

## **"The Recent History of the American Society of Criminology"**

(*The Criminologist*, November 1985, pp. 1-3, 9)

by Frank Scarpitti

(Frank Scarpitti serves as a Professor in the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice at the University of Delaware. Professor Scarpitti served as the President of the American Society of Criminology from 1980 -1981. This article was drawn from remarks he delivered at the 1984 ASC Annual Meetings)

We have come a long way. Today close to 1,000 of you are attending our annual meeting, choosing from among some 180 panels, seminars and plenary sessions located in a dozen different rooms in a large hotel. You may visit the book exhibit, use the child care facilities, socialize at several receptions, tour various local attractions, and even shed a tear or two in the employment exchange. All of this is now standard fare at our annual meeting. But, it seems like only yesterday that I attended my first ASC meeting, and it was quite different. Seventeen years ago this month, the meeting was held in one room at the N.Y.U. Law School I think because Gerhard Mueller was able to arrange for the use of the room without charge. Instead of the audience's moving from one session to another, the panelists changed while the rest of us remained seated. I'm not sure how many attended the meeting, but I'd be surprised to learn that more than 150 criminologists participated. But, to a young criminologist, it was exciting to hear the papers, see faces behind names I recognized, listen to Marvin Wolfgang give the presidential address, and even sit through the business meeting, including a lengthy treasurer's report. Only yesterday, but since then the American Society of Criminology has undergone profound changes and has emerged as a solid professional society, well run, servicing its members and speaking eloquently for the discipline.

A significant portion of our growth and development has occurred since 1976, a date that I think begins the latest era of our history. That year, for example, saw the establishment of the official office of the Society at the Ohio State University with the first full-time paid employee of the ASC. Also that year, the Society's newsletter, *The Criminologist*, was begun, first as a quarterly and later as a bi-monthly publication. Just this year, the newsletter expanded once again in order to serve the membership more effectively and efficiently, while our national office goes on providing a Weberian stability and continuity to the association's administration.

While our membership grew throughout the early and mid-1970s, it peaked in 1976-1977, reflecting the growth patterns of criminology and criminal justice academic programs and the expansion of crime control agencies at every level of government. From an unprecedented high of 1,758 members in 1976, we spurted to nearly 2,000 members the following year. But, that was our last hurrah as far as numerical growth was concerned because the following year saw our membership rolls fall back to the 1976 level and decline even further each year through 1980.

Despite the similarities and links between the two associations, tensions remained during this period. One year, a unique runoff election for president of the ASC took place amidst charges that the ACJS was tampering with our elective process. According to some, one candidate was friendlier than the other with rival organization, which instructed it several hundred joint members to vote for the "friendly candidate". The person so defined won the election, but was often denied full cooperation by several members of the Executive Board who felt the ASC had been betrayed. How? It is difficult to say. To my knowledge, no evidence has ever been produced to substantiate the charge of tampering, nor did that particular president relate any differently than other presidents with the ACJS. In all likelihood, the allegation grew out of rumor, fear and disappointment, with no basis in fact.

About this time, new leadership was emerging in the American Society of Criminology that represented a younger generation of criminologists. This new leadership was particularly sensitive to the charge that our society was run by an "old boy" network that no longer spoke for the membership nor the interests of contemporary criminology. These old boys, as some believed at the time, had acted as though the ASC was their personal fiefdom, dominating its politics and preventing its ascending into true respectability as a professional society. Armed with this definition of the situation, accurate or not, several members of the Executive Board began paying special attention to ways in which the so-called old boys' power could be controlled. The first such opportunity came in December, 1977.

Earlier that year, a grant was awarded by the LEAA Office of Criminal Justice Education and Training to the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences to explore the possibility of developing minimum standards for criminology and criminal justice education and issued relating to the implementation of those standards. The wise director of O.C.J.E.T., Price Foster, insisted that the grant be administered by advisory board made up of four members of ACJS and four representatives of ASC. The President of ASC agreed to this arrangement and appointed four members of our society to represent us on what came to be called the Joint Commission on Criminology and Criminal Justice Education and Standards.

When this was presented at the November Executive Board Meeting a month later, a chorus of objections rose from many of the Society's officers. Some were opposed to our participation in the project, some were critical of the Board's not being involved in such important appointments, and other complained that a full range of criminological philosophy would not be articulated by our appointees. Incoming president, C. Ray Jeffery, rightly concluded that the issue was larger than mere representation on another committee and called for a special Board meeting in New York City the following month. At that time, after a full day of sometimes heated argument, the Executive Board replaced three of the four original A.S.C. members of the Joint Commission. The new team was made up exclusively of Board members given specific guidelines by the Board as to the limits of their authority and instructed to report back regularly for the group's feedback and further directions.

Why have I spoken of the event in such detail? Because I believe that it marked a turning point in the recent history of our Society. It symbolized both a new assertiveness by the Executive Board and the emergence of new leadership in the organization. Not only on this commission, but elsewhere within the infrastructure of ASC, a concerted effort was now made to bring newer and often younger members into the government of the organization. Although this particular incident did not contribute very much to the establishment of minimum standards for criminology and criminal justice education, it did serve the serendipitous function of helping to transfer power to a new generation of criminologists and opening the Society to a wider range of opinion and philosophy.

I believe that this latter condition was also the consequence of another controversy within our Society a few years ago. When Jim Inciardi became editor of *Criminology* in 1978, he was struck by the fact that "for years, the works of radical theorists have only infrequently appeared . . . in the traditional criminology journals". Wanting to help rectify that situation, he decided to build a special issue of the journal around two papers presented by Richard Quinney and Austin Turk at our 29th Annual Meeting in November 1977. In addition to the papers by these two distinguished conflict theorists, he solicited two essays critical of their perspectives, and comments on all four papers by two other criminologists, one a Marxist and the other not. Although the reactions of the Marxist criminologist were withdrawn and did not appear, few members of the American Society of Criminology, certainly not Inciardi, expected or were prepared for what followed publication of that issue.

Radical criminologists reacted swiftly and loudly, charging that the special journal issue was unbalanced, designed to "inflame radical criminology" and "a thinly disguised excuse to attack radical and Marxist criminologists." In addition, they charged that the issue failed "to give even minimal presentation to the ideas of radical scholars". According to the editor, publication "led to a library of editorials and correspondence denouncing the papers, the journal, its editor, and its sponsoring society. Letters of praise and condemnation were sent to *Criminology's* editorial offices from four continents which, in some measure, at least offered some testimony as to how wide the readership of the journal was".

The controversy simmered and sometimes boiled throughout 1979 and was the primary topic of discussion at the business meeting of our annual meeting in November, 1979. Several members of the society canceled their membership, and some radical criminologists who stayed in the association attempted to have a second special issue of the journal devoted to what they defined as a more balanced presentation of their position. Before this request was rejected by a vote of the membership, however, efforts were already being made to attract radical criminologists back to the ASC and to make our society a hospitable place for the exchange of all ideas.

That was the serendipity growing out of this sometimes bitter situation which we experienced in 1979 and 1980. While radical criminology and its proponents were either ignored or denounced within the ASC prior to this incident, society officers, concerned for the future vitality of the organization and for its intellectual integrity, now began

making concerted efforts to heal the wounds. And, I venture to say, they have been successful. In the past four years, criminologists identified as radical or Marxist in orientation have participated with renewed vigor in our society, organizing panels, presenting papers, serving on the Executive Board and, in general, making us a truly representative association of criminologists representing different disciplines and various theoretical perspectives.

We have survived these bumps and we have prospered. Although our recent growth in members has now slowed considerably, we have continued to grow in more important ways: in service to our members, in respect among professional societies, in more important ways: in service to our members, in respect among professional societies, in tolerance of various explanations of human behavior and in esteem among social and behavioral scientists everywhere. Today, every major criminologist in the United States is a member of and active participant in the American Society of Criminology.

In a word, we have matured. As a professional society we have come of age, now being seen by others and by ourselves as a representative and established association of scholars and practitioners. Our identity has taken shape and crystallized, allowing even rivalry once felt with seemingly competing groups to wane. We recognize, for example, that we and the ACJS serve somewhat different constituencies and that we may co-exist and cooperate with each other without fear of losing either our membership or our principles. We have learned from our past and we are stronger for it today.

In each of the next three years, however, we grew once again, thanks largely to the herculean efforts of dedicated members of the membership committee and mass mailing of membership invitations permitted by the computerization of our national office. In spite of social, political and economic trends and the disappearance of much federal and state support for criminology and criminal justice research and educational programs, it is worth noting that today's ASC membership is the same as it was in 1976. We must be doing something right.

One thing we're apparently doing right is attracting members to our annual meetings. Attendance doubled between 1976 and 1981, reaching a high of 1,004 in the latter year. Although we haven't exceeded that number yet, we continue to draw in excess of 50 percent of our membership to our annual conventions.

By the late 70s, our membership had not only increased dramatically but was also changing in nature and interests. Over half had joined since 1975, some 70 percent were under 45 years of age and over one-fifth were female. With newer, younger and more heterogeneous members, it was obvious that the 1980s would be a period of vitality and excitement for the Society. Indeed, it started off that way, with the first divisions or sections of the ASC, on Women and Crime and International Criminology, created in 1981. And, earlier this year, we accepted an invitation to become an affiliate member of the Consortium of Social Science Associations.

Of course, one could not expect to experience such growth without a few bumps along the way. By the late 1970s, the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences was also expanding rapidly and being seen as a competitor by some members of the ASC leadership. Although the ACJS appealed to a somewhat different constituency, it was feared that their aggressive recruitment of members would interfere with what some saw as the manifest destiny of the ASC. To make matters even worse, this upstart organization even proposed that criminology and criminal justice academic programs be accredited, and it wanted to do the accrediting. To many of us thought this was clearly unacceptable because we did not believe that accreditation was necessary for the integrity of the discipline and we feared that it was being used by an apparent rival to attain political leverage. Although we know that there is ample room for both professional associations to thrive, at the time we felt challenged and often reacted defensively.

In addition to some 300 overlapping members between the two associations, the differences between the ASC and the ACJS continued to blur in the late 70s and 1980s. Originally, as association of police educators and then criminal justice teachers primarily from junior and four year colleges, ACJS has moved steadily toward an emphasis on research scholarship and traditional discipline concerns. Our society, on the other hand, while continuing to appeal to theorists and researchers of crime, has increasingly broadened its concerns to include issues related to pedagogy and the practical applications of criminological knowledge. In fact, the most recent data available indicates that 40 percent of our members are non-academics, applied criminologists of one type or another. While we have always been an inter-disciplinary society, in recent years that has come to mean more than just academic types from varying disciplines. More than ever, it now means a society concerned with the professional interests of teachers, researchers and practitioners, each with unique problems and concerns but each benefiting from interaction and association with the other.

The growth of the ASC is not surprising given the social and political even of the 60s and 70s. It is somewhat ironic, though, that our strength and esteem have continued to expand in the 1980s, a time when national conditions and priorities are markedly different and when the social sciences in general are losing both support and respect. The reasons for our current healthy status probably have to do with such things as good management, fairness, providing service,, and publishing a high quality journal, all of which help us continue to attract and hold those members of the criminological community engaged in the most important scientific work and its application. As long as we remain a professional association supporting the very best scholarship and the free exchange of ideas, the American Society of Criminology will continue to prosper and achieve even greater respect.