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Intelligence Gathering Problems for Major Demonstrations

(1) Gentlemen, you have heard the representatives of the Security Service give you the political extremist background to the current protest movement, while Mr. Hamblin has outlined the problems met by his Service in obtaining information in the student and university setting. It is my intention to place before you the difficulties we as a police Special Branch unit face in securing intelligence about the plans and intentions of the participants in the type of major demonstration we have experienced in London during this past year, and which we expect to continue to experience in the months ahead. I will then indicate how we try to overcome them.

(2) These particular demonstrations confront us with special problems of information gathering of a nature we have not encountered to the same degree before within my personal experience. The essential difficulty lies in the fact that we are not at present dealing with one single disciplined organisation but, under the umbrella of an Ad Hoc Committee, with a multiplicity of individual groups. These may all ostensibly subscribe to the main theme of the demonstration but some pursue within it very different ends to those publicly stated by the organisers. A good example of this occurred during the final day of this year's Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament Aldermaston march. On the way to Trafalgar Square a group of anarchists and trotskyists peeled off to demonstrate at the German Embassy in Belgrave Square over the shooting in Berlin of a German student leader, Rudi Dutschke; and at the conclusion of the march similar groups under Tariq ALI headed off for the "Daily Mirror" building which houses the headquarters of the German Springer publishing group, held by the students to be morally responsible for the

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shooting of Dutschke. At both places there were scenes of violence around issues which had nothing to do with nuclear disarmament. Then there are groups within groups, ready to act independently of their parent body and making their tactical plans at very short notice. It is from these fringe elements that most of the trouble and disorder stems, and therefore it is on them we are required to concentrate a heavy weight of intelligence gathering effort. As a result of recent Press publicity about so-called Special Branch "undercover squads" in relation to the October demonstration, we have learned that certain extremist leaders at branch level have taken the view that there is no point in their making plans at meetings, as the police will get to know of them. This is flattering to our ego, but hardly helpful, because the organisation's members are now being told to split into small groups to make plans in greater secrecy. There is clearly a limit to which any S.B. organisation can go to penetrate beforehand so many relatively minuscule but potentially violent groups, and therefore a certain amount has to be left to coverage of the demonstration on the day. Of this latter aspect more anon.

(3) Faced with this complex situation, it at once becomes clear that there can be no magic solution to the problem, no slick formula which will quickly provide all the answers. You cannot use just one or even two of the normal techniques for intelligence gathering and expect to learn everything you need to know. What you will have to do is apply the well tried patient police technique of grafting for it. You will have to employ all available methods of information gathering on as all embracing and intensive a scale as manpower availability will permit in an effort to obtain the maximum possible result. By concentrating the direction of

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your main attack on the branches of those groups you expect to cause the most trouble, you will in some measure go far to overcome the problem set by their numbers and diversity.

- (4) The following sources of information are used by us:-
- (a) Publications. Close scrutiny of the different organisations' publications and leaflets can lead to an assessment of the likely mood of the demonstrators, their overt plans of action and some idea of the support expected.
  - (b) Contacts. Approach can be made to the leading members of an organisation, e.g. the Secretary or Press Officer. It depends, of course, on the attitude of the organisation towards police as to whether any real co-operation will be forthcoming. Trotskyist and anarchist groups, who predominate at current major demonstrations, will give no help, but the leaders of other participating groups with a less distrustful attitude to police can be expected to assist. Even the Communist Party can be approached these days with an even chance of some general information emerging.
  - (c) Informants. Informants within a dangerous organisation are, of course, absolutely essential. They are not always easy to get, but it is surprising how trained officers, in the pursuance of routine Special Branch periodical enquiries about individuals, can identify possibles in this line, and, by careful approach and handling, exploit them to advantage.

Mr. Hamblin has made reference to our technique of trying to obtain as an informant someone who is already established in an

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organisation. We use this method advisedly because we have a greater need than the Security Service for immediate information about a group's plans to disturb public order. An established, politically conscious individual can, we think, produce this for us more quickly than a young, possibly politically unsophisticated person whose real value lies in long term exploitation. Our man should already be an accepted member whose past actions render him above suspicion, and, under proper direction and encouragement he will have a shorter distance to travel to the inner councils. How do we obtain them?

It is a reasonable proposition to say that many anarchists and trotskyists are psychologically disturbed (otherwise they would not be anarchists and trotskyists) and although they outwardly accept the credo of the organisation to which they belong, they sometimes find it does not fulfil all their inner needs. They want someone or something of substance to hang on to, and on more than one occasion we have unearthed individuals with this need to talk to a sympathetic officer. By skilful cultivation, encouraged eventually by suitable payment, such a person can be well exploited. One of my officers has said to me, when discussing his experience in the application of this technique, "We have found that many of these people want to be loved and understood". Odd, but true. We have found too, that such informants produce their best work and results when handled by their original "father confessor". When, for any reason, he or she has to be changed, the quality of the informant's product can drop. So, we try

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to keep the same officer with him as far as possible and for as long as possible.

This is not to say that all our informants are of this type. Like the Security Service we also go for the long term operator. There are occasions when, if they happen to be well entrenched in a particular group responsible for planning some diabolical action, their products can be quite spectacular. But the emphasis on the dangers presented by different groups changes quickly, and to have all your eggs in one basket can lead to your being starved of information about a group which suddenly emerges as militantly active and dangerous.

Then there are informants who can be used on a very short term basis for perhaps a particular private meeting or operation. Unlike the first two categories these will mostly be loyal citizens, friends of officers, who will get a "kick" out of acting as agents, and who, for little more than their expenses and/or a suitable present, will turn in some good material if properly coached. They will probably not wish to compromise themselves further after their mission has been accomplished, but their limited employment will be useful, even though they do not become more than rank and file members of an organisation for the period of their task.

- (d) Coverage of public meetings, indoor and outdoor, by plain clothes officers, before the main demonstration. Here the officer may simply attend, observe, obtain all relevant literature on sale or distributed, mentally note and subsequently

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report, familiarising himself, of course, with the identities of those present. Here much may be learned of the plans and the mood of the adherents of the group. It is like taking the political temperature and is always a most valuable and necessary source of information.

Special Branch officers are, of course, police officers. If there is incitement or other offence disclosed at any meeting, the officers record officially what is said and usually a report is submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions. We have found however, that a good deal depends on the political climate at the time, and decisions as to prosecution are made accordingly.

(e) Infiltration. Suitable officers attending meetings may be given the task of getting themselves accepted by the organisers and, by following this up, learn something of their inner plans and intentions at subsequent private gatherings. This is always a tricky assignment, involving a good cover story, a cover address for contact, and plenty of nerve and imagination on the part of the officer. We have found some of our W.D.Cs very good at this. It is a technique which we employ only for demonstrations or operations of some consequence, where the benefit to be gained by the use of a well trained officer well outweighs the risk taken by his possible exposure. . . The quality of such an officer's reportage of private meetings and gatherings is, because of his specialised training, always very much higher than that of an ordinary informant. I personally rate this method of intelligence

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gathering as of tremendous value, particularly if it can be effected in the area of the groups and branches where some of the wilder fringe elements are to be found.

There is one danger, however, which I must stress. Use of an officer in this way exposes police to the accusation of acting as agents provocateurs, should the identity of the officer be exposed. To avoid this, those involved must be carefully instructed not to get themselves elected to any office in the organisation or to take any active part in planning operations which would bring the group into contact with the law.

- (f) The Press. Experience has shown that many groups who are planning a sudden, action of protest make prior contact with the Press in order to receive maximum publicity, but do not advisedly inform police. If the co-operation of the Press can be obtained so that information of this nature is passed to police immediately, disorder can be prevented. This is something which it may be easier to effect in the Provinces where there are fewer and smaller papers than in the Metropolis, and where a more direct relationship with editors can subsist.
- (g) Periodical, personal reports on selected active extremists can lead to sources of information close to the suspect from which useful material can be obtained. It is also from this sort of routine, bread and butter, Special Branch action by experienced officers that a potential informant can be spotted and subsequently exploited.
- (h) The public. From time to time, as we all know,

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members of the public contact police to give snippets of information they have or can obtain about extremists, or to report suspicious happenings. While most of the information from such sources is usually either known or useless, there is always a proportion of value and interest, and these approaches are never ignored. We always have the donor of the information seen by an officer knowledgeable in his subject and the result properly reported and assessed, just as it would be for a person giving information about crime.

- (i) Special Branch Port Units. Information comes from S.B. officers and Immigration Officers at the ports of the movements of known overseas political suspects. A thorough search of their person and baggage may lead to information being obtained about their particular tactics and intentions vis-à-vis the demonstration. Prior information about the arrival of such groups is often passed to us by the Security Service.
- (j) The Metropolitan Force itself is always a good source of information, and all matters of extremist political interest coming to notice of our uniform and C.I.D. colleagues are referred through to Special Branch. Contact is made with the crime intelligence units and the station collators, who, properly educated and exploited are likewise good sources to tap, particularly as they can lead to the discovery of a potential informant.
- (k) Other police forces. Where an issue, such as the current protest movement ostensibly against the Vietnam war can draw in extremists from other police force areas, we approach the C.Cs concerned



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and ask them to supply information of the intentions of such groups to travel to London to take part in the demonstration. We have had some very useful successes here. For both the March and July demonstrations we had prior notice from a number of provincial forces of the movements of coaches bringing local demonstrators to London. Action was then taken through our traffic patrols to have these coaches stopped and searched for offensive weapons. The actual coaches themselves were examined by the patrols and, by a remarkable coincidence, some were found to be sufficiently defective mechanically to have their journey to London delayed.

(1) Security Service co-operation. Prior to any major demonstration we are, of course, much in contact with the Security Service who afford us considerable practical assistance by providing information from their sources and resources. It is, as you will appreciate, not for me to enlarge on the nature of these resources, but I should like to take this opportunity to say how greatly we value their assistance which makes our task so much less difficult.

(5) All the above information is reported and fed to a senior officer who is given the responsibility of assessing and directing action on it. This, of course, includes passing on relevant material to the uniform branch, great care being taken over the matter of source protection. In the case of large demonstrations this officer is given the task of preparing a weekly appreciation of all the information that comes to hand to place before the uniform branch, so that they can plan ahead and make their

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dispositions accordingly. Home Office too are kept well in the picture and are given copies of these situation reports.

(6) The preliminary work before the demonstration should have resulted at least in the identification of the groups most likely to cause trouble, and it is on these that close attention is focussed on the day. Suitably attired, bearded, long haired officers are directed to stay among them to learn of any sudden spontaneous tactical diversion they may intend from the main demonstration. This could be to any of twenty or thirty public buildings in London. Having learned something important, an officer has to transmit it as soon as possible to the uniform branch so that the men can be deployed accordingly. For this we are obtaining specially adapted transceivers so that he can communicate his information without losing contact with the group in which he is interested. There are, of course, other variations with regard to transmitting such information which can be adapted to suit local conditions, and I don't propose to enlarge on them to an audience probably a good deal more knowledgeable in this field than I am.

(7) To sum up, gentlemen. The special features of to-day's violent demonstrations are the multiplicity and diversity of organisations taking part. To secure as much information as possible about their real intentions it is necessary to employ every available Special Branch technique and to make use of all relevant resources of the police and the Security Service. The demonstration on the day must be literally swamped with Special Branch officers to give maximum coverage for intelligence gathering. They must pay close attention to the most militant groups and transmit back

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to a central control as quickly as possible information about these groups' intentions.

(8) In closing I would like to take this opportunity to refer to the circular letter we sent out to Chief Constables in mid-August concerning the October demonstration in London, and to ask you to try to supply us with as much information as possible about the plans and intentions of extremists from your areas. This will be greatly appreciated.  
Thank you.

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