

Memorandum

Noted
24/57

1A

I was today present at a meeting in A.S concerning the forthcoming demonstration to be held in Lewisham on 13.8.77 by the National Front and at which it is expected there will be a serious counter demonstration by left-wing elements.

Present were: ACA. Mr. GIBSON
DAC AS Mr. HELM
A/Cdr. P. STOW
A.7 Cdr. STOW
C.I. (AS) SPEED
D.I. [redacted] 3
D.I. Creamer S.B.

2. The National Front march is due to assemble in Clifton Rise and leave at about 2.30p.m. along a route through the main streets of Lewisham. 4 D.I. [redacted] gave an outline of the support for this march which he estimated at about 1,500 strong. He explained that the NF supporters were in a determined mood and would not willingly accept any arrangement whereby they were not allowed to parade through the main shopping area of Lewisham.

3. With regard to the left-wing opposition I said that there was considerable opposition within the borough of Lewisham to the NF march and that the more virulent elements among the left- i.e. S.W.P. - had intentions to stop the marchers leaving Clifton Rise, either by throwing a cordon across the street or some other means. In estimating the strength of the militant left-wing I said that the number could be up to three thousand, although the moderate left-wing elements might seek some way to avoid confrontation.

4. It transpired that a deputation from the All Lewisham Campaign Against Racism and Fascism.- headed by Bishop Mervyn STOCKWOOD and including a local NF - had visited A.S yesterday and had made representations to ACA that police ban the NF march. Furthermore in order to avoid confrontation between ALCARF members and the NF it was proposed to organise a march of ALCARF supporters to take place in the morning (from 10.30a.m. to 1p.m.) of 13.8.77 along an almost identical route to that of the National Front but ending just outside Goldsmiths College close to Clifton Rise, in effect taking the reverse route to the NF. This would leave an hour or so for the left-wing march to clear the streets before the NF march got under way.

5. There was some discussion as to the purpose of the ALCARF demonstration. I put the view that the purpose was a sincere attempt to express local opposition to the NF in a moderate and lawful way; to some extent I was supported by the A.7 officer. ACA said that he was concerned that the ALCARF march would have the effect (whether intended or not) of assembling a lot of left-wing persons at the very point and time when the NF march was due to start, for by delaying matters elements in the ALCARF march could ensure that they arrived in the vicinity of Clifton Rise by 2p.m. and not 1p.m. ACA therefore insisted that the ALCARF march should be routed in reverse order, that is to start near Clifton Rise and to go to a terminal point further down in Lewisham High Street. This change has to be agreed with the organisers. I accepted that this was a reasonable plan but that it would not dispose of all the left-wing elements; there would still be about 2,000 militants prepared to confront the NF in the afternoon. (As matters stand therefore this change of route has to be put to the ALCARF organisers. I feel that they will be reluctant to accept it and that even if they do the only effect will be to reduce the support for their march so that instead of being some 2-3,000 strong it will only be a few hundred. I did not make this point at the meeting as the central problem for the 13th August is not the ALCARF march but the antics of the ultra-left opposition.) I emphasised the point made earlier that the strategy of the militants would be to stop the NF march leaving Clifton Rise.

6. ACA then raised a wider question as to what would be the reaction by extremists of either right or left to a total ban on demonstrations in

left-wing would be to welcome such a ban because it would hit the NF harder than the left-wing. Except for the Lewisham 21 matter there is not much for the left-wing to demonstrate about in Lewisham. Even so to obtain a temporary alleviation of trouble in Lewisham by banning demonstrations could well lay up trouble for the future.

7. The ACA indicated that if a ban was imposed in Lewisham then a precedent would have been set which would virtually make it impossible for the NF ever to hold demonstrations in London. There would be a good case from a police viewpoint for resisting any call for a ban on the NF march.

8. It is a widely held ~~lasting~~ view that NF marches are inherently objectionable and harmful to race relations. The deputation which called on AS yesterday included John SILKIN (Health Minister) Richard MOYNE (Lewisham E MP) Christopher PRICE as well as the Mayor of Lewisham and the Bishop of Southwark. Clearly the question of a ban will be given serious consideration by the Commissioner. The way things are going it looks as though he may well be advised against it by A. Department and that he might ask Special Branch more directly for an opinion, at top level.

9. There is room for differences of opinion on both sides and is something of a political decision. In setting out the obvious - that a ban would be welcomed by the left and resented by the right - I do not think D.I. [redacted] and I can be said to have misrepresented the views of the Branch. At the same time I feel that neither of us should be drawn into such discussions any further, ~~without some brief as to what we should~~

[6]

(R. Creamer)
Inspector.

SB 27.7.77