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NOTES

Introduction:

Following the events at Lewisham on 13 August 1977, the undermentioned points have been made by officers attached to the Special Branch Special Demonstration Squad, with a view to assisting methods of policing future demonstrations.

General:

The ultra-left organisations' hatred of the National Front must not be underestimated. These groups regard the Front as an instrument used by capitalists to ensure their survival, and are hell bent on forcing the NF off the streets.

Whilst the police are not yet the prime target for the ultra-left, officers escorting marches are always vulnerable to attack because it is a tenet of extreme left-wing revolutionary policy to undermine the forces of law and order.

When such marches are to be policed the following points should be taken into account:

- a) local people must be adequately protected both in regard to limb and property.
- b) police should be properly trained and equipped to deal with a riot situation:
 - i) 'wedges and trudges' are out-dated and too many officers charge into demonstrators quite spontaneously and come to grief when isolated.
 - ii) if a situation is serious enough to warrant the issue of riot shields then, in addition to proper head gear and batons being supplied, the calling into reserve of measures such as water cannons and gas is justified.

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- iii) once a mob implicitly declares its intention to riot, the police must openly display its determination to quell it. There can be no half measures.

- c) use should be made by police of loudspeakers as a method of controlling crowds, with less fear of making enemies of the local populace in particular.

- d) where possible, police should not only line up between the rival factions but also behind the counter demonstrators to prevent the use of broken fencing etc being used as missiles.

Lewisham:

Despite advance warning that trouble was likely in Lewisham High Street, groups of left-wing supporters and, more importantly, coloured youths were allowed to gather.

There was an apparent lack of leadership and there seemed little police co-ordination; properly trained groups of 25-30 officers under the command of a senior officer would appear to be the answer.

The whole area around Clifton Rise should have been sealed off before the left had occupied it in strength.

The National Front march was taken far too close to the main contingent of left-wing supporters.

The mounted police were ineffective and presented an excellent target; left-wing tactics being to throw missiles, break and reform after charges.

There was an obvious lack of officers patrolling potential trouble spots and left-wing supporters were allowed to roam free.

When riot shields were first used a number of officers could have found themselves surrounded. If certain left-wing groups had received more support from their comrades they would have gone between and behind the small groups of officers using the shields.

Special Branch:

With the increased threat of violence at political demonstrations, Special Branch should possibly look into ways of keeping a better check on extreme political groups.

Whilst the Socialist Workers Party took most of the 'credit' for the events at Lewisham, two other groups are worthy of special attention:

- a) The Communist Party of England (M-L), which has entered a new era 'tactically', is capable of causing a disproportionate amount of disruption for its size ('C' Squad is currently considering action in this field).

This group has recently been trying to perfect petrol bombs (which it had considered using at Lewisham), tunes into the police wavelength to monitor police activities at demonstrations and is toying with the idea of equipping its members with 'walkie-talkie' radios for use at political events.

Members of the CPE(M-L) are security conscious and rarely, if ever, give their correct address when stopped or arrested by police. In fact, when arrests are likely the organisation sets a well oiled machine into operation (the manning of a number of CPE(M-L) addresses) to answer bail enquiries, thus securing a member's release without having revealed his or her home address. This was the case with the CPE(M-L) members arrested at Lewisham, and is probably true with a number of other left-wing organisations. The Branch could find itself ill-prepared to carry out raids should the need arise.

- b) Young blacks, the vast majority of whom have little time for the ultra-left, turned out at Lewisham with the sole intention of attacking the police. It must be realised that the hatred of these people for authority has no bounds and the most insignificant of incidents involving them could spark off major public disorder.

Finally, it is known that one member of the SWP was armed with an air pistol at Lewisham which, given the opportunity, he would have used to shoot at the police and members of the National Front. An Asian man, thought to be an SWP supporter, had in his possession a book which had the centre cut out to conceal a knife.

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1 September 1977

L Willingale
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