

A LETTER FROM NORWAY: CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN NORWEGIAN POLICING

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Abstract

This article describes the Norwegian police and recent shifts that have led to policing becoming multilateralized. This includes private sector developments, the growth of the Night Ravens as a citizen volunteer group, and the expansion of the police reserve and groups with "restricted police authority".

Keywords

Norway; plural police; policing; multilateralized; private security

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Policing in many Western societies is increasingly becoming “multilateralized” (Bayley and Shearing, 2001), with police tasks being taken over by private sector agencies, NGOs, local communities, and other public sector institutions (Crawford, 2003; Crawford *et al.*, 2005). However, while this trend appears to have accelerated in North America, the extent to which it is as evident in Europe has been questioned (Jones and Newburn, 2002). In response, this article assesses moves towards plural or multilateralized policing in Norway.

The historical development of policing in Norway is strikingly similar to the historical developments of policing found elsewhere in the Western democratic world. While policing in medieval and early modern Norway to a large degree was a private matter, it became increasingly monopolized by the state as the central government expanded its power throughout the country (Naeshagen 1999, 2000). The first “modern” police force – largely inspired by the Metropolitan Police in



London – was established in the capital Christiania (Oslo) in 1859. From then on and until the late 20th century, policing was almost exclusively provided by the public police force.

This has changed radically over the last 15–20 years. During this time, we have witnessed a restructuring of policing in Norway whereupon new private actors – both commercial and idealistic – have broken the *de facto* state monopoly in the security sector. According to numbers provided by the Security Association (Sector Alarm, 2005), the commercial security industry in Norway has been growing by an impressive 10–20% annually since the late 1980s. There are almost 300 firms, both small and big, operating in this market, employing around 8,000 people. There are in comparison around 11,000 people employed in the public police force (about 8,000 of these are police officers)(National Police Directorate, 2004). The money spent on the private security sector or the economic turnout is between six and seven billion NOK. The annual budget for the public police is in comparison just above eight billion NOK for 2005.

The growth in private policing has been impressive, especially considering that the public police have had a significant growth both in terms of money and manpower during the same period. Today private actors provide security for both the private and public sectors. In the private or semiprivate sector, they provide security (personnel, alarms, detectors, surveillance, etc.) for office buildings, airports, shopping malls, value transports, banks, residential areas, and so on. In the public sector, they provide security for government buildings (including Police headquarters), hospitals, railway and subway stations, and even prisoner transportation (except when there are high-risk prisoners). There are also examples of private actors commissioning security from the public police, for example, during large sports events such as football matches.

NGOs providing policing or volunteers managed by the police are not very common in Norway, at least not compared to Britain or the US. The only NGO that provide some sort of policing are *Natteravnene* (The Night Ravens), an idealistic organization that operates both in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark in close collaboration with the police. Their main activity is to prevent crime, violence, and alcohol/substance abuse among children and teenagers through the presence of sober adults in the streets during night-time in the weekends. The Night Ravens are volunteers, and so far around 300,000 people have walked the streets during night as a Night Raven. There are 450 chapters of the organization spread around the country (Natteravnene, 2005).

There are very few known examples of vigilantism in Norway. There are of course isolated incidents of citizen “taking the law into their own hands”. However, vigilantism in terms of organized groups sustained over time is not known.

Civilians in the police have become more common in the last few years, numbering about 3,000 out of 11,000 employees. Administrative personnel constitute the largest part, but arrest wardens with restricted police authority are a

growing group. The police are now increasingly employing civilian specialists with backgrounds from social sciences, economics, accounting, computer science, and technical disciplines for analytical and investigative tasks. This is likely to continue in the years to come with the implementation of problem-oriented policing and the demand for specialist knowledge in many areas of crime investigation.

Since the mid-1990s, all police officers have received a 3-year college education, including 1 year (the second) of practical training in a police district. Police lawyers, who have studied law rather than police college, also get police authority in the capacity of their position. Traditionally, the top-level chiefs of police have their professional background and training as (police) lawyers rather than as police officers. Only one out of 27 police districts is headed by a police chief who is not a jurist but a police officer by training.

In principle, there are no less “professional” or less trained police officers employed by the state. However, the Police Reserve (*Politireserven*) consists of personnel who have completed their military service (which, at least in principle, is mandatory for all male Norwegian citizens). Instead of being part of the military reserve forces, they are transferred to the police reserve, which will reinforce the police in emergency situations and for particular major events. Thus, several hundred reserve police officers served during the 1994 Winter Olympics in Norway. They may be used for patrol duty, handling traffic and the public, securing objects, border control, and general guard duty. The police reserve is equipped as ordinary police officers, and may under special circumstances also be equipped with weapons (the Norwegian police do normally not carry guns). At present, there are close to 1,000 police reserve officers, but there are plans to increase the police reserve force to 2,000 officers and improve their training (Ministry of Justice and Police, 2005, pp 72, 87).

In addition, there are a number of professional groups in Norway with a “restricted police authority”, which means that they are give authority to control or use force in certain situations. Arrest wardens are employed by the police but are not police officers. Passport controllers and the Costumes Service have such functions. The Coast Guard, which is a part of the Navy, has a restricted police authority, authorized to control ships and fishing vessels and use force under certain circumstances. The Rangers (*Fjelloppsynet*) also have a restricted police authority to check hunting and fishing permits, and control the use of national parks. The local police chiefs are also authorized to give particular persons restricted police authority for particular tasks.

There is thus considerable evidence of a move towards plural policing in Norway. However, the path this has taken is in many respects distinctive from that in Britain and North America, building on the policing traditions of Norway and its Scandinavian neighbours.

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