

Cover Sheet

Introduction

Last Saturday, 13 August, about 2,000 supporters of the National Front held a march in the London Borough of Lewisham where it enjoys a high degree of support ostensibly to protest at the high incidence of robbery by young blacks in the area.

Counter-demonstrations were organised in the morning by the All Lewisham Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (ALCARAF) and in the afternoon by the "August 13th Ad Hoc Committee". The former affair, supported by 5,000 persons, passed without incident. The afternoon demonstration, attended by about 4,000, clashed with police resulting in 212 arrests and a large number of police and demonstrators being injured. In the forefront of these clashes was the Trotskyist group known as the Socialist Workers Party.

The National Front

Formed in 1966 from the merger of the extremist League of Empire Loyalists, the British National Party and the Greater Britain Movement. Its policies are anti-communist, racist, anti-coloured immigration, anti-Common Market, and pro-'old' Commonwealth.

Although the Front endeavours to present an image of respectability it inevitably suffers from the reputation and activities of an unruly vicious and indisciplined minority. Its estimated membership is 14,000. Extreme Left hatred of the Front has been seen in various counter-demonstrations mounted against its public activities. The first major event of this nature occurred in June 1974 when left-wing demonstrators attempted to prevent a 900 strong National Front march from reaching Conway Hall in Red Lion Square, WC1. This resulted in 55 persons arrested and 40 police injured. The untimely death of a student provided a martyr for the left, and led to the Scarman Enquiry.

A number of anti-fascist committees was subsequently formed, principally in Hackney, Islington, Battersea and Wandsworth. During the remainder of 1974 and throughout 1975 physical confrontation was thwarted by adequate coverage by police. In 1976 the threat of possible violence led to the National Front being banned from using Trafalgar Square as well as being refused permission to hold meetings in several public buildings in London.

The most frequent scenes of conflict occurred in Brick Lane, E1, and to a lesser extent in Barking, Brixton, Lewisham, Streatham and Wood Green, where National Front members regularly sold newspapers. Attempts by left-wing extremists to stop this were in the main unsuccessful, but a particularly nasty incident occurred in November 1976 when a group of International Socialists (now the Socialist Workers Party) broke away from an anti-racist march in the East End and deliberately attacked National Front paper sellers. 28 arrests were made.

The frequency of such clashes has increased this year and the Front, while maintaining a degree of order within its own ranks, has been deliberately provocative to its opponents.

Socialist Workers Party

Formerly the International Socialists, it developed in 1950 from the Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist Party. It drew its original support mainly from universities and institutes of higher education, and during the twelve years 1957-68 the war in Vietnam provided the focal point for its activities.

In 1970 there was a shift of emphasis from academic to industrial exploitation and it now has over 120 cells of 3-10 members in factories throughout the country. Membership has increased from 991 in 1971 to about 4,200 this year and is believed to be rising rapidly.

The basic aim of the Party is smashing the capitalist state by means of a proletarian revolution and it supports the causes of 'oppressed minorities'. In order to achieve its aims, the Party has stated ('Socialist Worker' 2.7.77) "There would be only one way to defeat this combination (the police and army). It would be to prepare to meet the force of these scum with the force of a united, militant class the great founders of Marxism concluded that socialism could only win when the existing police and army were smashed".

The SWP's industrial strength was manifest at Grunwicks where it has performed a dominant and violent role.

The SWP also purports to be the champion of the Black community but is generally only able to secure the support of the younger and more militant blacks to whom its policy of violent confrontation no doubt appeals. The Party publishes a newspaper 'Flame' which, has not been received with great favour by the coloured community. It is edited by Kim GORDON, who is black and a candidate in the current by-election in the Ladywell constituency of Birmingham.

The situation in Lewisham came to a head in June this year when 21 coloured youths were arrested for conspiring to rob and associated offences. The arrests highlighted the serious problem of organised street thefts and the affair has subsequently been exploited by the SWP. The Party adopted similar tactics in the cases of the 'Harlesden 8' and the 'Islington 18' (those accused of offences in connection with last year's Notting Hill Carnival) with little success. The parents of some of the accused at Lewisham have sought injunctions to prevent interference by the SWP.

Comment

The protagonists of such extremist groups as NF and the SWP, and they are not alone, have no regard for the deep and lasting damage their militancy and strong-arm tactics can achieve - particularly in that extremely sensitive area of race relations where the danger of violent conflict is so great. It is important, therefore, that they and their like be convinced that much of what they do is criminal and will not be tolerated.

Legislation

Existing legislation is adequate in principle - it is the collection of sufficient evidence to ensure conviction which is the police problem.

I have, nevertheless, been advised that consideration might be given to amending Section 3(2) and 3(3) of the Public Order Act 1936 to include "public meeting"; that would enable a chief officer of police to apply to ban such meetings on the same basis as he is now able to apply to ban public processions to prevent serious public disorder.

Additionally, consideration ought to be given to extending the power of arrest to those persons who contravene Section 3 by taking part in banned public processions, and also those who commit an offence under Section 5A, dealing with racial hatred.

The consideration of possible legal sanctions to give police a greater pre-emptive strike capacity against violent extremists is hedged with such important and fundamental legal, political and constitutional problems as to make them unworthy of pursuit at this time.

In essence, I see the prospect of new legislation as being of minor importance at present. If, however, the situation continues to deteriorate, it may become necessary to review this aspect and consider, for example, whether if, after being warned officially by public address systems, those who remain with missile throwing crowds could be automatically arrested for a summary offence.

Lessons to be learned

The most important lesson to be learned is that there is a limit to the patience and forbearance of a dedicated, loyal and professional police force and the generally law-abiding and peace-loving public they aim to serve. If the violent revolutionary attempts being made from both ends of the political spectrum to destroy the traditional image of the police in this country were to be at all successful, the changes in policing methods and the consequential fall-off in public esteem and support would be of the utmost seriousness.

It follows, therefore, that government, all other responsible agencies and senior police management must make urgent and earnest endeavours to ensure that in supporting police in their unenviable task they help consolidate the morale of the service, improve public support, and diminish the disproportionate importance of a meagre band of trouble-makers thereby.

Tactics

I do not think we have yet exhausted the traditional possibilities for maintaining public tranquility. Do we want a CRS or National Guard type development? We are certainly in a new era of violent demonstration which may demand some kind of alternative policing if it gets worse - and certainly at Lewisham we had information of intentions to use a rifle and petrol bombs, about which investigations continue.

The fundamental option is whether or not we seek to police demonstrations in accord with time-honoured tradition, or, in meeting violence with violence, and in order to protect the innocent public and preserve the safety of police we move towards para-military control of public disorder.

Defensively, given that there is a limit to which gratuitous and often serious injury can be allowed to be inflicted on police, there is a clear need for improved protective equipment. This must take into account improved protection of vehicles, and such personal equipment as will protect officers from missiles, corrosive fluid, tear gas and smoke. The increased vulnerability of mounted police and their horses is also of considerable concern.

Offensively, there is a wide and distasteful range of "weaponry" ranging from water-cannon, smoke and tear gas, through to armoured carriers, rubber-bullets and rifles. I do not think we are yet at the point where these should be given serious consideration.

There is perhaps another way which could be developed and that is, by ^{most} recourse to the Police Mutual Aid Scheme, to ensure that police are always present in such massive numbers as to inhibit violence in the first place and more easily arrest offending demonstrators in the second. It was this tactic used in 1968 which finally ended the very violent demos in Grosvenor Square. Allegations of police provocation by numbers does not pertain when the numbers are such as to prevent violence occurring.

The Courts

Here, I am looking for firmness, realistic penalties, and more speedy dealing with cases so that they are more readily related to the events from which they spring. The morale and effectiveness of police can be seriously affected when, after they have suffered great danger and personal inconvenience their attackers appear to be very lightly treated.

A more balanced approach by the media to cases with racial connotations would also be extremely helpful.

Prosecutions Arising from the Organisation of the Lewisham Demonstration

My officers are now looking at evidence gleaned before, during and after the event to see to what extent an actionable case is possible, for, eg / ^{incitement} bearing in mind, of course, the seriously counter-productive effect of not proceeding on a very sound basis.

Conclusion

It seems to me that over the years, the police attitude to political demonstration has become more liberal. We have, however, now reached a situation where it is the stated intention of certain extremist political groups to force direct violent confrontation with the police. Their aim is to challenge and destroy the establishment in the belief that this is the most likely way to achieve their own political ends. It may, therefore, be time for police to take a more positive line to convince them otherwise.

We are dealing with minorities, and whilst such a positive approach might bring some immediate abrasive and uncomfortable reactions in certain quarters, I am certain that the great majority of the citizens of London would applaud a force which shows itself capable and determined to end this calculated violence on the streets. The people of London have nothing to fear but everything to expect from their police.

R.P. Ryan Dtc.

J.B.

17.8.77

Handed to the Commissioner today with 2 folders, one containing S.W.P. copy newspaper cuttings & the other leaflets relating to S.W.P. LEWISHAM demonstration

*R.P.
17/8*

[REDACTED]

NOTES

THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

History

1. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) which was known as the International Socialists (IS) until the beginning of this year developed in 1950 after the dissolution of the Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist Party the previous year. Its early leaders were Tony CLIFF (it was at one time known as the Cliff Group of Trotskyists) and Mike KIDRON who envisaged the role of the new organisation as 'to bring together original contemporary social and political analysis that has special relevance to the waging of the class struggle and the deepening of working class consciousness'.

2. It drew its original support mainly from students and university teachers and consolidated its position in institutes of higher education during the student uprisings of 1968 but over the years has sought to widen its appeal to identify itself more with the "working class". It was part of this policy which led the organisation to change its name from IS to SWP in January this year.

Basic policies

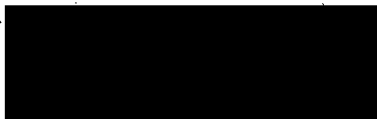
3. It describes itself as an organisation of revolutionary Socialists dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism internationally and the construction of a world Socialist system. Its ultimate aim is to build "a mass workers revolutionary party, organised in the work places which can lead the working class to power and for the building of a revolutionary Socialist international independent of Washington or Moscow".

Membership

4. It is estimated that this now amounts to something in the region of 4,000 (nationally).

5. These are drawn roughly from the following classes:-

Students	-	Over 700
Teachers	-	Over 300
Industry	-	Over 120 cells in factories of between 3 and 10 members in each.



6. Apart from London it draws its main support fairly equally from other Metropolitan areas.

7. The Central Committee of the Socialist Workers Party is composed of:-

Tony CLIFF
Duncan HALLAS
John DEASON
Steve JEFFREYS
Jim NICHOL
Privacy
Chris HARMAN
Margaret RENN
Alex CALLINICOS
Privacy

8. The national headquarters is 8 Cottons Gardens, E2, and the bulk of its printing is carried out at its own printing works - Corbridge Works, The Oval, E2. Over recent years its main campaigns have been - The Vietnam War; Withdrawal of Troops from Northern Ireland; the Grunwick dispute, "The Islington 18 Defence Committee", The Right to Work Campaign and now the Lewisham 21 Defence Committee, which became the Lewisham 24 Defence Committee after 3 of its own members including Privacy were arrested while campaigning for the 21.

9. There is no evidence to show any active co-operation or collusion between the leaders of SWP and AICARAF.