table 2 presents results from our study of contract security in Ontario, which show that the employers of private security are most commonly private industrial and commercial corporations.

TABLE 2
Classification of Five Largest Clients

Client	Type of Contract Security Agency					
	Guard (N = 19)		Investigator (N = 26)		G. & I. (N = 47)	
	% ^a	Rank	% ^a	Rank	% ^a	Rank
Industrial	42	1	31	5	70	1
Lawyers	5	c	92	1	28	c
Construction	32	2		b	55	2
Shopping Mall	21	5	35	4	36	4
Offices	32	2		b	45	3
Hospitals	10	c		b	30	5
Education	32	2		b	21	c
Insurance	b		69	2	17	c
Citizens	5	c	54	3	19	c
Government	21	5	15	c	28	c

Notes:

- a. As a result of multiple responses, percentages do not total 100.
- b. Client type not mentioned.
- c. Client type mentioned but not ranked within first five.

Source:

Adapted from Shearing *et al.*, (1980).

Furthermore, we found that contract security agencies, in their advertising, appeared to assume that their major audience was made up of executives of private corporations, and that they typically promoted their services on the basis that they would increase profits by reducing losses (Shearing, et al., 1980:163). While we do not have exactly comparable data revealing the distribution of in-house security, there is every reason to believe that here too private industrial and commercial corporations are the major users.

Private security is most typically a form of "policing for profit" (Spitzer and Scull, 1977:27)- that is, policing which is tailored to the profit-making objectives and its corporate clients. In those cases in which the principal objective of the clients is not the making of profit (e.g. where the client's principal objective is to provide health services, education, or entertainment) it will be that objective which will shape and determine the mandate and activities of private security.

This client orientation has important implications for the nature of policing undertaken by private security, and serves to distinguish it from public policing. In the criminal justice system, the state is nominally impartial and individuals are judged in terms of crimes against the public interest. By contrast, private security defines problems in purely instrumental terms; behavior is judged not according to whether it offends some externally defined moral standards, but whether it threatens the interests (whatever they may be) of the client. This establishes a definition of social order which is both more extensive and more limited than that defined by the state; more extensive because it is concerned with matters such as

absenteeism or breaches of confidentiality (Gorrill, 1974:98) which may threaten the interests of the client but are not violations of the law; more limited because it is not normally concerned with violations of the law – such as some victimless crimes- which are not perceived as threatening the interests of the client.

In this sense, policing by private security is essentially victim-controlled policing. Corporate victims can maintain order without having to rely exclusively, or even primarily, on the criminal justice system. By establishing their own private security organizations directed to maintaining their own definitions of social order, corporate landlords and entrepreneurs not only ensure that their interests as potential victims are given priority in policing, but also avoid "the difficulty of proving matters in a formal system of justice arising from the extension of individual rights (Reiss, forthcoming). With private security, conflict remains the property of victims (Christie, 1977). As one of the security managers we interviewed put it:

See those Criminal Codes? I got a whole set of them, updated every year. I've never used one. I could fire the whole set in the garbage, all of them. Security is prevention; you look at the entire operation and you see the natural choke points to apply the rules and regulation. The police, they don't understand the operation of a business. They don't come on the property unless we invite them.

Just as the social order enforced by private security is defined in terms of the interests of the client, so are the resources which are allocated for enforcement and the means which are employed. Thus, a retail organization which sells clothes will usually not install surveillance systems in changing rooms; this is not because such systems are ineffective in catching thieves, but because they might deter too many honest shoppers. The inevitable result of such instrumental policing is, of course, that a certain amount of known or suspected deviance will often be tolerated because the costs or the means of controlling it would threaten the interests of the client more than the deviance itself. There is little room for retribution within this instrumental approach. Social control exists solely to reduce threats to the interests of the client and the focus of attention shifts from discovering and blaming wrongdoers to eliminating sources of such threats in the future. This shifts the emphasis of social control from a judicial to a police function, and from detection to prevention. As one steel company security director expressed it:

... The name of the game is steel. We don't want to be robbed blind, but we aren't interested in hammering people. ... I'm not responsible for enforcing the Criminal Code; my basic responsibility is to reduce theft, minimize disruption to the orderly operation of the plant.

In our study of contract security we found that both security guards and private investigators focused attention primarily on identifying and rectifying security loopholes rather than on



apprehending or punishing individuals who actually stole goods (Shearing et al., 1980:178). This focus generates a new class of "offenders" - those who create opportunities for threats against the interests of the client. For example, a major Canadian bank launched an internal investigation into the loss of several thousands of dollars from one of its branches. The emphasis of the investigation was not on identifying the thief, but on discovering what breach of security had allowed the loss to occur and who was responsible for this breach, so that steps could be taken to reduce the risk of it recurring. The police were not involved in the investigation, despite the obvious suspicions of theft, and its results were the tightening up of security rules within the branch and the disciplining of the head teller who had breached them (Freeborn v. Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, 1981).

Even when a traditional offender is caught by private security, the client's best interest will often dictate a course of action other than invoking the criminal justice system. In 1982 in Calgary, Alberta, a bank succeeded in tracking down someone who had stolen over \$14,000 from its automatic tellers. Instead of calling the police, the bank tried to persuade the offender to sign for the amount as a loan. Only when he refused to agree to this resolution of the matter was the case turned over to the police (Globe and Mail, 1982).

The Character of Sanctions

The fact that private security emphasizes loss prevention rather than retribution does not mean that sanctions are never employed. When they are invoked, however, they usually draw on private and corporate power, rather than state power.

The sanctions available within the criminal justice system rest ultimately on the state's access to physical force, over which it has a legal monopoly (Bittner, 1970). Private security's use of force is legally limited to cases in which they act as agents of the state, using citizen powers of arrest, detention, and search (Stenning and Shearing, 1979). This does not mean that private security lacks powerful sanctions; on the contrary, as the agents of private authorities they have available a range of sanctions which are in many respects more potent than those of the criminal justice system, and which they perceive as being far more effective (Scott and McPherson, 1971: 272; Shearing et al., 1980:232). One of the corporate security executives whom we interviewed said:

[In a court] a different degree of proof is required; if the judge decides that there is insufficient evidence, you might be reinstated, because of some legal reason; in the disciplining process, I can get rid of you. If he's charged, we may have to continue him with benefits. To charge a person is a very serious thing, a very complicated process. We have to ask ourselves, do we just want to get rid of him, or do we want to throw the book at him? Maybe he's not a crook, he's just a dope.



As this example illustrates, foremost among the sanctions available to private security is the ability of corporations to restrict access to private property and to deny the resources which such access provides. Thus, private security can deny persons access to recreational and shopping facilities, housing, employment, and credit.

The essentially economic character of private security's sanctions does not mean that physical force has no bearing on what happens. When organizations want a legally imposed resolution to their problem, they can involve the police or initiate a civil suit. In drawing upon state power to support their legal rights to control access to property, organizations effectively expand the range of sanctions available to them.

PRIVATE SECURITY AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

While many writers have suggested that private security is a mere adjunct to the criminal justice system—the so-called "junior partner" theory (Kakalik and Wildhorn, 1977)—our research suggests that many of those who control private security view the relationship quite differently. They saw the criminal justice system as an adjunct to their own private systems, and reported invoking the former only when the latter were incapable of resolving problems in a way which suited their interests.

Nevertheless, private security executives as well as senior public police officers preferred in public statements to characterize private security as the "junior partner" of the criminal justice system. For private security, this characterization minimized public fears that private security was "taking over" and that "private armies" were being created. It also carried the welcome implication that private security shared in the legitimacy and accepted status of the public police. The "junior partner" theory was attractive to the public police because it downplayed suggestions that they were losing their dominant role, while allowing them to take advantage of the interdependence of the private and public security systems.

The "junior partner" theory significantly distorts the relationship between the public police and private security in at least three ways. First, the theory implies that private security is concerned only with minor cases, thereby freeing the public police to deal with more serious matters (Harrington, 1982). Yet this proved to be not true for property "crime"; in fact, the reverse was probably the case. Private security routinely dealt with almost all employee theft, even those cases involving hundreds of thousands of dollars. Security directors told us that they typically reported only relatively petty cases of theft to the public police and one Canadian automotive manufacturer reported that it was their policy never to refer employee theft to the public police. Even serious assaults, such as employee fights involving personal injury, were sometimes handled internally. Furthermore, while most serious personal injuries resulting from crimes were reported to the police, most so-called "industrial accidents" were dealt with internally (Carson, 1981).



A second, unfounded implication of the "junior partner" theory is that the public police direct the operations of private security. While the public police sometimes attempt such direction by establishing crime prevention squads and acting as consultants, private security personnel often mocked what they saw as presumptuous police officials who set themselves up as "crime prevention experts." Furthermore, because private security are usually the first to encounter a problem, they effectively direct the police by determining what will and what will not be brought to their attention (Black, 1980:52; Feuerverger and Shearing, 1982). On those occasions where the public police and private security work together- for example, police fraud squads with bank security personnel-it cannot be assumed that the public police play the leading role, either in terms of investigative expertise or in terms of direction of the investigation.

Third, private security is by no means a "junior partner" to the public police in the resources it draws upon, such as mechanical hardware or information systems. Private security not only frequently has access to sophisticated weapons and electronic surveillance systems, but is well equipped with standard security hardware including patrol cars and armored vehicles (Hougan, 1978; Scott and McPherson, 1971).

What, then, is the relationship between the public police and private security? Our research left little doubt that it was a co-operative one, based principally on the exchange of information and services. This was facilitated by the movement of personnel from public police to private security (Shearing et al., 1980:195). This movement was particularly prevalent at the management level. Thirty-eight percent of the contract security executives we interviewed (Shearing et al., 1980:118) and 32 percent of the in-house executives (Jeffries, 1977:38) were ex-police officers. Furthermore, many organizations reported relying on ex-police officers to gain access, through the "old boy network," to confidential police information. This was particularly common within private investigation agencies (Ontario Royal Commission, 1980:166). A private investigator summed up the exchange of information between private investigators and the public police this way:

There are approximately a hundred private investigators in Toronto who can literally get any information they want whether it is from the Police Department Workmen's Compensation records, O.H.I.P. [Ontario Health Insurance Plan], insurance records, or whatever. In the space of a ten-minute telephone conversation I can get what it would take me perhaps three weeks to discover. With experience and contacts, a well-established investigator can provide a better quality of information and can do so at a much lower cost to his client even though his hourly rates might be twice as much as a new investigator might charge.

The extent of this cooperation with the public police was summed up by the director of security we interviewed at a large commercial shopping mall in Toronto. After noting how



easy it was for him to obtain the support of the local public police, he described his relationship with them as "one big police force." Yet there was no doubt in his mind that it was he who effectively controlled this force, through his control over access to the private property under his jurisdiction.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Private organizations, and in particular large corporations, have since 1960, and probably earlier, exercised direct power over policing the public through systems of private security. The growth of mass private property has facilitated an ongoing privatization of social control characterized by non-specialized security. As a result, North America is experiencing a "new feudalism": huge tracts of property and associated public spaces are controlled - and policed by private corporations. To undertake this responsibility, these corporations have developed an extensive security apparatus, of which uniformed security personnel are only the supervisory tip of the iceberg.

The shift from public to private systems of policing has brought with it a shift in the character of social control. First, private security defines deviance in instrumental rather than moral terms: protecting corporate interests becomes more important than fighting crime, and sanctions are applied more often against those who create opportunities for loss rather than those who capitalize on the opportunity - the traditional offenders. Thus, the reach of social control has been extended. Second, in the private realm, policing has largely disappeared from view as it has become integrated with other organizational functions and goals, at both the conceptual and behavioral levels. With private security, control is not an external force acting on individuals; now it operates from within the fabric of social interaction, and members of the communities in which it operates are simultaneously watchers and the watched. They are the bearers of their own control. Third, this integration is expressed in the sanctioning system, in which private security draws upon organizational resources to enforce compliance. Together these three features of private security create a form of social control that Foucault (1977) has termed discipline: control is at once pervasive and minute; it takes the form of small, seemingly insignificant observations and remedies that take place everywhere (Melossi, 1979:91; Shearing and Stenning, 1982).

Is private security here to stay? We think this depends less on the fiscal resources of the state, as some writers have suggested (Kakalik and Wildhorn, 1977), and more on the future structure of property ownership and the law related to it. There is little reason to believe that mass private property will not continue to develop, thereby permitting corporations to secure control over "relationships that were once exclusively in the public realm" (Spitzer and Scull, 1977:25). Thus, we believe private security will continue to develop as an increasingly significant feature of North American social life.

To the extent that control over policing is an essential component of sovereignty (Gerth and



Mills, 1958:78), the development of modern private security raises the possibility of sovereignty shifting from the state directly to private corporations in both their national and, more significantly, their international guises. This in turn raises questions about the limitations of state control over private security and the validity of claims that the state is becoming more dominant in capitalistic societies (Boehringer, 1982; Cohen, 1979). Indeed, the evidence of direct control by capital over important aspects of policing points to the necessity of a thorough re-examination of conventional theoretical statements - be they instrumentalist or structural (Beirne, 1979)- about the relationship between the state and capital under modern capitalism.

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