

Cover sheet

A philosopher once said "Any fool can make the right decision if he has all the relevant information, but it takes a wise man to make the correct decision with insufficient information". The dilemma of the police service to-day is much the same. Crowd control would be comparatively easy if enough policemen were available, but too often there are too few because of the eternal need to achieve a balance between special requirements and everyday duties. The problem therefore is how best can the police service manage its limited resources and a key aspect of this question must be its ability to make an accurate assessment of the likelihood of violence on demonstrations.

Before examining how this ideal state of affairs can be attained it is necessary to examine how our experience has been affected by events in recent years with particular reference to the more turbulent demonstrating factions and factors.

The right to demonstrate has long been established as a democratic right in this country, serving as publicity for a cause or grievance, a safety valve for discontent and as an early warning system of potential unrest. This right, hard won over many years, has unavoidably placed a massive burden upon the police, who have had to act as a barrier between antagonists and bear the brunt of exasperated demonstrators whilst securing the minimum of disruption to the public and maintaining good order. Furthermore, it has to be acknowledged that the increasing awareness by people of their rights will produce more rather than less demonstrations in the future. Nevertheless, despite these immense and increasing difficulties, the police service has largely maintained its objectives to a remarkable degree and still enjoys the broad support of the public, which is so essential. Regardless of this apparently reasonable state of affairs, however, the issues, the circumstances and the participants are changing constantly like a kaleidoscope, necessitating continual adjustments to strategy and tactics. It is an unending and demanding task.

It has to be realised from the outset unfortunately that we must operate on the premise that there is little prospect of significant improvement in police manpower. The police service recently gained a better than usual pay award, which boosted recruiting to some extent,

but anticipated retirements this coming September will much reduce the gains made. With unemployment now running at 1.34 million, one might also expect no lack of good recruits, but the improvement has not been as good as anticipated. If unemployment worsens significantly the Government will be forced to introduce progressively stronger financial strictures thereby curtailing recruitment. By contrast, if unemployment decreases, the pool of labour available to police will shrink. So, if we are unable to make much headway in recruitment at a time when conditions are good, there is little chance in the longer term of rectifying the shortage of police in our major cities, the scene of virtually every large demonstration. On this basis we must assume that a dearth of policemen will exist into the foreseeable future and resolve how to manage our limited resources to the optimum.

When the Grosvenor Square clashes erupted in the spring of 1968 it seemed as if the extremist elements in this country were going to emulate the political and student unrest which had swept much of the Western World. The public had grown accustomed to seeing water cannon, tear gas and riot police on the streets of the capitals of Europe and began to accept that such scenes could occur here. Indeed, many commentators urged the use of these drastic measures. In the event the police were not panicked and on 27 October 1968 they won a victory which was acclaimed throughout the world as a vindication of traditional methods backed by resolution and planning. If the extremists had tried they could not have designed better publicity for the police.

Even though the extreme left, in the guise of the Vietnam Solidarity Committee, had been defeated in 1968 it persisted until 1972 in trying to mount regular large scale demonstrations on a variety of issues, but few were sufficiently emotive to gain continuing and enthusiastic support. Eventually they came to realise that unless a particular issue was sufficiently worthy, large demonstrations were ineffective, costly and disheartening for followers. As a result they began to indulge in more diverse forms of protest and turned to the 'sit-in', twenty four hour pickets, hunger strikes and 'solidarity' for various trade union disputes as a vehicle of protest. In brief, by a more selective and economic use of resources the extreme left ensured a steady flow of publicity for its many causes.

Inevitably, the political situation at home and abroad has been the key to events. The withdrawal of the United States forces from Vietnam in the early seventies deprived the 'left' of its cause celebre. From 1969 to 1974 the Northern Ireland question provided a platform for protest, although differences between the various factions led to a poorly organised campaign and when the Prevention of Terrorism Act was introduced in 1974 it effectively stultified protest. It would be naive to think that broader legislation on the same lines would curb all potentially violent demonstrations. Ireland is a problem peculiar to British politics in so far as it has been the only issue which has brought the terrorist into direct conflict with the British public, thereby alienating virtually all political support and gaining backing for otherwise unacceptable Draconian measures.

More recently the causes of protest have been racism and trade union disputes. The former conflict had been festering for years and emerged in earnest in 1974 when the battle of Red Lion Square took place. The gradual increase in the activities of the National Front during the early 1970s led to a predictable escalation of left wing disquiet and matters came to a head at Red Lion Square. The events of that day prompted the setting-up of an official enquiry to examine the causes and to make recommendations. The principal findings of that enquiry were:-

- a) the present law was adequate
- b) routes for marches should be confirmed in writing beforehand
- c) police should have power to direct marches
- d) before clearing demonstrators police should ensure that access for clearance was possible and whenever practicable a warning should be given beforehand
- e) rival marches should be kept an effective distance apart.

As a rider to these recommendations police also recognised the need to provide officers with adequate protection e.g. goggles, shields, strengthened helmets and other similar equipment.

More recently the Grunwicks affair provided a fine example of left-wing solidarity with 'exploited' workers which gave rise to equally violent scenes. This dispute had much in common with the Red Lion Square affair from a police viewpoint for both took place in confined areas, there

was a considerable element of premeditated violence and the Trotskyist groups were the prime offenders. Each proved only too clearly the difficulties in controlling sizeable crowds bent on disorder and in the case of Grunwicks there was the added complication of the confused state of the law on picketing.

Although Ireland eventually ceased to be an issue in a demonstrational sense, it nevertheless provided an excellent example of a clearly defined three stage response to an emotive issue. Within a day or two of Bloody Sunday in 1972 the sympathetic Irish and extreme left elements hastily mounted small but vociferous pickets at 10, Downing Street and other appropriate venues, which were easily managed by police. However, a week after the event some 2,000 demonstrators staged a violent protest in Whitehall, resulting in many arrests, considerable damage and disorder - the 'Coffins' demonstration. Some two months later a much larger demonstration comprising 14,000 persons took part in a better organised protest on the same issue, but this proved to be no more than a procession with speeches at the conclusion. At no stage was there any hint of violence. The lesson therefore of Bloody Sunday was that the organisers took a week to mobilise effective support and when maximum support was gained some two months later the issue was too removed to prompt violence. This three stage phenomenon has been repeated on various occasions since and points quite clearly to the risk of violence being greatest some five days to a week after the initiating event. What occurs when the larger demonstration is held some time afterwards is that time allows tempers to cool and causes the introduction of less extreme groups and effectively 'waters down' militancy. Added to this, bigger demonstrations require greater publicity and time, giving police more opportunity to formulate adequate arrangements.

Thus, although the experience of the past ten years or so contains much to teach us about the nature of demonstrations and the source of probable violence, no single demonstration can be taken as an absolute blueprint for handling any future demonstrations. Nevertheless the main areas requiring attention by police are well delineated and have become the subject of close and continuing scrutiny.

It is a truism that full and prior knowledge of extremist plans for demonstrations is the corner-stone for police success in planning for demonstrations. Fortunately, our liberal democratic system which

positively encourages demonstrations, is ultimately our best weapon for obtaining intelligence. Only rarely do the extremists formulate their plans in total secrecy and normally, albeit grudgingly, they will supply to police the broad outline of their intentions. Additionally, the need to enlist support for any event necessitates publicity, usually by leaflet, advertisements in sympathetic publications and publicity in the newspaper of the organising group. In more authoritarian countries, where the underground system is by necessity more widespread, it is possible to raise significant support in secret, but in this country other than for small 'sit-ins' or pickets it is virtually impossible to do so.

The more precise plans of extremists are normally supplied by Special Branch who employ rather more discreet and sophisticated means of obtaining information. Occasionally, Special Branch obtains information from highly sensitive sources, disclosure of which would involve considerable risk to informants or seriously jeopardise future operations. For example, it may be known that the International Marxist Group plans to hold a six man 'sit-in' at an Embassy and knowledge of this is confined to a few 'trusted' supporters. Clearly, if police are found to be waiting for the would-be participants it would pose very serious problems for the source. Similarly, if the 'sit-in' is allowed to continue it might prove to be embarrassingly politically. A solution is to acquaint uniformed police of the problem and to arrange for sufficient officers to be in the vicinity so they can respond to the call of a 'coincidentally' passing officer at the start of the 'sit-in'. In this way the source is protected, police do not act precipitately, as they might if arriving unbriefed, publicity is kept to a minimum and good order maintained. In short, by good planning and imagination most extremist plans can be combated.

The overall result is that by overt and covert methods it is possible to obtain an excellent idea of the intentions of most extremist groups involved in organising demonstrations. Unfortunately, the organisers are not always accurate in their personal forecasts of events. They almost invariably overestimate support, although police have long since become adept at adjusting these predictions. More disturbingly there have been instances when demonstrations have been poorly orchestrated and the organisers have had neither the means, nor the control, to co-ordinate affairs on the day. The annual Notting Hill Carnival has been an

excellent example of this lack of cohesive and effective control, when disparate groups make police planning difficult in the extreme.

Prior to any sizeable demonstration taking place it is patently advantageous to discuss arrangements with the organisers. Routes can be settled, timings fixed and the organisers left in no doubt about police directions and what will occur if there is violence or non-compliance. These meetings also serve as an ideal opportunity to judge the attitude of the organisers. It has to be accepted that Trotskyists and Maoists barely hide their contempt for police and so their general intentions are often evident from their demeanour.

The Fascists, on the contrary, are nearly always co-operative and whenever possible try to align themselves with the police in their support of law and order to the extent of quoting this co-operation as a justification of their policies. Rather like the Communist Party of Great Britain, they are courting respectability as a matter of policy, so police should never be lulled into forgetting the true nature of their character. Whenever rival groups plan events at the same venue a strict policy of 'first come first served' must be adhered to. An alternative venue may be suggested to the second group, but the possibility of clashes must be borne in mind. Likewise, any choice of venue by any demonstrating group must be examined carefully to judge the problems it may pose e.g. provocative immigrant area, potential targets, geographical problems, etc.

Once the intelligence of any forthcoming demonstration is collated, usually two or three days beforehand, it is vital that a central briefing be held for all supervising officers, usually inspectors and above, so that all the police elements involved can understand what is planned and anticipated and so that any difficulties can be resolved beforehand. Groups of officers, usually in serials of twenty, will be allocated to precise duties or allotted to a reserve function. Apart from details of the demonstration, the Operation Order will contain relevant information about charge centres, communications, traffic plans, availability of specialist departments and refreshment arrangements.

The briefing of individual serials will usually be held on the day in question and whenever practicable should be followed by a meal immediately prior to taking up positions. It has long been recognised that an army marches on its stomach and the police service is no exception.

No single factor maintains morale better than good feeding arrangements. It may seem expensive in the short term and even be wasteful on occasions, but ultimately the outlay is worthwhile.

In this age of the silicon chip, computers and specialised training it is only too easy to begin to rely too much on technical resources, but the most valuable weapon of police in all situations remains the ability of the individual officer accurately and succinctly to report what he sees. This is especially true of demonstrations. If marchers or participants are wearing helmets, gloves, carrying placards affixed to unnecessarily large pieces of wood or holding other items capable of being used offensively it is a transparent indication that violence is intended. Whenever these signs are noted comprehensive details must be passed immediately to supervising officers so that the extent of any apparent intention to cause violence can be judged and appropriate measures can be effected to thwart or minimise any outbreak of disorder.

More indistinct signs are the linking of arms and running - a practice often used by Trotskyist groups, particularly the International Marxist Group. Contrary to expectations, chanting in unison usually denotes good spirits and only occasionally signifies violence. Chanting seems to alleviate pent-up feelings and serves to defuse situations. Nevertheless inexperienced officers may, understandably, become disconcerted when subjected to abuse and should be briefed to ignore offensive remarks directed at them. Sir Richard Mayne, the first Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, when speaking on the role of police said that by the use of "tact and good humour much can be obtained". No better strategy of the police approach to its tasks has ever been uttered, for the humorous remark and tolerant forbearance are infinitely more productive than the hasty retort or sullen mutterings.

Another aspect to this problem is the psychology of crowd behaviour. Study of this subject has been made in some detail for the past century, but as might be expected, no precise answers have emerged. Nevertheless it is evident that if several of certain conditions are present at the same time there is considerable risk of extremely volatile situations developing which may lead to mob rule and riot. The principal factors are:-

- a) a sufficiently emotive cause
- b) a charismatic and persuasive figure to lead the protestors.

- c) a collective identification of purpose
- d) sufficient numbers to create an overwhelming sense of power
- e) insufficient controlling forces so that the crowd gains confidence in its ability to achieve its purpose

Once a riot situation has taken hold it spreads like a fire storm swept along by its own inexorable fury, only being extinguished when it runs out of fuel. Oddly enough, mass panic manifests many of the characteristics of a riot. Individuals in the group lose their ability to think independently and they act in mad unison, like a herd of wildebeests rushing to and fro in a frantic attempt to evade attacking lionesses. Psychologists will assert this is some primeval instinct re-asserting itself. Certainly anyone who has experienced a riot has no illusions about the frightening power exhibited. In the final analysis, whatever the psychological truth may be, experienced officers have learned to recognise the early indications of trouble and quickly seek to employ the old maxim of divide and conquer. In other words by reducing the crowd into manageable sections which do not in themselves have the same ability to gain momentum.

The execution of divide and conquer techniques have always been an integral part of police handling of demonstrations and much thought has been given to methods of achieving this object. Cordons and 'flying wedges' have been used successfully in crowd containment and dispersal, but it has to be appreciated such tactics require specially co-ordinated and disciplined manoeuvres, which need to be practised thoroughly in training. Moreover, whenever practicable, only the fitter officers should be engaged on these duties and they should be issued adequate protective clothing and equipment.

In certain particularly difficult situations it may be necessary to draw truncheons and deploy police horses to restore good order and to save colleagues from further or imminent injury. Once truncheons have been drawn wrong-doers should be left in no doubt that police intend to succeed in their intention of restoring order, although as soon as order has been re-asserted truncheons must be sheathed promptly.

To accomplish good control, co-ordination, flexibility and the latest information on events demands a well drilled and equipped control centre.

Only by such control, aided by planning boards, maps, charts and even television when available, can a reasonably accurate picture of events be achieved. Messages must be properly recorded and dealt with and functions within the control centre clearly defined. Whenever possible the officers manning this control, which is usually located at headquarters, should be well versed in this aspect of police work for only by their calm efficient service can the best deployment of resources be set in motion.

Another factor is the influence of the news media. Unwittingly or otherwise the press tend to attract violence and this is especially so when television crews use arc lamps. All too frequently minor scuffles which attract media attention develop into more serious disorder simply because they are present. It must never be forgotten that publicity is the principal aim of demonstrators and like moths they are unerringly drawn to the arc lamps. Police must therefore be fully alert to the added risk of violence in the vicinity of media representatives, who must be handled firmly and, if necessary, their numbers should be restricted, for apart from their catalytic effect on disorder they can hinder the arrival of police re-inforcements. As in most things, nevertheless, there are benefits to be derived from media coverage. In certain cases film can be obtained for helping to resolve the truth and for training purposes. Also, despite the undoubted force used by police from time to time the mass media usually present a picture which is broadly favourable to police, whereas undue restriction of their coverage would inevitably bring bad publicity regardless of the truth.

It has often been argued that a special force should be recruited for crowd control purposes and allied duties along the lines of the CRS in France. In the short term this course may be effective, but in the longer run it must lead to the alienation of comparatively moderate demonstrators. In essence the case for the CRS style of policing is too simplistic and hinges on the use of unthinking brute force without subtlety. British police methods, far from being the "muddling through" that many ascribe to it, are in truth based on an active, constructive and continuing appraisal of events aimed at maximum efficiency and flexibility. This success has been based in no small part on the use of officers who are in touch with the public in everyday situations and not incarcerated in barracks. Blanket solutions cannot be applied with so

mercurial a task as the control of demonstrations. Crowds are like fingerprints - no two are the same.

The prediction of violence is patently not just a question of gaining intelligence on demonstrators' plans. It also involves the many factors which increase or diminish the risk of violence. Moreover it has to be appreciated that occasionally events will get out of hand if only because police have finite resources, whereas the resources of potential demonstrators are comparatively infinite. There will also be times when things will go horribly wrong and policemen will be portrayed as fascist brutes, but when reverses are suffered police must not be diverted into urging the enactment of repressive legislation, as distinct from minor adjustments to the law. The thin blue line has long been a strength of the British democratic system and provided it remains steadfast, despite its lack of manpower, it has the ability to keep the peace.

Your essay reveals a considerably amount of analysis of political demonstrations, particularly in the Met. Clearly the force has learned many lessons. It seems to me though that we can never be confident in our predictions and so must continue to plan for every contingency, holding large numbers of officers in reserve.

Your essay opened up many avenues of thought not previously considered by me - probably your Branch experience. The paper is well structured, contains a high level of analysis and has been well researched. It gains much from your own special insights. A very good piece of work.

v. 3.

A number of major demonstrations have recently been held outside London. Is Branch/Uniform liaison affected away from the Met?

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

The Origins of Crowd Psychology - Robert A. Nye

Public Enquiry into Red Lion Square Disorder

East-West Digest 1975 - Robert Mark lecture

Police Responsibilities in Relation to Public
Disorder - D. Hopwood