

Story 37.

The Spy that Wasn't

Part 3. Resolution

Next morning, the Council of Europe Debating Chamber.

“I am pleased to open this, our second session, of the United Nations and Council of Europe collaboration to address the problem of world crime,” announced the Rapporteur with greatly affected pride. “After conversations delegates had at dinner and afterwards, there is a draft of our resolutions now available, and our beautiful administrative assistant Mademoiselle Andrea will now read out the draft of our deliberations.”

Andrea, now dressed in a sleek two piece suit, the top a snug fit and the bottom styled as a miniskirt, always the colors of the Carabinieri, stepped up to the podium that had been specially erected for her. Dennis was spellbound, both by her amazing composure and by the shock he felt that these people had already drafted a report of deliberations, even though the major aspects of the project had never been addressed. He could — almost — accept that he was not included in the out-of-meeting deliberations, given his apparent very junior position as accidental director of the research, nevertheless, he had to gulp very hard to swallow the inferior position into which he had been relegated. So far, he could see no reason why he was even dragged along to this meeting.

Andrea began:

“Considering, that in light of increases in crime worldwide, the World Crime Project will collect crime data from all member countries of the United Nations and the Council of Europe, and...

“Acknowledging the implications world crime has for world order, the project will be carried out in a timely, if not urgent, manner to address the many concerns of world crime for citizens.

“Observing, that the rise in world crime will place a burden on the capacity of prisons of most if not all member nations, particular attention will be given to the numbers of inmates currently residing in prisons.

“Understanding, that the definition of crime varies according to the different procedures and laws of each member country, data will be collected concerning only the general

categories of crime such as homicide, assault and theft.

“Accepting the fact that crime also varies according to economic conditions, data will be collected concerning the social status of the offenders, whether rich or poor, the particular measures of these categories to be left to the appropriate technical experts.

“Realizing the importance of this research for the economic and social progress of developing nations, the Director of Research will give special attention to developing countries and their social and cultural problems and differences concerning crime and criminal justice.

“Recognizing that for many member nations, crime and justice are politically sensitive problems, the project results will not be published in any public forum, without the permission of every member nation.

“Accepting furthermore, that this research is highly technical as well as sensitive politically, significant research design decisions must be approved by every participating member nation, before the project can continue forward.

“Approving the general design of this important project will be contingent on the director of the research project presenting a research design and preliminary report to this body one year from now.”

Andrea looked up at her audience, collected her papers, and stepped away as light applause followed her to her seat. The Rapporteur from his supervising chair stood and clapped excessively.

Dennis, however, had shrunk back into his padded seat, angry as he had never been before, or at least since he was a three year old. His immediate impulse was to call them a bunch of nincompoops. In fact, he raised his hand, waved it actually, but the Rapporteur’s eyes had already landed on Der Groot, who responded accordingly.

“May I congratulate you, Monsieur Rapporteur and your very hard workers, for having drafted an excellent report of our important deliberations.” He turned to look at Dennis. “And Mr. Cotter, I congratulate you on your position as project director and urge you to undertake the recommendations of our meeting as soon as you are able. Mademoiselle Andrea has provided an excellent blueprint for going forward. I commend her and thank

you all for your insightful contributions.”

Dennis forced a smile, the corners of his mouth quivering with pent up anger. He spied his boss Ferrapotti, grinning gleefully, as he did the rounds of all participants, whispering loudly in their ears. Then, without quite realizing it, he found himself standing in his place, his hand up as though asking to go to the bathroom. “Monsieur Rapporteur!” he called.

“The chair recognizes Mr. Cotter of UNSDRI.”

“What about race? Why is that not included as a variable?”

Immediately he had said it, he knew he was in trouble. It was the way he said it. He should have said simply, “Do you think race should be included along with the other social factors you recommend?”

For once, Ferrapotti stopped his whispering and his persistent grin faded. The Rapporteur’s jaw dropped, and Der Groot, now also angry, rose from his seat. He looked across the cavernous chamber, no more than a dozen people scattered around the front rows, a chamber built to seat several hundred, his lips dripping with pomposity, his countenance so patronizing, informed Dennis of his utterly ignorant mistake:

“I cannot speak for the rest of Europe, but The Netherlands certainly does not collect crime or any other type of social data according to race. That would be a policy of outright racism. It is racial profiling, as your American government even calls it. It is time that the United States learned from Europe how to include its ethnics into its supposed diverse democracy.”

Dennis went very red, his lips quivering, at first unable to make them say the words that lay stuck in his head. He saw out of the corner of his eye Ferrapotti making his way to Der Groot. “I’ll have you know,” he mumbled in a weak voice, “that I am Australian, not American.”

As if this were an excuse or even substantive reply to Der Groot’s powerful observation, indeed, accusation! Der Groot waved Ferrapotti away, who adroitly changed course and made his way to Dennis.

“Did you not receive your Doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania?” asked Der Groot.

Dennis sat down in his seat, an act that helped calm him. Ferrapotti was now approaching him from the aisle, still with his grin, though obviously concerned.

In response to Der Groot's question Dennis rose again. He looked at the Rapporteur who was flummoxed and did not know how to intervene in a respectful way. The issue was too controversial. He dare not get caught up in an argument about race.

"You are right, professor doctor Der Groot," noted Dennis sarcastically, "but may I point out that, if you do not have valid data on the racial component of crime, and especially of those who are in prison, how will you ever determine whether the criminal justice system is racially biased? Without such data, there is no empirical evidence on which to develop policy that guarantees racial equality."

There, he had said it. True, what he had said was a paradox of sorts. In order to show racial prejudice, especially systemic bias, you must be able to show that in actual fact the bias exists, and for that you must collect data that profiles — dare one say the word — the race and other attributes of those who commit crimes, who are victims of crimes, who are processed through the criminal justice system.

Der Groot did not offer a retort. He assumed that all present would see that everything the young man had said revealed his racist view of the world. The Americans, the Australians, everyone knew that.

"Oh, er, oh," Dennis heard, in loud whispers in his ear, and smelled Ferrapotti's stale nicotine breath, "of course you're right. But you can't say it to these people."

Dennis turned to reply and thank his boss for the support, but Ferrapotti had already left and was on his way to whisper to Der Groot.

Buoyed by the support of his boss, Dennis stood again, and addressed the chair. He was learning how to make himself seem civilized.

"Monsieur Rapporteur," he said, "may I speak again? This is such an important issue in our times."

The Rapporteur, glad of a way to be included in this difficult exchange, replied, "the Chair recognizes Mr. Cotter."

"I have one small question to ask Professor Doctor Der Groot. Does he know how many ethnic Indonesians are in Dutch prisons, and are they over-represented according to their portion of the total population of the Netherlands?"

Der Groot stood stiffly. "As I have said, we do not collect such information. It is racist to do so."

"May I?" asked Dennis again respectfully addressing the chair."

"You may."

Ferrapotti was now hurrying back to Dennis with more whispers, this time no doubt to tell him to shut up.

"Do you collect data on sex of the offenders or inmates of prisons?"

Der Groot pretended to busily write something down and did not respond.

"Does the delegate from The Netherlands wish to respond?" asked the Rapporteur.

"I do not," replied der Groot, clearly sulking.

"Of course you do," said Dennis, now feeling a rush of adrenalin that comes with winning. "According to your argument, collecting such data would be sexist."

Dennis smelled the nicotine breath. Ferrapotti was panting, no longer whispering. He squeezed Dennis's arm quite strongly. Dennis's cheeks were still flushed with the feeling of winning, though none present perceived the incident as such. But he then thought of the wonderful last lunch he had in Rome with his colleagues and new friends before departing for Strasbourg, and decided that such a life was much more important than winning a small argument. He grabbed Ferrapotti's hand that gripped his arm and whispered. "O.K. I'll shut up."

