

What Happens When We Tear a Hole in the Social Fabric

Editor's Note: This column is an updated and expanded version of a recent edition of *Off the Cuff*

-0-

The Los Angeles district attorney, elected just a month ago, has come up with an innovative way to cut down on crime: Pretend that a crime isn't really a crime and don't prosecute anyone who commits the crime.

Brilliant, right?

George Gascón, the new D.A. in L.A. is a perfect example of what can go wrong when a far-left social justice warrior finds himself in a position of authority.

Here's a list of misdemeanor offenses he says he won't prosecute: Trespassing, disturbing the peace, a minor in possession of alcohol, driving without a license, driving with a suspended license, making criminal threats, drug and paraphernalia possession, being under the influence of a controlled substance, public intoxication, loitering to commit prostitution, resisting arrest.

Question: In what civilized society is resisting arrest not worthy of ... arrest and prosecution?

Here's another question: Do you think there will now be more hotheads who decide to get into fights with cops and resist arrest, or fewer? I'm going with "more" as my answer.

And so, let's consider the broad implications of the district attorney's "woke" idea and how it might affect real people.

Let's say some guy and his girlfriend need a place to stay for

a few days and decide to camp out on your lawn. They're trespassing. You can call the police if you want – they may even show up at your house – but don't expect anyone to be charged with anything; trespassing, after all, is no big deal anymore, so it's on the list of crimes that won't be prosecuted.

How about the district attorney's decision not to prosecute people who drive without a license or with a suspended license? What could possibly go wrong with that?

Disturbing the peace won't be prosecuted, either – so why bother calling the police if your neighbor decides to have a party that starts at midnight and goes until dawn, with music blasting away the whole time? Yes, the police might show up if you call them, but generally speaking cops don't like wasting their time on calls knowing no one will be charged.

And if a few hookers drop by to see what's going on, no worries. Remember, the district attorney has decided to look the other way when it comes to loitering to commit prostitution.

Public intoxication? What's so horrible about walking down the street with your kids while a drunk is yelling obscenities at you?

You can be assured that none of what I described here is going to happen in Beverly Hills or any other tony part of town – (not for a while, anyway). More likely – actually, much more likely – it'll happen in the less-well-off sections of Los Angeles, which is ironic since the district attorney came up with his goofy idea because he thinks poor people are the ones who too often have been prosecuted for these crimes.

I don't know about you, but this looks like anarchy to me – government-sanctioned anarchy. The people of Los Angeles elected Gascón as their district attorney – not as their king or emperor who can decide, all by himself, what laws he'll

uphold and which ones he'll ignore.

Criminals may lack scruples, but not street-smarts. They have a knack for picking up on things that progressive politicians somehow have missed. So, if you're poor and live in Los Angeles, you probably won't feel comforted knowing that while prosecutions will go down for certain offenses, actual crime likely will go up.

And if you're thinking that L.A. is a one-off, an outlier, that no other city in these United States would even contemplate something so potentially reckless, you'd be wrong.

About 1,100 miles up the coast, the Seattle City Council is considering something called "the poverty defense" – which would excuse misdemeanor crimes if the offender is either poor, hooked on drugs or alcohol, or has a mental health disorder.

Under the "poverty defense" an accused suspect can steal, assault someone, or trespass and get off with no punishment if the crime was committed to meet what is being called "a basic need to survive."

"In a situation where you took that sandwich because you were hungry and you were trying to meet your basic need of satisfying your hunger, we as the community will know that we should not punish that. That conduct is excused." So says Anita Khandelwal, the top public defender for King County, which takes in the Seattle area.

I don't want to see anyone go hungry, any more than the public defender does, but there are shelters and churches and other places where people can get free food without stealing it. Don't the folks who run mom-and-pop sandwich shops have rights in Seattle? What if you need a tissue? Can you walk into a CVS and steal a box of them? The list goes on and on, doesn't it?

There's also a thing called the "fabric of society," and allowing people to steal stuff simply because they believe they "need" it, or to camp out at your front door because they need a place to stay, rips a great big hole in that fabric. And once that happens, civil society starts to fall apart.

That's not some highfalutin theory. That's how real life works.

If this were April 1, it might be a joke. But it's December, and there's nothing funny about any of it. Being "woke" sometimes is just silly – and sometimes it's downright dangerous.