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CRIME AND POVERTY

If you are worried that crime is on the increase in New Zealand, you can take cold comfort from the fact that most other developed countries, including wealthy Switzerland, are experiencing exactly the same problem.

The fact that in all these countries the rich get richer and the poor get poorer in relation to each other has made many people believe that this must be the root of the problem. No doubt, the ever increasing gap between rich and poor coupled with a high level of unemployment are definitely important factors for the crime wave that is sweeping through the developed world, but in no way are these the only contributing factors.

The crime rate we are experiencing at present is a rather recent phenomenon, whilst poverty has existed ever since the human race has established itself on earth. So the blame cannot be put on poverty and unemployment alone, because there are far deeper and more sinister factors at work.

In the "good old days" life was much simpler, much more basic. As long as you had enough money to house, clothe and feed yourself, you could live without too much stress. Your editor can remember the times when a Sunday afternoon family stroll along the lake shore, ending with the traditional cone of ice cream was a real treat, when a tram or a train journey into the countryside or a ride in someone else's car was the event of the year, when window shop-

ping was about the only type of shopping the family could afford, when cars were a novelty reserved for the super rich and the highest aspiration in your life was to own a bicycle, even if only a second-hand one, when evenings were spent with friends playing cards for matchsticks or the then new game of monopoly. Life was then very simple and straightforward. You were poor, you never had any sizeable amount of money in your pocket, you could rarely afford anything more than the bare essentials, but you lived reasonably contented and without much pressure from the outside. You bought what you could afford, accepting the fact that many luxury items in the shop windows simply were not meant for you. You knew that only the rich could afford these luxuries, but you did not care. You did not know much about the life of the rich and powerful because not much was made public. They lived their life and you lived yours, and very seldom did your respective paths ever cross.

You had vaguely heard about drugs, but since it was mainly opium being smoked by some old Chinese in dingy looking dens somewhere at the other end of the world, you never gave it a second thought.

There were no scandal newspapers, no tabloids and of course no TV at that time to intrude and dictate your life. Admittedly there was radio which then was restricted to a few national stations only, but as advertising on radio had not yet been thought of, the only advertisements you could come across were on billboards, perambulating sandwich-

men, in the newspapers and magazines and on the occasional leaflet in your letterbox.

Compared with today, where advertising has almost taken over your whole life, there was hardly any pressure put on you to purchase anything else beyond what you could afford or really needed. Business was far less aggressive than today. People were allowed to live the life they wanted or which they could afford without being pressured from all sides as they are today. And so this increasing aggressive behaviour which we are confronted with today hardly existed in those days. Apart from the Mafia, which for us Swiss was a purely American phenomenon, there was almost no organised crime. With very few worthwhile household gadgets to steel, break-ins and burglaries were few and far between. Robberies, street muggings, rapes, stabbings and indiscriminate shooting of people hardly ever occurred. Murders were usually the actions of a few deranged individuals and certainly did not occur on an almost daily basis as today.

The fact that life has changed so much is largely due to the modern mode of communication allowing aggressive advertising to intrude into every facet of your life. More than any other group, the poor are by far the hardest hit victims of today's constant bombardment through TV, radio and newspapers by this unashamedly aggressive publicity which, day after day, hammers into you the idea that you must at all costs purchase a new house, a car, TV sets, video recorders, computers, sound systems, washing machines and any of the hundreds of gadgets seemingly required in a modern household lest you fall utterly behind the rest of the world.

Today, in the eyes of the advertisers,

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