

Crime wave . . .

United Press International
CHARLOTTE AMALIE, U.S. Virgin Islands — Stuart Lawrence has had his home broken into twice, had two cars stolen and thieves tried four times to break into his watch repair shop. He is thinking of leaving.

Another businessman who operates a chain of clothing stores in the Virgin Islands has had all of his stores, as well as his apartment, burglarized. The youthful burglars were apprehended. But he still hasn't recovered all the merchandise.

"I have to look at the kid going by on his bike with my pants on every day," he says. He is thinking of selling out.

"We've got to do something because people are screaming for protection," says John Maduro, a lawyer who represents the island of St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands territorial legislature. "We've got people threatening to blow off the heads of other people's kids."

Maduro wants to bring back capital punishment.

Mrs. Edith Borm, a local lawyer who handles many juvenile cases in family court, said the community deserves protection from certain 16-year-olds who have already committed 16 burglaries and are still out on the street because of the revolving-door type justice.

Just when the Virgin Islands seemed to have overcome the fallout from the shocking Fountain Valley golf course murders of 1972, a new but different type of crime wave is threatening this self-ruling American territory of 100,000 persons, whose main livelihood is tourism.

The new wave involves crimes against property, principally burglaries. Most are committed by boys and girls under 18 who cannot legally be jailed. They also cannot be held in a juvenile detention home because there is none at present.

While just about everyone agrees that the problem is serious, there is disagreement on its causes and how to deal with it.

Troy Chapman, a Washington D.C., native who runs the local Law Enforcement Planning Commission, said the juvenile crime wave — more than 53 per cent of all felonies are being committed by persons under 17 — is due to two factors.

"First, there is no facility to keep

people. They're out on the streets doing it again. And secondly, others, who may be on the fringe of the scene, see that the juvenile delinquents are getting away with it and then they start doing it too. It's contagious, in a way."

But the police force is to blame, according to one businessman who asked not to be identified because he says whites are already more likely to get parking tickets than blacks and he doesn't need any more trouble with the police.

"The cops are too close to the scene. They don't want to arrest the kids of their own relatives, neighbors or friends. I don't think they're getting a rakeoff from these burglaries — they're not smart enough for that. But they just don't want to bust anybody."

Another businessman blames a "general laxity, a lack of dedication to upholding the law."

"Nothing is being done about some very serious matters," he said. "It's the lifestyle of the West Indies;

it's an attitude of who the heck gives a damn."

Gov. Cyril E. King proposed stiffer sentences for burglaries and a drive to get federal funds to build new detention facilities.

But the legislature watered down some of his proposals. King proposed a mandatory minimum five-year prison sentence for a first-degree burglary conviction — breaking into a home or business with a weapon and with intent to steal. The legislature gave the judge

an option of a lesser term or suspended sentence on the first conviction. Only the second conviction now carries the mandatory term.

King proposed making parents of juveniles liable for twice the amount of property loss or damage. The legislature reduced it to the amount of the loss or damage. It gave the parents a chance to excuse themselves of any culpability.

King has signed the watered-down measures. But U.S. District Court Judge Almeric Christian says nothing will be achieved by them.

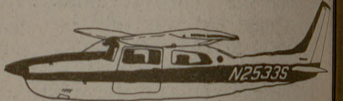
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