

# IN THESE TIMES

Editorial

## Criminals move in all walks of life

In the 19th century, when people spoke of crime they usually referred to the Criminal Class, by which they meant some substrata of the working class. More recently, "criminal element" was in fashion among middle and upper class commentators. Now, since Watergate, various bribery scandals, and illegal corporate contributions and pay-offs, some people still think in the old ways. But it is increasingly clear that in the field of crime, unlike society at large, there are no classes in the United States.

In every category, and among all sectors of American society, crime has increased dramatically in recent years, as the first installment of Elliot Currie's four-part series on crime in this issue demonstrates. True, as we reported two weeks ago, the press plays up crimes of violence against middle and upper class whites and portrays blacks and hispanics as the most frequent criminals. But, in fact, those most likely to be murdered, raped, assaulted, or robbed are working class people themselves, and especially lower income blacks. Higher income people are less frequently victimized and, on the other hand, whether they be guilty of violent crimes, shoplifting, embezzlement, or some of the more esoteric crimes available only to people in positions of influence and power, are much less likely to be tried or imprisoned—and if they are imprisoned they are less likely to receive long sentences.

This has always been true and is only to be expected in a society where a person's power, status, and influence is measured primarily in monetary terms. But the rapid increase in the rate of crime across the board is something new. Some of it can be explained by particular circumstances, like the rising crime rate among youths, where almost 20 percent of the white youth and over 40 percent of black youth are unemployed. But rising crime cannot be explained in terms of increasing poverty alone, since there has been an overall relative decline in poverty in recent decades, and in any case criminals today are just as likely to be relatively well-off suburbanites as they are to be inner-city poor. Nor can rising crime be explained in terms of increasing inequality, either of income or power. The kind of inequality we have now is nothing new.

Inequality in itself is not a source of crime. In fact, in a society with vast inequalities where people have no reason to believe that things could be better and no personal expectations, discontent and crime will be relatively slight. But in a society like ours, where the capacity exists for everyone to live in comfort and security, and where people are constantly reminded that this is so and are constantly urged to consume an incredible array of goods and services, it should be no surprise that people act on these urgings, even if they don't have the money to buy things.

And in a society like ours where we are taught that there is no "natural" social order and where "money is the measure of the man," it should be no surprise that people in all walks of life will do whatever they can to get more—especially, as is the



case with wealthier thieves, when the expectation of serious punishment is low.

In the end, there are two ways substantially to reduce crime. The first is to lower expectations, to suppress needs, to destroy desires. This would require convincing people that there is a natural social order, that a few are born to live like kings while the rest remain peasants. The other is to fulfill the needs and desires created by corporate capitalism by establishing a society in which the technical skills and productive capacity of this country can be used to satisfy people's needs rather than being constrained by the need to make profits for private owners of capital.

Short of one or the other of these solutions and regardless of the activities and policies of criminologists and law enforcement agencies, crime will continue to plague us all.

## The minor party vote

In this issue we publish the complete official election returns for minor party candidates. From the point of view of the left parties the results, as could have been expected, are rather sad. The combined vote of the Socialist Workers party, the Communist party, the People's party, the Socialist Labor party and the Socialist party is some 215,000. This is less than President-elect Carter received in Rhode Island alone. It is less than half the 503,000 votes garnered by the three right wing parties. And it is less than a third of the 751,728 votes captured by Eugene McCarthy's independent candidacy.

Furthermore, the various left parties cannot even take comfort in believing that

no matter how miserable their showing it represents progress. Just the opposite. On a percentage basis, the Socialist party in 1912 received 20 times as many votes as the combined vote of the left parties in 1976. And the Socialist and Communist parties together in 1932 received 10 times as many votes as the combined left parties did last November.

From any point of view other than narrow doctrinal or organizational rivalry these left presidential campaigns are a painful waste of financial and human resources, a token ritual that proves nothing except the bankruptcy of the parties concerned.

## Blacks and women in Carter's cabinet

In an interview in *Playboy* last November, President-elect Carter's top staff man, Hamilton Jordan, was quoted as saying, "If after inauguration you find a Cy Vance as Secretary of State and a Zbigniew Brzezinski as head of national security, then I would say we failed."

So soon, oh Lord, so soon!

As for the cabinet as a whole, the "new faces" we were promised, particularly blacks and women: if we can believe what President-elect Carter has to say, many were culled, but few were chosen.

The treatment of blacks, whose votes carried the South and the nation for Carter has been particularly insulting, though not entirely unexpected. It is true that Carter interviewed and offered many

blacks a job in the Cabinet. The problem was that it was all the same job, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

Not surprisingly, several of those who were offered the job turned it down because, as one anonymous black politician told the *New York Times*, "It's a no-win situation for a black to become Secretary of H.U.D. or H.E.W. (Health, Education and Welfare)," because the problems in housing, health, education, and welfare are "probably insoluble as long as nothing is done about the economy."

Many blacks would have been glad to have accepted top economic or foreign policy jobs like Secretary of the Treasury, or Secretary of State, or even Attorney-General. But Carter seemed to be looking only for blacks already in highly vis-

ible positions, and then only to fill jobs that had little to do with basic policy making matters. The same, it should be noted, seems to be true of women.

In a sense, of course, this should not be seen as discrimination against blacks or women on Carter's part. The truth is that Carter would have chosen anyone for posts like head of the CIA, Secretary of the Treasury, Office of Management and Budget, national security advisor—so long as they were acceptable to the corporate community, so long, that is, as they were reliable members of the ruling class establishment. The problem is that such people tend not to be black or female.