

Special Branch

MEMORANDUM

Commander 'Operations'

Special Demonstration Squad 1976

INTRODUCTION

1. The ninth year of its life has seen continued development in the work of the Special Demonstration Squad. Whilst the strategy, to gather essential but otherwise unobtainable information about matters of public order, has remained unchanged, the tactical approach has evolved to meet the challenges of the day. The Squad was brought into being in 1968 to provide the intelligence against which large and potentially violent anti-Vietnam War demonstrations could be policed. Supported by a consistently high standard of intelligence, uniformed police have so developed the art of controlling political demonstrations that the threat of serious disorder resulting from major, organised gatherings has diminished. However, the potential for violence amongst revolutionary, ultra-left groupings remains as strong as ever but is beginning to reveal itself more in comparatively small, local actions against, in particular, the ultra-right National Front and National Party, where those involved hope to catch the police off their guard. To combat this, the SDS has found it necessary to keep a close watch both on the extremist organisations and on local, broad-front anti-racialist groups through which the revolutionaries operate.

COVERAGE

2. The following organisations, all of which were involved in demonstrations, were given close attention by the Squad during 1976:

Pro-Irish

Troops Out Movement

Peace Through Freedom Committee (ad hoc group against the
'Peace People')

Trade Union Committee Against the Prevention of Terrorism Act
(combination of Trotskyists and Sinn Fein)

Trotskyist

Workers League

International Marxist Group

International Socialists (now the Socialist Workers Party)

International Communist League

Right to Work Campaign (IS and IMG)

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Maoist

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Communist Unity Association (M-L)

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Anarchist

Anarchist Workers Association

Freedom Collective

East London Libertarians

Federation of London Anarchist Groups

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Revolutionary Socialist

Big Flame

Anti-Fascist (infiltrated or controlled by revolutionaries)

Croydon Collective

Battersea and Tooting Campaign Against Racism

Battersea and Wandsworth Anti Racist Committee

All Lambeth Anti Racist Movement

Greenwich Anti Fascist Committee

Hackney Committee Against Racism and Fascism

West London Anti Racist Forum

3. Under present conditions the risk to the lives of the officers concerned would be too great to justify an attempt at direct coverage of the Official and Provisional wings of the Irish Republican Movement. Nevertheless, much useful information has been obtained through involvement with the Troops Out Movement, the so-called Trade Union Committee Against the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the Peace Through Freedom Committee which was formed to co-ordinate opposition to the 'Peace People' from Belfast. The Republican organisations, nervous of police activity under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, have shown little appetite for demonstrating their beliefs.

4. The Trotskyist groups have all followed similar lines of protest against unemployment and cuts in public expenditure but their sectarianism continues to limit joint activity and thus renders the task of the police less difficult than it might otherwise be. All have an almost paranoid attitude to the ultra-right, fed continually by what appears to them as the success of the National Front in by-elections. The International Socialists, in particular, have gone to considerable lengths to confront the 'fascists' with overwhelming numbers and to 'drive them off the streets'. The other organisations, numerically smaller, have attempted to achieve the same object only in combination with anti-fascist/anti-racist committees and on larger demonstrations.

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6. Little has changed on the anarchist front in the last year. Those professing the creed are a continuing nuisance on demonstrations and from the circles in which they move come rumours of the formation of 'Angry Brigade' type cells bent upon violence. Several individuals known to hold such views have appeared in political campaigns recently and SDS coverage of anarchist groups continues in the hope that advance warning may be obtained of any intention to carry political protest into the realms of violence.

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7. The sinister Big Flame organisation, which originated in the North West but soon spread to London, was the subject of close scrutiny until September when, for security reasons, it was decided to withdraw. The organisation comprises a number of hitherto unaligned revolutionaries from the shop floor of industry combined with a clique of well educated individuals, several with 'Angry Brigade' associations. Whilst there has been no known illegality in its London activities, it has been responsible for violence in Liverpool and there is little doubt that a large number of its members would be inclined to follow that path given the right circumstances. Whereas the ultra-left as a whole claims to be security conscious, no organisation has shown practical ingenuity in the field of investigation to compare with that of Big Flame. There is little doubt that this organisation has more to hide, and hence more to fear, from the police than some of the others.

8. In the area of anti-fascist/anti-racist committees there is a distinct dividing line between those controlled by members of the Labour Party, and even the Communist Party of Great Britain, and those controlled by elements of Trotskyists, Maoists and anarchists. The former co-operate with police in their street activities and steward demonstrations closely and are therefore of no concern to the Special Demonstration Squad. The second group, however, tend to be used by revolutionaries as a cloak for the organisation of violent confrontations with the ultra-right and the police whom they bracket together as 'fascists and enemies of the working class'.

9. For some months in 1975 an officer from the Squad penetrated the National Front at the behest of his 'parent' Trotskyist organisation. The information gained added nothing of real value to that obtainable from already excellent Special Branch sources and since the officer's withdrawal early in 1976 it has not been considered necessary to replace him. If the Metropolitan Police is to keep the peace between the extremes of the political spectrum it is clearly essential that accurate information be readily available from both ends. Should existing sources on the far right show any sign of weakening, the SDS will give immediate consideration to renewed coverage there.

PRODUCT

10. The quality and quantity of material submitted by the SDS officers has been maintained at a consistently high level throughout the year under review. Whilst the value of up-to-the-minute information about forthcoming public order matters is easily understood, less obvious is the considerable saving in police time produced by a constant flow of reports about people and organisations involved in extreme political activity. These reports form an essential part of the base of information which enables Special Branch to provide accurate assessments of the strength and threat of demonstrations and to bring

into the realms of reason the claims about numbers of participants made by organisers. On several occasions in 1976, for example, it was possible to scale down to around 1,000 estimates of 5,000 to 10,000. That the process of demonstration assessment has been developed into a fine art is due, in large measure, not only to existing SDS field officers but also to their predecessors and supervising officers who have built up the knowledge and experience from which the current staff work.

11. As a by-product, copies of reports dealing with subversives and their organisations are passed, via the appropriate Special Branch squad, to the Security Service. The value of the information to that Service is a matter of record.

PERSONNEL

12. The establishment of the SDS remained in 1976 at 12 field officers (4 DSs and 8 DCs) with supervision and administration in the hands of one Chief Inspector, one Inspector, two Sergeants and one Constable. In the course of the year four experienced officers left the field on transfer to other Special Branch duties. The experience and expertise of such men cannot be replaced in a matter of months but their successors are living up to tradition and the future is viewed with confidence. Promotion classes have been run by the Inspector since June to assist four of the Constables in their attempt to pass the competitive examination. If their efforts are rewarded application will be made to retain their services to enable them to complete the normal tour of four years on the SDS.

SECURITY

13. Security of the operation has rested always upon close supervision of officers as individuals and as a group, backed up by 'safe' premises, in which meetings can take place, and the provision of the strongest possible cover backgrounds compatible with the modern computer age. In addition to daily contact with the Chief Inspector and his assistants, all officers are regularly supervised by a Chief Superintendent and Superintendent who bear overall responsibility. Additionally, they have received a number of visits during the year from the Deputy Assistant Commissioner and Commander 'Operations', Special Branch.

14. The political sensitivity of the SDS operation is fully recognised by all officers concerned and, to protect the ultimate defence line, great care is taken to ensure that penetration of an organisation can be fully justified on the basis of the Commissioner's responsibility for the preservation of public order in the Metropolis.

ACCOMMODATION

15. The landlord's intention in March to sell a block in which one of our two headquarters flats was situated necessitated a hurried search for alternative accommodation. A suitable flat was obtained in May but the situation in this respect is becoming increasingly difficult. The best accommodation, for the Squad's purpose, is to be found in large, anonymous blocks, but the companies owning such property have discovered that letting is no longer an economic proposition and are tending to sell units to individual buyers or to hold them vacant with a view to the eventual sale of the whole block. Unless there is a change in Government policy over rented accommodation this will remain a continual problem for the Squad which must not draw attention to itself by remaining too long in one neighbourhood.

16. The shortage of comparatively cheap, furnished accommodation is now acute and officers entering the field are experiencing considerable delays finding 'cover' bed-sitters with absentee landlords. Despite this problem, the experimental policy of allowing two officers to share a flat is being phased out on the grounds that should one fall under suspicion requiring his withdrawal the position of the other might also be prejudiced.

TRANSPORT

17. The provision of second-hand cars and vans for the use of individual officers remains a great asset and the Squad owes a debt of gratitude to those in 'B', 'G' and 'T' Departments whose willing co-operation is essential if the fleet is to be kept on the road. A full report on SDS transport is submitted separately on TR14/73/10.

FINANCE

18.	<u>Expenditure for the period</u> <u>1.1.76 to 31.3.76.</u>	<u>Final expenditure A/C for</u> <u>the period 1.4.75 to 31.3.76.</u>
	Rent	4,685.48
	1,317.00	
	Electricity and Gas	202.32
	80.84	
	Telephone	461.86
	172.83	
	Rates	424.40
	96.22	
	Operational expenses	604.36
	186.98	
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	TOTAL:	6,378.42
	1,853.87	
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Expenditure for the first nine months of the current financial year was as follows:

Rent	3,804.94
Electricity and Gas	190.47
Telephone	290.04
Rates	753.89
Operational expenses	789.79
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TOTAL:	5,829.13
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19. Anticipated outgoings for the final quarter of the financial year is not expected to exceed £2,000, thus the total outlay should be in the region of £700 less than the approved budget of £8,600.

20. The projected budget figure produced in January 1976, has, up to the present time, proved to be an accurate assessment of the year's costs. The anticipated surplus could not have materialised had there been twelve officers in the field throughout the period. In fact, due to changes in personnel, the number of such officers has not exceeded eleven since April 1976.

21. The economic situation and the effects of inflation continue to make projected budgetary figures difficult to formulate. However, a substantial increase in rent paid for 'cover' flats during the next financial year cannot be avoided, due to the operational necessity of abandoning the practice of flat sharing. Furthermore, the need to replace one of the headquarters flats for security reasons, which would incur considerable costs and a possible increase of rent, cannot be discounted. It is already known that gas charges are to be increased and there can be little doubt that electricity charges and rates will follow suit. At the same time, the general rise of the cost of living has a direct bearing on operational expenses.

22. With these points in mind, it would be imprudent to hope to operate in 1977/78 on a budget similar to that of 1976/77. However, with continued strict control of expenditure, it is considered that the required increase can be limited to £1,200. It is, therefore, deemed expedient to seek approval for a figure of £9,800 for the financial year 1977/1978, an increase of a little under 14% above the budget approved for each of the last two years.

23. The SDS accounts for 1975/1976 were audited by 3 [REDACTED] B3 Branch, on 8 April 1976, and found to be correct.

REVIEW

24. Bearing in mind that the Metropolitan Police District averages more than one demonstration each day, any review of activity for a period of 12 months must confine itself to pointing out the more significant events.
25. The first of these, in 1976, occurred on 1 February when the annual 'Bloody Sunday' march and meeting was held under the auspices of the Bloody Sunday Commemoration Committee, formed by the Troops Out Movement and the International Marxist Group specifically for the purpose. As a result of bad weather conditions and poor organisation only about 1,500 people took part, but of interest was the fact that some 50 supporters of the National Front mounted an attack on the assembly point and three of their number were arrested.
26. On 27 February, 14,000 students demonstrated their opposition to the Government's proposed cuts in the education budget and called for an increase in students' grants. Whilst there was no real disorder, only two being arrested for footway obstruction, the occasion served as a reminder that these young people are willing to come out in considerable numbers whenever they see the issue to require it.
27. On the following day, supporters of the International Socialists organised Right to Work Campaign, left Manchester on their 20 day march to London. Their progress attracted little publicity and on arrival, about 80 strong, on the outskirts of London they took the opportunity of attacking their police escort. In what amounted to a running battle, 44 police officers were injured and 43 marchers arrested. The publicity gained from the fracas attracted full press and television coverage to the final day's march and rally on 20 March, thus turning a non-event into an overnight success, from the organisers' viewpoint. The activities of the 19th March 1976, stressed once again the need for police to be in sufficient numbers to deter the violence of the revolutionary left which bubbles constantly below the surface. The lesson did not go unheeded. A similar march from London to Brighton between 4 and 6 September, organised with the object of bringing pressure to bear upon the TUC, passed without serious incident. Nevertheless, it was learned from SDS sources that at a large meeting of Campaign supporters in Brighton a motion to invade the Congress was thwarted only by the visible presence of a large body of police.
28. The National Abortion Campaign (for abortion on demand) demonstration on 3 April, revealed a considerable fall off in support in comparison with 1975, 6,000 as opposed to 15,000 participating. With the left in committed opposition to any tightening of the law on the subject, and the Government likely to take just such action, too much significance should not be placed upon the diminution of support.

29. Typical examples of planned clashes between left and right occurred on 24 April, around a 'Rally for Britain' in Trafalgar Square supported by the National Party, and on 22 July, at a public meeting held in Stoke Newington Town Hall by the Hackney Committee Against Racism. On both occasions police came between the opposing factions and serious disorder was averted. Similar confrontations were planned in Blackburn and Walsall on 11 and 25 September, respectively, and it was a matter of some satisfaction within the SDS that the Squad was able to provide the Police Forces concerned with accurate assessments of likely ultra-left involvement. On consecutive Sundays throughout October the International Socialists fielded strong contingents in the Bethnal Green area with the expressed intention of 'driving National Front paper sellers off the streets'. Their efforts were constantly frustrated by police but on 7 November, under the guise of a Hackney Trades Council march against racism, they succeeded in forcing a brief but furious encounter with a small group of National Front supporters. A number of police officers were injured and 28 arrests were made. As in previous years, a combined attempt was made by the ultra-left to prevent the National Front holding its Annual General Meeting, held in 1976, on 16 October at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square. Once again, firm and intelligent policing prevented a riot.

30. The murder of an 18-year-old Asian in Southall was followed by a violent demonstration there on 6 June. Joint action by community leaders and police was successful in calming the situation in Southall, but Trotskyists, Maoists and anarchists seized the opportunity to meddle in troubled waters. On 12 June they demonstrated in Southall, Newham and Brixton and on 14 July participated en masse in a march through Central London organised by the Indian Workers Association. Serious disorder was prevented on the last occasion only by swift police intervention.

31. The most bizarre demonstration in the period under review occurred on 2 October, when some 25 supporters of the Communist Party of England (M-L) met outside Lambeth Town Hall to protest against the Kissinger proposals for a Rhodesian settlement. At the conclusion of the meeting they marched off in heavy rain towards Central London, refusing to inform police of their intended destination. As the march crossed Westminster Bridge a precautionary police cordon was thrown across the entrance to Downing Street. The demonstrators, upon meeting the cordon, which outnumbered them about two to one, immediately mounted an attack upon it and six of their number were arrested before peace was restored.

32. Six weeks later, on 17 November, the largest demonstration of the year took place when an estimated 57,000 trade unionists marched from Speakers' Corner to the Tate Gallery in protest against cuts in public expenditure. Whilst the ultra-left involvement was accurately

forecast, all assessments of the total number likely to participate fell short and it is fortunate indeed that the vast majority of trade union members are prepared to resist the prompting of extremists to turn from their traditional mode of peaceful demonstration.

33. The last major public order event of 1976 was held on 27 November. On that date the Women's Peace Movement, better known as the 'Peace People', organised a march from Hyde Park, culminating in a rally at Trafalgar Square, which was supported by 11,000 people. Opposition, co-ordinated by the Peace Through Freedom Committee, took the form of a picket at the assembly point and organised heckling by groups of up to 50 strong in Trafalgar Square itself. The heckling, which involved no more than 200 activists from the left and Sinn Fein, provided a clear example of the difficulties which can face police when small contingents of potentially violent extremists succeed in infiltrating large crowds. On this occasion only good contingency planning enabled police to remove the participants from the Square before they could cause serious trouble.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

34. The indications are that the 1976 pattern of political protest will continue to develop in 1977. With the Government's cuts in public expenditure moving from policy decision towards action the ultra-left is planning to intensify activity, particularly in relation to the closure of hospitals. The intention to bring certain acts of trespass within the criminal law has infuriated the 'squatting' fraternity and opposition to the measures is being built by anarchists and the alternative society in general. Unemployment remains an emotive issue and the International Socialists, who have gained many recruits through their Right to Work Campaign, will be looking to keep this successful ball rolling.

35. The Troops Out Movement has already set about organising its annual 'Bloody Sunday' demonstration and in the New Year will widen its scope to take in active support for the Trade Union Committee Against the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Dissatisfied with the progress of opposition to the 'Peace People', the Movement is determined to be better organised should the latter appear again in London and, in this respect, would undoubtedly be followed by Sinn Fein which lost face through an ineffectual performance against the 'Peace People' in November.

36. The unpredictable Maoists will presumably involve themselves in some of the issues already mentioned and, in addition, can be expected to take to the streets in support of their friends, the 'freedom fighters' of Rhodesia and South Africa.

37. HM The Queen's Jubilee Celebrations, drawing to London Heads of State and leading personalities from the world at large, could well be plagued with demonstrations as the revolutionary organisations seize the opportunity to express their hatred of those governments which oppress 'their international comrades'.

38. The greatest continuing problem for police, however, is likely to come from the animosity between the extremes of left and right. The forthcoming Greater London Council elections, which will bring into the field candidates from both the Socialist Workers Party (IS) and the National Front, will require strenuous efforts in the area of preventive policing if widespread violence is to be precluded.

39. To sum up, there is little hope that 1977 can be other than an exceptionally busy year in the history of preservation of public order in the Capital. It is a tenet of revolutionary philosophy that the credibility of the Establishment and, especially, that part of it concerned with law and order, must be destroyed. To this end the ultra-left orchestrates a constant war of words accompanied, wherever the slightest opportunity presents itself, with physical violence which it sees as an important element of the struggle.

40. The officers of the Special Demonstration Squad understand the difficulties of their uniformed colleagues in the face of potentially violent extremists and will do their utmost to provide the information necessary to ease the burden.

G T M Craft
Chief Inspector

Your Ref: QPB 66 1/8/5
Our Ref: 588/UNREG/694

R. Armstrong Esq.,
Deputy under Secretary of State,
Home Office,
Whitehall,
London,
S.W.1.

6th April, 1976

Dear

I refer once again to the Special Demonstration Squad operating within Special Branch, the formation of which was first authorised in August 1968 to help police combat the serious public order issue then prevailing.

Since then, the SDS has concentrated primarily on gathering intelligence about the activities of those extremists whose political views are to the left of the Communist Party of Great Britain, generally described as the 'ultra-left', and the anarchist and libertarian movements. The primary aim has been to give warning of impending demonstrations and to obtain information, not available from any other source, regarding the number of persons taking part and the degree of planned or likely public disorder. This information enables 'A' Department to assess the required police coverage to ensure adequate control. In pursuance of this aim, valuable information is also obtained regarding subversive organisations which is passed to other Special Branch Squads and to the Security Service.

Coverage of Irish activists has also been undertaken on the fringe organisations such as the Troops Out Movement basically a left-wing libertarian movement,

Demonstrations organised by purely Irish groups during the past year have excited little public interest and have been poorly attended. There are, however, indications that Irish extremists are becoming more active in demonstrations, and this trend will be watched by the SDS.

At present we are fortunate that the degree of violence resulting from public demonstrations has reduced appreciably since 1968. Nevertheless, political protest on the streets is as popular as ever, with participation in some cases amounting to 15/20,000 supporters, and the potential for disorder is such that it requires continual scrutiny.

I would therefore seek authority for the continuation of these activities. The degree of coverage considered necessary is under constant review and all the Squad's systems and areas of coverage have recently been examined in detail by a working party comprising three Chief Superintendents in Special Branch, in order to ensure the minimizing of risk and of unnecessary activity by the Squad. I am pleased to say that the number of officers who are purely operational in this field has gradually been reduced from the original 26 (at 1968) to a current strength of 12. This has to a degree been achieved by more effective use of operational personnel and, under present conditions, is the minimum by which adequate intelligence can be obtained over the wide extremist spectrum.

Security surrounding the activities of the Squad is maintained at a very high level, and the Chief Superintendent and Superintendent responsible ensure the closest supervision of each of the officers operationally involved. Needless to say, the Commissioner and I also exercise a keen interest in their activities.

One of the two headquarters flats was changed last year for security reasons. These flats enable regular meetings of operational officers under safe conditions and also make possible the regular visits of supervising officers. Cover flats for use by the officers are becoming increasingly difficult to find in suitable areas, and without resident landlords, but a successful experiment has been introduced whereby two officers share a double-flat. This is, of course, a more normal way for young men to live in the London area and has the added advantage of reducing the suspicion of well-meaning neighbours conscious of television warnings regarding the threat from Irish terrorists.

With respect to operational efficiency, as well as a security safeguard, the use of second-hand cars and vans continues to be a valuable asset, affording officers the mobility necessary to utilise their individual coverage of organisations to maximum effect.

Expenditure in the first nine months of the financial year 1975/6 was £4,524, and the last three months was not expected to exceed £1,800. Approximately £2,300 of the annual budget of £8,600 will, therefore, remain undrawn.

To justify the budget figure for 1975/6, allowance was made in January 1975 for anticipated increase in rents and running costs of vehicles but, in the event, these fears were not realised. Although considerable difficulty was encountered in obtaining the new headquarters flat it was, in fact, eventually obtained at a slightly lower rental. The anticipated increase in rents of the cover flats did not materialise either and a further reduction in expenditure was brought about by the introduction of double flats for six of the officers.

It is, as ever, difficult to project a figure for likely expenditure for the forthcoming year. The charges for both headquarter flats have recently been placed before the local Rent Officers and the judgement in one case will result in an annual increase of £200; no decision has yet been reached in the case of the second flat but a similar increase must be anticipated. There is little doubt, also, that the rents of cover flats will increase, as will telephone, electricity and gas charges.

In all these circumstances the Receiver has agreed that we should seek a budget of £8,600 for 1976/7, similar to that of last year. (The £2,300 expected to remain in hand from the 1975/76 allocation will be returned to M.P. Funds through the Receiver).

I would, therefore, be grateful if formal approval could be given to the Squad continuing its work as at present, subject to review, for a further twelve months.

Yours sincerely,

J. S. WILSON
Assistant Commissioner (Crime)