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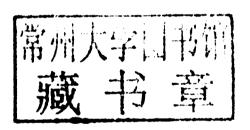
Towards a Social Democratic Criminology

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Policing, Popular Culture and Political Economy

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PIONEERS IN CONTEMPORARY CRIMINOLOGY SERIES

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POLICING, POPULAR CULTURE AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

PIONEERS IN CONTEMPORARY CRIMINOLOGY

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Introduction

Some 30 years ago I heard an inspiring paper by our series editor, David Nelken, at a conference on Critical Legal Studies. He remarked that all scholars sought to reach two goals: to be true *and* to be good. In the contemporary culture of post- or late (perhaps post-post or late-late?) modernity either aspiration sounds anachronistic if not sclerotic. And combining the two is, of course, a perennial problem of the philosophy of science.

I believe that Max Weber's tackling of these issues remains the most credible and stimulating – shot through, as it is, with unresolved, and probably unresolvable, tensions. Weber maintains that scientists, including social scientists, have a responsibility (itself, of course, a moral judgement) to seek objectivity and value-freedom in their research, although this is never fully attainable – the influence of values seeps through or bursts out inevitably, and objectivity is an ideal that can be approached asymptotically at best. More obviously, the choice about what to study is necessarily a value judgement about what is important and interesting. And at the other end of the spectrum, people of action, only concerned with the achievement of practical objectives, need information about the likely consequences of what they plan that is based on an impartial assessment and not one that is tailored to what they want to hear. If the Light Brigade is to charge into a valley, it is better for its commanders to be correctly informed that they will face cannons than to be comfortably told that the valley is clear. So both politics and science (including criminology) are vocations that must appease the tensely competing, voracious gods of passion *and* professionalism: 'ought' *and* 'is'.

The practical implication of this is that the researcher's values should be openly and clearly declared, so that their influence can be taken into account. But the perennial vice of social scientists is to hide behind a stance of sticking stubbornly to the facts. This is most obvious with the positivistic, largely quantitative, research that dominates criminology (at least numerically), especially in the USA, but it also characterizes what presents itself as the opposite pole – appreciative studies of deviance. Despite Becker's seminal call, more than 40 years ago, for sociologists of deviance to declare whose side they were on (Becker, 1967), much labelling theory (and its current rebirth as cultural criminology) purports to offer a tell-it-like-it-is interpretation of deviant life-worlds, coolly suspending any moral judgement.

I believe that a failure to come to terms with the moral issues that inevitably underpin its work is a major Achilles heel of criminology and indeed social science more broadly. It is also a serious lacuna for the political left, with which I (but not all and perhaps not even most criminologists) broadly identify. But, as Weber (and Freud) anticipated, the repressed returns inescapably, often in uncontrollably malignant ways. Values can only be tackled in the open.

This Introduction aims to lay out the development of my criminological career, and place in context the essays which this volume brings together. Following the injunctions above, I will begin with a brief statement of what I now see as the purposes and predicaments that have generated my work. The Owl of Minerva flies at dusk: I cannot claim that this

understanding was conscious in the past, or that my work followed a consistent line. Rather my reconstruction is heavily informed by where I am now. But I don't feel it is too much of a retrospective invention to claim that the writing presented in the volume is informed by two interdependent threads: a particular moral/political position that has remained fairly consistent and a biographical experience that is dialectically intertwined with it.

When I attempted a similar biographical account some 15 years ago (Reiner, 1998) my conclusion likened these guiding threads to 'Rosebud', the sledge which is revealed in the final frames of the classic film *Citizen Kane* as the condensed symbol of childhood events, animating the eponymous protagonist's life. I was referring then to the biographical antecedents of my academic work, and I will summarize that later. But I would now add what is implicit in the sub-title of this volume. One thread, derived from biographical experiences no doubt, is a commitment to social democratic values. These two elements, biography and ethical commitments, are the underlying themes of my intellectual career and the essays collected here. So I must begin with an explicit statement of the moral/political values that have inspired my work.

Social Democracy

In my essay 'Beyond Risk: A Lament for Social Democratic Criminology' (Chapter 14) I attempt a brief characterization of social democracy. As I noted, the label has been used by a wide variety of political movements and thinkers, from Marxists such as Trotsky to the explicitly non- or anti-socialist Social Democratic Party formed in 1981 in Britain as a breakaway from the Labour Party which it criticized as unacceptably militant. Since the First World War and the October 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the term 'social democracy' has generally been contrasted with communism. Social democracy signified at least an acceptance of democratic means to achieve socialism – a non-revolutionary, parliamentary road – and, for many, a change of ends, too: the reform of capitalism rather than its destruction.

The social democracy that I have been inspired by has its intellectual centre of gravity in the English tradition of ethical socialism (Dennis and Halsey, 1988), the quintessential exemplar of which was R.H. Tawney. This 'social democracy' was avowedly a species of socialism, although it can be said to offer a 'third way' between communism and liberalism.[1] I suggest that this social democracy was not just a middle-of-the-road compromise, 'a presentational splitting of the difference, but an anguished and internally contested terrain, an intellectual and moral Buridan's ass, torn between the powerful pulls of justice and liberty' (p. 302). In terms of a systematic attempt to ground this in philosophical first principles, the most fully developed example is John Rawls' magisterial *Theory of Justice* (1971). Rawls is normally labelled as a liberal theorist, but his powerful arguments for 'justice as fairness', based on principles that balance liberty and equality, offer the quintessential case for the values underpinning social democracy as I espouse it.

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1   This distinguishes it from the 1990s 'third way' of the two Tonys – Blair and Giddens – which was an attempt to triangulate 'social democracy' and neo-liberalism, repudiating any identification as socialist.

The essence of this moral/political position is encapsulated in Rawls' two rules of justice: everyone should enjoy the maximum possible liberty subject only to preserving the same for others; and material welfare should be distributed equally, with inequality justified only if it benefits the least well-off.[2] Rawls' book meticulously and rigorously derives these principles from a hypothetical 'original position' in which alternatives can be assessed 'fairly' – that is, without the biasing effects of vested interests. It is so striking because at first reading (or so it appeared to me in 1971) it seems to offer an Archimedean position providing an objective grounding of these values. This is not how Rawls regarded them, nor (on reflection) is it a defensible position. The notion of 'fairness' as the absence of vested interests has been criticized cogently and most prolifically, on methodological and substantive grounds, by neo-liberals and communitarians. The neo-liberal critique, keenly promoted by Nozick (1974), questions the justice of taking property away from people who have acquired it by legitimate methods, in order to attain an idealized pattern of justice based on an *a priori* thought-experiment. A variety of philosophers loosely (and contentiously) dubbed as 'communitarian'[3] point out that people cannot be conceived of as pure decision-making entities, the 'unencumbered selves' attributed to Rawls' original position. They are always born into, and formed by, existing cultures endowing them *ab initio* with distinctive perspectives, values and tastes. So Rawls does not provide indubitable proof of an egalitarian position on liberty and welfare, although his work is the most rigorous account of such a position.

My own view is that value commitments are ultimately existential choices that can be argued for more or less convincingly but not finally established in knock-down ways, capable of converting even all well-intentioned people. But the kind of fundamental egalitarianism encapsulated in Rawls' principles has deep and ancient roots and recurs in most influential conceptions of justice in moral philosophy and theology. It is the conception that I have dubbed 'reciprocal individualism' in my book on *Law and Order* (Reiner, 2007a, pp. 18–20). I contrasted this with the 'egoistic individualism' that was encapsulated in Margaret Thatcher's notorious assertion that '[T]here is no such thing as society … and people must look to themselves first. It's our duty to look after ourselves and then, also to look after our neighbour' (interview, *Woman's Own*, 31 October 1987).

Thatcher explicitly inverts the biblical Golden Rule, 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19: 18), which I take to be the moral foundation of social democracy and ethical socialism. In her version, neighbours have to wait in line while we look after ourselves first. But it should be stressed that the Golden Rule is *not* a collectivist ethos. Its bedrock value is the welfare of individuals, whose interests have to be balanced on the basis of fundamentally equal concern, including oneself ('as yourself'). Indeed, the Talmudic sage Ben Azzai specifically relates the Golden Rule in Leviticus to the earlier statement in Genesis I: 27, that all people were created in the image of God – that is, that individuals share in a common basis for equal concern and respect.[4] This derivation not only makes it clear that the Golden Rule is universal, applying to all people and not just literal 'neighbours', but also

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2   This is, of course, a highly condensed version. I have given my own take on the vast Rawls literature in my essay on 'Justice' (Reiner, 2002.

3   The leading examples are MacIntyre (1981), Sandel (1982) and Walzer (1983).

4   The best-known Israeli human rights group derives its name from the Hebrew for 'in the image', *B'tselem*.

introduces an element of objectivity into the concrete obligations of care that flow from the injunction to 'love'. They should be based on a notion of the common 'image' of humanity, not my subjective preferences. If I am a masochist, I don't fulfil the injunction by flogging my neighbour.

Pace Mrs Thatcher, there is no simple contrast between individualism and other ethics. There are important differences between distinct forms of individualism:

> Specifically, the *egoistic individualism* that she and other neoliberals champion must be contrasted with the *reciprocal individualism* that underpins social democracy. Egoistic individualism regards individuals as responsible primarily for themselves – neighbours hold back! Reciprocal individualism sees all individuals as mutually responsible: neighbours are to be treated *as* oneself, requiring equal concern and respect. These two versions of the ethics of individualism suggest radically different notions of social policy, crime, and criminal justice. (Reiner, 2007a, p. 18)

Reciprocal individualism is the ethical basis of most – arguably all – forms of social democracy and of Rawlsian liberalism. Collectivities such as the state, trade unions and social classes may be valued as instruments for achieving justice, but they are not venerated in themselves.

My Entry into Criminology

I stumbled into criminology through what I have described elsewhere as 'a mixture of cowardice, compulsion and convenience' (Reiner, 1998, p. 75). My first degree was in economics, which I graduated in at Cambridge in 1967. Economics then was very different from what it is now. Nowadays students take it up mainly in the hope that it will prove a fast track to a well-heeled future of megabucks in the City, whereas my more innocent generation hoped to heal society. I had originally studied economics at 'A' Level and found it fascinating as my first exposure to social science. As an adolescent who voraciously read Freud in a vain effort to analyse my own inner turmoil, the idea that you could actually study human behaviour (even in the relatively limited aspects in the economics syllabus) was a revelation.

I started in economics with a genuine passion to understand the sources of poverty and inequality, and set the world to rights. In this I was far from alone. At my entrance interview I was asked what I wanted to do with my economics degree, 'and don't say you want to run off to the United Nations to solve world poverty like all the others' – pre-empting precisely that answer and leaving me speechless. Originally, my hope was to be a mathematical economist, finding rational and neat solutions to the problems of the universe. My economics tutor in the second year was the distinguished mathematical economist Frank Hahn, a privilege arranged by his wife Dorothy who was director of studies in the subject at my college. He was inspiring but daunting, with an amazingly rapid mind; he was constantly scribbling equations on scraps of paper – solutions that he had just thought of to hitherto impenetrable problems. He was somewhat isolated as a neo-classical economist in Cambridge which was then dominated by Keynesians and Marxists (and remains so more than most other economics faculties).

My ambitions as a would-be mathematical economist were soon dashed. Although I had coped well enough with maths at school up to 'A' level, I was completely thrown by the maths course I followed in the second year at Cambridge. By the Easter vacation I realized

that I was completely out of my depth and heading for disaster at the end-of-year maths exam. Many of my friends were enthralled by the sociology course then taught primarily by David Lockwood and John Goldthorpe. So, as an insurance policy, I decided to enter for the sociology option as well. My college arranged a crash course of tutorials with Lee Davidoff, David Lockwood's wife. I remember doing my first essay on Merton's theory of anomie and being completely captivated by the study of deviance (a revelation given the repressive orthodoxy of my background). My conversion was confirmed by the exam results. After a year of maths I only managed to get a third, but my few weeks of enthusiastic reading of a handful of sociology texts netted me a 2.1.

During my third year I concentrated on sociology and politics options, one of which was taught by Ralph Miliband, on loan from the LSE, and father of the two front-runners in the race for the Labour Party leadership following the 2010 general election defeat. The third-year compulsory economics course, which was then called something like 'Economic and Social Relations', confirmed me in deep scepticism about what has become the mainstream in the subject. It was largely a rebuttal of the neo-classical model and, in particular, its Milton Friedmanite, Chicago School variant, which has, of course, swept the world in subsequent decades, at least until the 2007 credit crunch. The course's critique was largely directed at the neo-classical economists' 'physics envy', which drove them to increasingly elaborate mathematical model-building, based on highly simplistic and artificial assumptions about human motivation, cognition and social organization. Their perfunctorily acknowledged premises (perfect rationality, perfect competition, one-dimensional maximization of economic returns as the sole human goal and so on) blithely bracketed out any empirical research on these phenomena. The course argued for the integration of sociological research on these issues into the building of economic models, encouraging me further down the road I was already set on taking.

Following graduation, I went on to do an MSc in sociology at the LSE in 1968. By this time my central substantive interest in sociology (apart from theory, my and probably every student's first love) was criminology. This was heightened by the excellent option on deviance, inspiringly taught by Terence Morris. In 1969 I was offered a lectureship at the Sociology Department at Bristol which had recently been formed by Professor Michael Banton. It was understood that I would specialize in teaching deviance, and embark on a PhD on something in that broad area under Michael Banton's supervision. I had the summer vacation to find the precise topic.

Policing

PhD

Most of my research and publishing – at any rate until the last decade – has been on the police. They were the focus of my PhD on police unionism (Reiner, 1978/2010), my text on the politics of the police which is now in its fourth edition (Reiner, 1985, 2010), my joint research with Rod Morgan and Ian McKenzie on custody officers (McKenzie, Morgan and Reiner, 1990), my book on chief constables (Reiner, 1991), my inaugural lecture on policing a postmodern society (Chapter 5 in this volume), my joint volume with Sarah Spencer on

police accountability (Reiner and Spencer, 1993), two edited volumes in the Dartmouth International Library of Criminology, Criminal Justice and Penology, and dozens of journal and newspaper articles and book chapters on a variety of aspects of policing (seven of which appear in Part I of this book).

I am pleased when police officers I meet assume that my reason for specializing in the police is because I have some sort of personal or family connection with them, as this implies to me that my accounts of police work and culture have some sense of authenticity. The truth is, however, that I do not have even the most remote personal background or involvement in policing. As far as I can remember, the first time I met or spoke to a police officer was when I was interviewing one for my PhD. Before that I had never had the occasion even to ask a policeman the time!

It was a sign of both my profound ignorance of the police, and of the neglect of policing within criminology at that time, that I did not know that Michael Banton, my PhD supervisor, was the pioneer of research on the police in the UK and the US. He had published the first sociological study of policing, *The Policeman in the Community* (1964).

During the summer vacation in 1969 I agonized over a subject for my PhD. In truth, the problem was that, as a stereotypically repressed grammar schoolboy with an orthodox Jewish upbringing, I had been fascinated to read the appreciative, tell-it-like-it-is studies of 'nuts, sluts and perverts' within the then burgeoning labelling and naturalistic approaches to deviance. But voyeuristic thrills experienced in learning about other people's forays into bohemian underworlds while cocooned in the sheltered environs of the university library, were one thing; observational field research was quite another. I realized, with increasing trepidation, that immersing myself in the front-line reality of deviant subcultures could be a more fraught and hazardous enterprise than I had bargained for.

A chance encounter in the library with Jerome Skolnick's riveting and seminal study of policing in California *Justice Without Trial* (Skolnick, 1966) seemed to offer an inspired way out. Why not study what I still, perhaps naively, thought of as the right side of the law? So when I met Michael Banton for my first supervision in the autumn of 1969 I tentatively suggested to him that I would like to do research on the police. His eyes lit up, as he pulled from his drawer a long list of possible PhD projects which he had put aside for just such an occasion. 'How about doing a study of the Police Federation?' he suggested. I did not dare confess that I had never heard of the Police Federation, which had not yet become the high-profile pressure group it now is. 'Sounds interesting,' I mumbled. 'I'll think about it.'

A couple of days later, some assiduous research had resulted in my discovery that the Police Federation was what some of its own members described as a copper's trade union with a vasectomy: it had all the equipment apart from the power to strike. I was far from certain that I wanted to spend three or more years studying it. However, the die had been cast. The next time I saw Professor Banton he asked, 'How's your thesis on the Police Federation coming along?' So there it was.

But what angle was I to take on the Police Federation? I quickly concluded that the straightforward approach, a historical account of its structure and functioning, had already been accomplished more or less definitively by Tony Judge, the editor of *Police* (the Federation's monthly magazine), in a couple of his books (Reynolds and Judge, 1968; Judge, 1968). So like many PhD students, I fell back on the safety of the intellectual pastiche of established

models. As I mentioned earlier, my first sociology lecturers had been David Lockwood and John Goldthorpe, and the latter had been my supervisor during my final undergraduate year. I was steeped in their classic studies of trade union and class-consciousness, Lockwood's *The Black-Coated Worker* (1958) and *The Affluent Worker* trilogy (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968a, 1968b, 1969). Why not try to adopt a similar approach to the career, work situation and socio-political perspective of police officers, who were workers after all, albeit of a highly distinctive kind? To my mind, the idea had several appealing aspects. I could follow the methodological models of some of the most influential empirical studies in British sociology at that time. I could also combine the two main ingredients of my formal academic education: economic sociology and the sociology of deviance. Not least, I liked the mild *chutzpah* of calling the project *The Blue-Coated Worker* in honour of these roots. And I was delighted when, many years later, the book of the thesis appeared under that title in the same series as *The Affluent Worker* studies (Reiner, 1978a, 2010).

Post-doctoral Research

My continuation in police research after completing and publishing my thesis was once again the product of outside pressures and serendipitous opportunities. By coincidence, I finished my PhD, and began publishing papers and a book based on it, just as the Police Federation stopped being as obscure a topic as one could envisage and became front-page news, partly because it was engaged in a bitter and protracted pay dispute, including threats of police industrial action for the first time in 50 years, which culminated in the Edmund Davies pay review in 1978. Even more significantly, these were the years in which the Police Federation began a high-profile and controversial 'law and order' campaign, which became a coded 'vote for Margaret Thatcher' message in the run-up to the 1979 general election. The Police Federation, usually labelled the 'toothless tiger' by my PhD sample of officers, suddenly bit the Labour government where it hurt.

So I was in 'the right place at the right time' (the favourite explanation of career success in the police offered by my interviewees). The advantage of doing a PhD on an obscure topic is that if it ceases to be obscure, you have a monopoly of expertise on it. On the basis of my research I was well placed to comment and publish on the newly prominent pressure group that the Police Federation had become.

During the early 1970s police research had been a small cosy club with a handful of members. Apart from work by Banton himself there was the PhD and later book by Maureen Cain (Cain, 1973), John Lambert's (1970) work on police and race relations, John Martin's and Gail Wilson's (1969) study of police manpower, and Maurice Punch's study of public demand for policing (Punch and Naylor, 1973). There was also a rapidly growing body of excellent American research, the relevance of which to Britain was much debated (the American giants of police research were producing some of their major works at this time – for example, Skolnick, 1966; Wilson, 1968; Bayley and Mendelsohn, 1968; Reiss, 1971; and Manning, 1977).

The second half of the 1970s saw policing, and law and order in general, become increasingly central to political conflict (Downes and Morgan, 2007; Reiner, 2007a). Reflecting this, the police began to be studied on a significant scale in British criminology.

Following in the wake of the early research was a growing band of PhD researchers like myself, notably Mike Chatterton and Simon Holdaway. Nonetheless, as late as 1979, the extent of police research in this country was still small enough for Simon Holdaway to edit a volume that offered a definitive sampling of the state of the field at that time but was less than 200 pages long (Holdaway, 1979). The explosion of British police research only began in the early 1980s, in the wake of the Thatcherite politicization of law and order (examined in detail in Reiner, 1989b, 1992, Reiner and Newburn, 2007a, 2007b).

My first publication after my PhD was an article summarizing it, 'Reds in Blue?' (1976), which I sent to *New Society*. This proved to be fruitful in many more ways than merely being the first notch in my curriculum vitae (apart from a paper on the sociology of country music which *The New Edinburgh Review* had published in 1973). Paul Barker, the editor of *New Society*, had a remarkable eye for spotting trends before they emerged. Once I had become known to him, he kept commissioning me to write articles on aspects of policing which were about to hit the headlines. This led me to write a series of articles on different aspects of policing just as they became controversial, and eventually meant that I had covered the whole field in embryo. These articles, in effect, became the basis for the general book on policing which I wrote in the appropriate Orwellian year, 1984, *The Politics of the Police* (1985, 2010).

Critical Criminology and Policing

The period in the late 1970s, during which I was producing these papers on different aspects of the growing political debate on policing, was one in which the intellectual centre of gravity in British sociology was Marxist. The dragon of left-wing idealism had not yet even been named, let alone slain, by Saints John and Jock and the other new left realists (Lea and Young, 1984). It permeated much of deviance theory as a taken-for-granted, scarcely articulated set of attitudes, much as its counterparts did in other areas of sociology. Just as the prospect of change in a socialist direction departed from the tent of political reality into an Arctic darkness, to be gone for a very long time, academic sociology and criminology were churning out papers and debates implying that the Marxist millennium was around the corner.

This climate was reflected in my main publications in the late 1970s (especially the 1978 essays reproduced as Chapters 1 and 2 in this volume) which were heavily influenced by Marxist perspectives. These were uncharacteristic for me, in terms of my overall life and experience. Although (because?) I came from a largely conservative family background in terms of both attitude and politics, I cannot ever remember not being somehow radical in my political beliefs and commitments. I had no enemies from the Left, and an implacable moral and intellectual hostility to the Right. But perhaps an even more firmly rooted aspect of my outlook and personality has been a deep pessimism about the prospects of anything other than piecemeal progress, and scepticism about utopian enthusiasms. For reasons of personal biography which I will sketch later, I am a dyed-in-the-wool emotional Menshevik, with a perennial soft spot for heroes destined for the dustbin of history. So I was heavily suspicious of revolutionary tactics or slogans, believing that methods for achieving socialism had to abide by ethical constraints, a 'just revolution' version of the 'just war' theory (Walzer, 1977). I agreed with Steven Lukes that the ideals to which Marxists and socialists aspire are

'unapproachable through the violation in the present and in the future of the limits that basic or human rights impose' (Lukes, 1985, p. 70). The downside is, as he gloomily added, that they 'might also be unapproachable through respecting them'.

Nonetheless, when a former University of Bristol colleague Martin Jacques, who had become editor of *Marxism Today*, commissioned me in 1977 to write an analysis of recent developments in policing for his journal, I leapt at the chance. I must confess to a frisson of childish glee at the opportunity *épater mes bourgeois parents*. More seriously, I was already somewhat vexed about the root-and-branch hostility towards the police then dominant on the Left. It gave me a chance to develop my own more ambivalent, albeit still critical, analysis of the police.

My feelings on reviewing my *Marxism Today* essay (Chapter 1) are as ambivalent and contradictory as the class location I attributed to the police. On the one hand, I remain pleased with my critique of the then dominant critical criminology cliché that crime was a phenomenon of tabloid headlines rather than of the streets, with the function of ideologically legitimating more repressive social control through the generation of moral panics. I argued instead that crime was a genuine problem, albeit one that could be the basis of disproportionate fears exploited by the Right. As volume crime blighted the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society in particular, it ought to be taken more seriously by the Left. I can still reread this anticipation of 1980s left-wing realism with some satisfaction. I also remain happy with the basically structuralist diagnosis and policy recommendations about crime which I offered: that the sources of crime are rooted in wider social arrangements – above all, in the political economy and culture – so that criminal justice, however efficiently and effectively conducted, is at most marginally important in controlling crime. This perspective remains at the heart of my analysis of policing and criminal justice (as Chapters 7, 8, and 12–18 show).

What now makes me squirm with embarrassment is the section of my *Marxism Today* essay that attracted the most favourable responses at the time. These are the pages in which I attempted to sketch out the way in which the contradictory class location of the police as simultaneously workers and state agents could be politically exploited to prise them away from Conservatism to support for revolution. And to my chagrin I pursued the ultra-utopian hare of speculating on what shape the police would take in a socialist society, no doubt before they withered away altogether. Like the last few pages of Taylor's, Walton's and Young's 1973 classic text *The New Criminology* (then a bible to me as to so many criminologists of my generation – cf. Rock, 1994), these passages now seem to me almost a caricature of what Young later labelled 'left idealism' (Lea and Young, 1984).

Sociology to Law

I felt uncomfortable with the rather vulgar Marxist straitjacket that constrained the papers I wrote in the late 1970s, even at the time. But I was emotionally carried along by the wishful thinking which then dominated so much British sociology and the Left generally.

What broke this intellectual log-jam for me was an experience which I initially found traumatic and vainly resisted. As a consequence of the 1981 cuts in university finance, the University of Bristol developed a plan which included shrinking the Sociology Department, by redeployment rather than redundancy. The little local difficulty for me in their grand

design was the Godfather-style 'offer' made to me that I might 'like' to be redeployed to the Law Department.

My perception of law at that time was that it was a matter only of learning rules, black-letter in the extreme. I thought of it as vocational rather than intellectual, and a bastion of authoritarianism. Nonetheless, after some futile struggle, I bowed to the pressures of the university plan and transferred to the citadel of rational legal authority in the mock-Gothic spire of the Wills Memorial Building.

I have now worked in three Law Departments as a criminologist (Brunel and the LSE after Bristol) and found the intellectual and political climate of all of them at least as liberal and theoretical as academic sociology. There is a very clear sociological basis for this. Nearly all academic lawyers have far more lucrative career opportunities open to them in legal practice than in the groves of academe. Those who choose the academic route are therefore a self-selected group of people who have made a deliberate choice to forego instrumental rewards for intellectual and political values.

I personally found the transfer intellectually liberating. I was left to my own devices academically so long as I fulfilled the basic remit of continuing to publish. My presence as a token sociologist demonstrated the department's concern to move away from its traditional black-letter approach towards a more socio-legal, contextual one. This was made clear to me at the farewell party held when I was leaving for Brunel. David Feldman (now Professor of English Law at Cambridge) gave a valedictory speech. They had wanted me, he said, to import a touch of the modern social world into the fusty corridors dominated by the Law Reports, and I had succeeded amply, bringing them slap-bang up-to-date with the culture of the 1950s (still my favourite period of pop music).

The Politics of the Police

From the late 1970s onwards, while still in the Sociology Department at Bristol, I had been planning to write a general book on the politics of the police. The title was inspired by John Griffith's *The Politics of the Judiciary* (1977), which I greatly admired. At the back of my mind was the dream of achieving a similar exposé of another arm of the state's repressive apparatus.

By the mid-1980s there was a burgeoning scholarly library on the police, but it comprised either empirical monographs or interventions on specific policy issues. The debates on policing were highly polarized, both politically and analytically. The police were either paragons or pigs – defenders of civilization as we know and love it, or the jack-booted repressive arm of the state.

For theoretical and moral/political reasons (growing out of my personal background as I will show later) I was drawn to try to bridge this increasingly gaping chasm. In general political terms I was firmly on the Left, and concurred with the criticisms of many police activities. But I felt that these were partly vitiated by an implied utopian standpoint about what was possible.

To me, the police were fated to be 'dirty workers' – to use Everett Hughes' (1962) phrase – doing the tragically inescapable job of managing, often coercively, the symptoms of deeper social conflicts and malaise. They were a necessary evil in any complex society, even if this