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# EDITORIALS

## 1. THE POLICE

In this number of REALITY we carry the first part of a long article on the police. It comes at an appropriate time. The British police, the model for all the rest of us, have had to contend with widespread rioting, something with which they have never expected to have to deal. And much of it has been aimed against them.

In some areas there has been bitter criticism of their conduct before and after the riots. All this has led to intense heart-searching at all levels of British society, not least amongst the police themselves, about what has gone wrong and how the damage already done to the image of the police can be repaired.

Although there has been a good deal of disagreement over the precise causes of the riots it is recognised that they are largely social and partly the result of a breakdown in communication between the police and the inner-city communities, many of whose members are black, where most of the riots have started. People in Britain have been talking about this communication breakdown for years, but it is obvious that hardly anything was done about it. It is a matter for urgent attention now.

Meanwhile, over in New Zealand, the anti-Springbok Tour demonstrations have placed their own strains on a police force whose traditions, as far as one can see, are very much British ones. The police there have been criticised for their handling of the disruption of the Hamilton game, but surely their attempt to remove the demonstrators from the ground by arresting them individually and taking them off to charge them one by one was the way for a civilised police force to act? Of course it was offensive to some people. Our own Brigadier "Rooi Rus" Swanepoel, head of Johannesburg's

Riot Squad, is reported to have said that, with just 20 of his men, he would have taught the demonstrators "a lesson they would never forget". We are sure he would have. Half-a-dozen snapping dogs, a dozen thudding batons, and the field would have been cleared, even if it took a fleet of ambulances to do it. In the process, of course, the New Zealand police would have been transformed into something they had never been before and the fabric of New Zealand society irreparably damaged. We sincerely hope that that does not turn out to be one of the more abiding results of that sad tour. For the difference between how the New Zealand police acted at Hamilton and how Brigadier Swanepoel thinks they should have acted is surely the difference between how a police force should act and how it should not.

One of the most marvellous scenes in the television report on the royal wedding was that of the police controlling the enormous crowd which converged on Buckingham Palace --- no force, no tension, no illhumour. How many of the six or seven hundred million people who were reported to have watched that film would not have given their right arms to live in a country with a police force like that? Unfortunately a large part of the world lives with police forces which aren't like that at all, but which are feared and hated by most of the people they are supposed to protect.

The myth of the British Bobby as the near perfect policeman has suffered a good deal in these recent months. Those wedding scenes showed that the basis for the myth is still very much alive. It is very important for Britain that it should survive this present crisis. And it is very important for us too. For if the British police were to become not much different from all the rest, what would there be left for us, and others, to aspire to? □