

3 Tooling Up

Once we start tooling up to declare war on society, policemen become the unwitting victims of violence.

John Alderson, 2 September 1981

While work continued on a set of training materials for lower ranks which would teach them the manoeuvres set out in the *Public Order Manual* (which they, like the public, were not permitted to see), an abbreviated version of the manual itself was prepared for the eyes of middle-ranking officers, who would act as commanders on the ground during disorders. It was distributed in April 1985 under the title *Public Order Guide to Tactical Options and Related Matters*, under the imprimatur of the Chief Constable of Cleveland, Christopher Payne, the Chairman of ACPO Public Order Sub-committee. Chief Inspectors, Superintendents were told that the *Guide* was only the first step. Policing public disorder was 'an evolving discipline' and new developments and emerging tactics would be kept under review by a new body, the Public Order Forward Planning Unit.

This planning unit was to become a permanent continuation of the working group which had prepared the *Public Order Manual*. Significantly, it reports to the ACPO sub-committee on public order and is based in New Scotland Yard under the administrative umbrella of the Metropolitan Police. This effectively removes the Forward Planning Unit, like the working group before it, from even the semblance of control by local elected representatives on police authorities. ACPO and its sub-committee are answerable to nobody except their own members, and the Metropolitan Police are (uniquely) answerable to the Home Secretary alone, acting as the police authority for the metropolis.

An official document explaining the assumption of control at national level by ACPO and the Home Office presents the structure and purposes of the Forward Planning Unit. It says that Chief Constables should consult the unit when contemplating new proposals or equipment connected with the maintenance of public order. Officers throughout the country are asked to send new ideas, concepts and items of equipment up to the Forward Planning Unit so that they can be disseminated 'for the benefit of the police service as a whole'. (The document is reproduced in Appendix B.)

The official description of the Public Order Forward Planning Unit makes no mention of the Home Office. But in the course of explaining its operation, one senior officer with public order responsibilities made an important slip. He was discussing a particular tactic set out in the manual, which involves the use of a manoeuvre imported directly from Hong Kong. In Britain, the tactic had been found to contain a serious flaw, and a modification had been introduced to correct it. In line with the instruction that new ideas should be sent to the unit, this officer had not only changed the tactic within his own force, but had referred the change upwards. At first he said that the modification had been sent up to ACPO, but later he said it had gone to the Home Office. When pressed about this discrepancy he explained: 'ACPO or the Home Office? The two are sort of synonymous in this respect.'

Perhaps this interesting synonym lies behind another discrepancy. The author of the ACPO manual on public order is stated by the ACPO President in his foreword to be the Community Disorder Tactical Options Inter-Force Working Group, which was set up for the specific purpose of preparing such a manual and answered to the ACPO sub-committee on public order. But in a brief and apparently well-informed account of its preparation, the editor of *Police* (the magazine of the Police Federation) wrote in 1985 that 'it was prepared by the Home Office Public Order Liaison Group'. There can be only two explanations of this conflict of evidence: the first is that either the president of ACPO or the editor of *Police* is

misinformed, which would be very surprising; the second is that the ACPO working group and the Home Office liaison group are, once again, 'sort of synonymous'.

Equipped with their new *Public Order Manual*, police forces up and down the country began training in its tactics late in 1983. They put a huge effort into it, to bring officers of all ranks in every force up to a common standard.

New recruits now find special training in public order tactics extended in their basic training. For the Metropolitan Police, this is conducted at Hounslow. Other forces use communal district training centres at Ashford in Kent, Bruche in Lancashire, Chantmarle in Dorset, Cwmbran in Gwent, Aykley Heads in Durham, Ryton-on-Dunsmore in Coventry and Kincardine in Alloa.

Male serving officers up to the rank of Inspector have been sent, in rotation, to learn the new tactics at training grounds within their own forces. Even those with long experience in crowd control have been dispatched to add the approved manoeuvres to their repertoire. Specialist squads of firearms officers have been taught to use new forms of weaponry which fire plastic bullets and canisters of CS gas. More senior men, up to Chief Superintendent, have been sent to classrooms in regional training centres, where they find themselves up against computers and facilitators in the hypothetical battleground of the Carruthers Estate.

The most senior officers, those of ACPO rank, have been sent back to the police staff college at Bramshill in Hampshire for between one and three weeks of intensive training in riots and the control of public disorder in general.

While all this training has been undertaken, orders for new equipment have become a matter of urgency. Protective clothing has been supplied, as have thousands of long riot shields. New short shields similar to those used by the Hong Kong riot squad have been stocked. Many forces store CS gas and plastic bullets in their armouries. Portable loudspeakers have been provided to issue warnings to disorderly crowds, and a few rudimentary banners have been made bearing legends such as DISPERSE OR SPECIAL WEAPONS WILL BE USED.

This transformation of the British police was completed, exactly as it started, in total secrecy. It is a mark of the tight discipline of the service that a fundamental shift in tactics of such enormous proportions was planned, and then codified in a manual, abbreviated in a guide, established in a Forward Planning Unit, translated into teaching packs, and then taught to tens of thousands of lower-ranking officers in the school of hard knocks, and to thousands of their superiors in Sandford, and to hundreds more of ACPO rank in the police equivalent of Sandhurst, without a word leaking out from anyone.

But while there was no published information, there were dire enough warnings of what would happen if the police departed from their traditional methods. Breaking ranks even before the crucial ACPO conference of September 1981, the influential voice of one insider was raised in public, John Alderson, the Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall, had a reputation as a progressive thinker with liberal tendencies. He had increasingly set himself apart from more conservative Chief Constables and in particular from the Chief Constable of Greater Manchester, James Anderton. It is part of the voluminous police apocrypha that a weary Home Secretary once reacted to their bickering by announcing that he was sick and tired of the Andy and Aldy show.

By 1981, John Alderson had become convinced that his career would go no further. His outspoken advocacy of liberal (and later Liberal) policies, would deny him the job he most wanted, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. Having served in the metropolis as an Assistant Commissioner, and at the staff college at Bramshill as Commandant, he would collect his pension at the end of his days in Exeter. He had, therefore, little to lose by speaking his mind.

In an interview with the *Sunday Telegraph* in July 1981, he warned of the consequences of a hardline police response to disorder:

Alderson: There has to be a better way than blind repression. We must remember that this rioting is not a new phenomenon. Some 460 people died in the Gordon riots in the turmoil of the Industrial Revolution. Today, too, society has undergone a social revolution.

The violence stems from various disaffections – and this whole volatility has been detonated by the impact of the recession and the feeling of hopelessness. ... The recourse to sheer force as a solution is very dangerous. We must tackle the underlying tensions and develop unorthodox, imaginative and radical solutions to keep pace with the free society and the cult of individuality. ... The police and criminal justice alone can no longer be expected to control crime and violence. Police, probation officers and community workers must all come out of isolation and work together, sharing resources. If not, people will form vigilante groups.

Sunday Telegraph: While this may be a fine ideal, how do you reassure the public that the large-scale violence and destruction we have seen can be stamped out? Surely the police must urgently take a tough line with near anarchy?

Alderson: Of course. I'm explaining what's happened, not condoning it. Our men have to be equipped, trained and deployed to put down such excesses of violence. We must be seen to win and the rule of law vindicated ... But having muscle is not enough; you have to use it wisely. A violent police reaction is not a panacea. It will not solve complex problems and will only make things worse.

Sunday Telegraph: We have already seen the use of CS gas in Liverpool. Would you approve of water cannon, rubber bullets?

Alderson: ... and guns and machine guns? Where does the escalation stop? We are at a critical watershed and must not advance the police response too far ahead of the situation. It is even worth a few million pounds of destruction rather than get pushed too far down that road. That will only bring further violence ... I repeat, force alone is not enough. Let us learn from Northern Ireland that you can't simply bring peace through great strength.

Sunday Telegraph: Without these constraints, should the police be doing anything more to curtail the violence?

Alderson: I think we are at the beginning of seeing a police response that none of us wanted. A repressive police force is inimical to our interests. ... I don't think that even chief officers who may disagree with me on the extent of our reaction honestly want to see a paramilitary riot squad with all the paraphernalia on the streets of Britain.

I think we should rather learn from the United States, which had some appalling riots in the 1960s. They called in the National Guard and crack squads, but more and more people were killed. The presidential commission urged well-motivated social programmes to end alienation and they had some success, not least by employing more coloured and minority-group policemen.

John Alderson decided not to attend the ACPO annual conference at Preston in September 1981, due six weeks after his interview appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph*. According to one report, the mere mention of his name at a closing press conference produced an effect like shouting 'Paisley' in a Roman Catholic church. Instead, the Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall presented his evidence to Lord Scarman's Inquiry into the Brixton riots, and instructed his public relations officer to put out a press release. It was dated 2 September 1981, just one day before the ACPO conference started. It expressed his resistance to paramilitary policing in even more stark terms.

Some people seem hell-bent on sacrificing a police style which is the envy of the world just because of a few hours madness on the streets. The official response in the aftermath of the rioting falls short of the stimulus needed to achieve a worthwhile solution. The Home Office has come up with de-humanizing equipment such as plastic bullets and CS gas, greater police powers and the prospect of a detention camp on Salisbury Plain. Meanwhile many police leaders seem unable to grasp the essential need for radical change. Once we start tooling up to declare war on the public, policemen become the unwitting victims of violence. They fill the hospital beds. If we are to save ourselves from incessant conflict, we must start talking hearts and minds, not CS gas and plastic bullets. We should be seeking to preserve our great tradition of policing with the people and declare our abhorrence of the alternative now on offer.

In the event, as we have seen, the policy ACPO adopted was precisely that which John Alderson so vividly warned them against. ACPO opted for the 'paramilitary riot squad with all the paraphernalia on the streets of Britain'.

At the press conference on 4 September 1981, which marked the only public session of their annual conference, the President of ACPO took the opportunity to distance himself from his dissenting colleague in the West Country. 'Mr Alderson polices a pleasant part of England,' said George Terry, the Chief Constable of Sussex. 'He can have a policeman to cover hundreds of square miles with nothing but sheep. The philosophy in that environment is quite different from inner city areas.' If these remarks seemed ungenerous in overlooking the years John Alderson had served in Scotland Yard as Assistant Commissioner, during which he had trained the Metropolitan Police for Grosvenor Square in 1968, they did at least end on an incontrovertible note. 'I can only make clear,' concluded Mr Terry, 'that the views Mr Alderson has expressed are not on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers.' Six months later, John Alderson took early retirement and left the police service.

The word of the Lord

In November 1981, Lord Scarman presented his report on the Brixton riots. Some Metropolitan officers found it a difficult document to read because it was in places critical of the police, pointing to acts of racial prejudice, harassment, lack of flexibility, failure to consult, aggressive behaviour and excessive force. But one paragraph was taken from it and remembered by those most closely concerned with ACPO's decision to revise public order policy. It was section 5, paragraph 72:

5.72. However good relations between police and a local community may be, disorder may still occur. The police must be equipped and trained to deal with this effectively and firmly wherever it may break out. In responding swiftly to disorder, the police deserve and must receive the full support of the community. The analysis of the disorder in Brixton in Parts III and IV of this Report, and the experience of the handling of disorder elsewhere, underline in particular the need for:

- (i) means of ensuring that available police units are rapidly reinforced in the event of disorder by sufficient properly trained and equipped officers. Effective reinforcement arrangements both within and between police forces are particularly important, because the traditional British approach to handling disorder requires, if it is to be effective, the presence of large numbers of officers;
- (ii) increased training of officers, both at junior and command levels, in the handling of disorder. I have recommended earlier the adoption of common minimum standards and programmes for such training (paragraph 5.30 supra);
- (iii) more effective protective equipment for officers – including better helmets, flame-proof clothing and, perhaps, lighter shields;
- (iv) vehicles for transporting police officers which have some form of protection against missiles;
- (v) improved arrangements for communication between officers involved in handling disorder and their operational commanders;
- (vi) a review of police tactics for the handling of disorders.

Parts of this paragraph of Lord Scarman's report were committed to memory by ACPO rather as if it were a text of the scriptures to justify a policy they had already adopted. Indeed, one very senior ACPO member has the reference at his fingertips, 'Scarman page 97 paragraph 5.72', and has claimed that ACPO established its own review of public order policy as a direct response to this recommendation of Lord Scarman's. This seems to imply that members of ACPO possessed powers of foresight bordering on the clairvoyant, since they held their crucial session on public order two months before the Scarman report was published.

Again resembling those armed with a convenient biblical text, some police officers have overlooked parts of Lord Scarman's report which would not fit their case. The next page (page 98), for example, contains an unmistakable warning against ACPO's change of policy:

There should, I suggest, be no change in the basic approach of the British police to policing public disorder. It would be tragic if attempts, central to the thrust of my Report, to bring the police and the public closer together, were to be accompanied by changes in the manner of policing disorder which served only to distance the police further from the public.

Nor can Lord Scarman be quoted in support of ACPO's decision to proceed in total secrecy with its change of public order policy. Page 99 of his Report is categorical about the need for openness:

The need for an imaginative, dynamic attempt to tackle the tremendously difficult issues currently facing the police, an attempt which requires the co-operation of *Parliament, the Home Office, Chief Officers of Police, the police representative organizations, Police Authorities and local communities*, is clear. I hope that the recommendations I have made will help to provide an agenda for a continuing dialogue between the police and the public about the nature of policing in today's society – a dialogue, which, if it be based on mutual understanding and respect, will serve to strengthen, without de-humanising, the forces of law and order. [my emphasis]

Of Lord Scarman's list of six major contributors to public discussion of policing issues, only two were actually included in the decision to opt for a paramilitary response to public disorder – the Home Office and Chief Officers of Police.

The battle of Orgreave

With an unblushing sense of timing, the last stages of training in the new public order tactics were completed in 1984. They were almost perfectly on cue for the first test of their effectiveness in Britain, which was not to suppress a riot but to defeat a mass picket of coal miners.

Early that year, the National Union of Mineworkers began picketing the coking depot at Orgreave in South Yorkshire as part of its dispute with the National Coal Board, and, indirectly, the Conservative government. It was in the course of this dispute that the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, was reported to have made a comparison with the Falklands War two years earlier and to have told her party that, having defeated the enemy in the South Atlantic, it was time to defeat the Enemy Within. Day after day, as large numbers of pickets attempted to stop lorries from moving in and out of the plant, police officers from all over the country were seconded to keep the supply lines open. Some of them disliked their new role. One senior Metropolitan officer said that policemen were being asked to behave as soldiers. He gave a graphic description of coaches leaving Hendon every Sunday for the coalfields, saying that it was like watching an embarkation for a war. 'While the Army would call them platoons, ACPO calls them Police Support Units.'

A mass confrontation, sooner or later, seemed inevitable. It came on the morning of 18 June 1984. Thousands of miners converged on the road into the plant, arriving in large numbers from 6 a.m. They were met by thousands of police in riot gear, who confined them to the field adjoining the road. The following eight hours brought the most bitter and brutal clashes of the whole year-long coal dispute, and (perhaps inevitably) led to the most serious conflicts of evidence about what exactly happened and in what order. Both sides suffered terrible injuries in the fighting, and television news sided with Fleet Street in blaming the miners for having started the violence. But a spate of radical books published eye-witness accounts to support the view that the police had provoked the worst of the conflict by attacking first.

The trial of Orgreave pickets charged with riot was remarkable in different ways. In the first place, the charges against every one of the accused collapsed, suggesting that whatever may have happened on 18 June, there was no riot at Orgreave. Secondly, the defence team

required the police to produce their own direct evidence of the day's events, in the form of a video recording of the main confrontation which had been made by a police cameraman from a nearby rooftop.

The existence of this official police video had not been mentioned by the police themselves, and it was not produced in court as evidence for the prosecution. A detailed account of its contents was presented in a *Guardian* article by Gareth Peirce, a solicitor acting for miners in the dock.

You see how men arrived at Orgreave on a beautiful summer's day from all corners of the country. You see them from 6 a.m. onwards being escorted by police towards an open field, being brought by police over open ground from the motorway, being steered by police from below the coking plant to the field above. For two hours, you see only men standing in the sun, talking and laughing. And when the coking lorries arrive, you see a brief, good humoured, and expected push against the police lines; it lasts for 38 seconds exactly. You also see – the film being shot from behind police lines – battalions of police in riot uniforms, phalanxes of mounted officers, squadrons of men with long shields, short shields and batons. You see in the distance, in a cornfield, police horses waiting, and down a slope, on the other side, more police with dogs.

Suddenly the ranks of the long-shield officers, 13 deep, open up and horses gallop through the densely packed crowd. This manoeuvre repeats itself. In one of those charges you see a man being trampled by a police horse and brought back through the lines as a captive, to be charged with riot. You see companies of 'infantry' dressed in strange medieval battle dress with helmets and visors, round shields and overalls, ensuring anonymity and invulnerability, run after the cavalry and begin truncheoning pickets who have been slow to escape.

You hear on the soundtrack 'bodies not heads' shouted by one senior officer, and then see junior officers rush out and hit heads as well as bodies. You see this over a period of three hours and you see men begin to react and throw occasional missiles. After 12 noon, they begin to construct defensive barricades against further police onslaught.

Ms Peirce's account concludes:

Orgreave was never to do with the niceties of police powers. It was to do with power, absolute power, exercised at will. Arbitrary arrests and brutality are hallmarks of any dictatorship – they were evident at Orgreave on 18 June and ignored. By our silence, we have endorsed the existence of a militia.

Ms Peirce compared the modern Chief Constable to a medieval warlord.

The account of the same events by the Chief Constable of South Yorkshire, Peter Wright, presents a quite different picture. Where Gareth Peirce emphasized the extent of police power and planning for the confrontation, Peter Wright stressed the preparations made by the miners and their supporters. His account makes no mention of some of the most serious incidents described in Ms Peirce's article, in particular the repeated use of mounted police charges into the crowd. Mr Wright tells a story of police responding in purely defensive ways to the increasing violence directed at them by the pickets. His account was published by his force in a detailed report called 'Policing the Coal Industry Dispute in South Yorkshire'.

Monday 18 June 1984 saw the worst and the last day of violence at Orgreave. Intelligence and information received indicated that many demonstrators would be arriving from Scotland, Kent, South Wales, the Midlands as well as South Yorkshire.

Pickets began arriving in Sheffield on the evening of Sunday 17 June 1984 and many more arrived in the early hours of Monday 18 June 1984.

The first incidents of note took place as early as 3.00 a.m. when 50 demonstrators began pulling stones from the walls of the Plant throwing them into the works.

A constant build-up of pickets continued through the early hours.

Some 700 left their coaches in Sheffield City Centre and commence to walk in procession to the Plant causing traffic hold-ups on major roads. They were directed off the main roads with some difficulty. The build-up of pickets reached its peak about 9 a.m. when estimates of 10,000 were made.

In the meantime, because of this build-up of pickets, extra Police Support Units were requested and received through the National Reporting Centre.

The first convoy of 35 lorries to reach Orgreave had to be delayed on the M1 Motorway for 33 minutes whilst PSUs were deployed to prevent any likelihood of pickets blocking the approach road.

The convoy entered the Plant and loaded with coke. It was held for 28 minutes inside the Plant when fully loaded until it was considered safe for it to proceed. The convoy left without problem after which some pickets moved away, but most remained.

There had already been some scenes of violence and police officers in protective headgear and with shields had to be deployed to protect the police cordon from missiles being thrown by pickets.

... The second convoy of lorries arrived at 12.40 p.m. and went straight into the Plant without any hold up. The violence escalated; a barricade was erected using heavy boulders, a heavy steel girder, and angled steel spikes; also scrap vehicles were removed from a nearby dismantling yard, placed in the roadway and set on fire.

The second convoy left Orgreave at 1.10 p.m. without being interrupted. Usually after the second convoy had departed the pickets dispersed, but not on this occasion. They directed even greater violence towards the police, and this continued for about an hour.

... At the end of the day, 93 pickets had been arrested, 72 police officers and 51 pickets injured; 181 PSUs, 50 police horses, and 58 police dogs had been deployed ...

... Following 18 June 1984, Orgreave never again figured in the headlines.

In 1985, BBC Television's *Brass Tacks* obtained a copy of the official police video of the confrontation at Orgreave, which was by then being used at the police training college at Bramshill as part of the ACPO rank training in new public order tactics. It seemed to offer a unique opportunity to decide between competing descriptions of events. It could settle the question of who started the violence – the police, as claimed by the defence solicitor, or the pickets, as in the Chief Constable's version.

Brass Tacks invited John Alderson, by then in his fourth year of retirement in the West Country, to travel to Manchester and view the video. Having done so, his conclusion was clearcut: the pickets were not quite so peaceful and good-humoured as Ms Peirce had suggested, but there was no doubt that the police were responsible for the escalating violence:

Brass Tacks: You have looked at the police video of Orgreave. Judging from it, who attacked first?

Alderson: I think it is fair to say that although there was pushing and shoving by the miners and one or two throwing missiles of one kind or another, the general escalation, the first escalation it seems to me, came from the cantering of police horses into the crowd which merely heightened the tension and increased the violence. Which is contrary to what the police stand for. The police are there to diminish the violence, not to increase it.

John Alderson then viewed the video again up to the moment of the first police mounted charge into the crowd. He described the scene just before the order to advance was given:

Alderson: So far on this day, the majority of miners have been boisterous, there's been some pushing and shoving, but no greater violence than we saw in Grosvenor Square in 1968. I have seen one or two stones but that's about all.

Brass Tacks: If we stop the video at this point, imagine yourself as commander of the police on the ground. What would you be instructing your men to do?

Alderson: I would be certainly instructing my men to hold firm and try to retain their good humour.

Brass Tacks: Is there any sign that they could not hold firm?

Alderson: If I had seen a sign that they could not hold firm, I would have reinforced them, but I have not seen that.

The video was then played on, and John Alderson described the police tactics which had actually been used.

Alderson: Look what has happened. The commander on the spot has exercised one of his options, and that is his option to release the mounted police to charge in and to intimidate the crowd, in order to drive them back and relieve the pressure.

Brass Tacks: Would you have done that?

Alderson: I personally would not have done that at this stage because what is happening now is that this is causing the crowd, which is already tense and angry for reasons apart from on this particular day, now to become even more angry and respond you see. Now you find that after the mounted police charge, the

throwing of stones at the police increases a little, though not, at this stage, on any great scale. So that has merely provoked anger and reaction and escalated the day's proceedings higher than I would have wanted to do at that stage.

Brass Tacks: How would you describe the decision to send in the police horses there?

Alderson: I would describe it as the sort of thing that you might read in a manual, but on the spot this is where judgment comes in. If you are trying to police with minimum force and get away from this field today with few casualties, then the police should not start the escalation on any scale.

There was a third remarkable outcome of the Orgreave 'riot' trial, which may prove even more significant than the collapse of all the riot charges and the revelation of the official police video. It was certainly the most unwelcome outcome so far as ACPO was concerned. It was the disclosure, for the first time, of the existence of their new *Public Order Manual*, and the training in its tactics. The point which brought it to light was not, in itself, central either to the prosecution case or to the defence. It was alleged that some police officers at Orgreave had drummed on their shields with truncheons, and shouted battle-cries in unison. When the commander of the police forces on the ground appeared in court as a witness, the defence barrister, Michael Mansfield, decided to question him about these allegations.

The officer concerned, Tony Clement, Assistant Chief Constable of South Yorkshire, was himself a member of ACPO. He had spent 18 June at Orgreave directing his forces from just behind the front line of long shields. He said that drumming on shields was legitimate in the circumstances and was, indeed, authorized in the new manual.

What manual was this? Asked the defence, and invited him to quote the relevant section. The Assistant Chief Constable referred to a section of the manual governing the 'tactical use of noise'. Later, other sections concerning long shields, short shields and horses were also read out in court and transcribed. ACPO's secret was out.

On 22 July 1985, a copy of what the Assistant Chief Constable had read in court was placed in the House of Commons Library, on the instruction of the Speaker following a request from Tony Benn MP. Journalists hurried to read it, and a number of indignant articles appeared drawing attention to its sometimes aggressive language. Three phrases caused particular comment:

- ★ the instruction to short shield officers to 'disperse and/or incapacitate' demonstrators;
- ★ the instruction that long shield officers should give a show of force by making 'a formidable appearance';
- ★ the stated objective of using police horses 'to create fear' among a crowd.

It will become clear in later chapters that these are by no means the most contentious words in the manual. But their publication in the newspapers created enough antagonism for ACPO to insist that the rest of the document remain secret. If there were voices raised in favour of its publication, as some insiders suggest, then they were overruled by the majority which then, as now, maintained the manual's status as a restricted document, for ACPO rank only. Even the Shadow Home Secretary, himself a Privy Councillor, was told that he could not read it. What nobody outside ACPO and the Home Office could have known was that the sections on shields and horses which were read out in court had already been systematically edited to delete passages which might have provoked even greater comment (see Chapters 5 and 6).

In what is by now an extensive body of Orgreave literature, there is a consensus about the conflict's importance for the remainder of the coal dispute, which continued for eight further months without any further pitched battle on the same scale. Orgreave, 18 June 1984, has been presented as the place and time the police showed their power to defeat even the greatest and most dedicated forces of opposition. It has been mythologized as the day South Yorkshire regained what Birmingham lost in 1972 at Saltley gates. To one side in the argument, Orgreave represents a turning-point in the long struggle of the law against the dark

might of trade union barons. To the other side, it symbolizes the victory of official violence in the form of Thatcher's army over the time-honoured civil liberties of workers. This conflict of interpretations has made Orgreave difficult to discuss without rancour, and has ensured its place in the dissenter's pageant of State repression alongside the General Strike and Tonyandy and Peterloo.

But in all that has been written about Orgreave, one key fact has been overlooked. From the standpoint of this narrative, it is the central point: Orgreave represented the unveiling of colonial policing tactics in mainland Britain. For the first time, manoeuvres learned from police forces abroad were put into practice not on a training-ground, but in a real dispute.

Immediately after cantering horses into the crowd, the police introduced their new cutting-edge: what ACPO calls short shield units, and Gareth Peirce calls 'companies of "infantry" dressed in strange medieval battledress'. It is the formation employed by the Hong Kong police in their riot squad. The police video shows clearly what happened. After the lines of long shields parted to let the horses through, paramilitary teams of police officers carrying truncheons in one hand and round shields in the other ran through behind the cavalry and set about members of the crowd, arresting and/or incapacitating them as laid down in the manual.

John Alderson watched this part of the police video with dismay. 'This is precisely how the Hong Kong riot squad would act, this is a carbon copy of the Hong Kong riot squad.' He observed that some of the behaviour of officers of the short shield units was contrary to the doctrine of minimum force, and would legally constitute a crime. But his major concern was the general strategy.

The British people should never accept colonial-style policing. It is not democratic policing, it is forceful, repressive policing. Instead of exporting the developed British traditions to the colonies, we are now importing colonial policing into Britain. The question that face us all is this – if we have seen the Hong Kong police tradition used in Great Britain in 1984, what are we going to see in future on the streets of our big cities?

The fact that this fundamental change in police tactics was introduced without reference to Parliament or police authorities and with public discussion muzzled by lack of information, raises another question: what is left of the constitutional tradition of policing by public consent? John Alderson says:

You need the consent of the people to police effectively. If you don't carry the people with you, your policemen will lose confidence in the public and begin to turn in on themselves. They will become alienated. They will, in fact, become a minority just like other minorities, and only by sticking together and using their force and power will they feel safe. If you can't walk about in police uniform in most communities by yourself and be reasonably well-received, there is something wrong in this country.

The secrecy surrounding the manual troubles many who wish the police well. In September 1985, the Police Federation magazine said that the manual 'has been the subject of a quite absurd degree of secrecy' and complained that neither the Police Superintendents' Association nor the Police Federation itself had been 'vouchsafed a sight of its contents'.

In 1986, one Chief Constable gave an interview saying much the same thing. Geoffrey Dear, by then Chief Constable of the West Midlands, told viewers of *Brass Tacks* that he did not know why his colleagues had decided to keep the manual secret.

I personally don't believe that there is anything in that manual that could not be made public. The tactics we have used and would seek to use in the future are pretty well known anyway. The only thing I think it is necessary to keep secret is the actual deployment on the day – the numbers of men you are going to use, where they are going to arrive and so on, which is a very different matter. I think the police service would be wise to allay suspicions about the manual and publish it.

The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Peter Imbert took a more restrictive view, but is nonetheless in favour of public awareness of ACPO's new approach to public order policing: 'I do not believe that it is right that we should hide this training from the public. People should know what we are doing in their name, and either consent to it or not. I think that the more they know about it the better.' His approach to the manual is more limited in its candour, but he takes a dim view of ACPO's policy of secrecy: 'I do not think it would be helpful to publish the whole of the manual of tactical options, but we have been far too secretive with it.'

President Johnson's Commission on the United States riots of 1967, whose report became a nationwide bestseller in paperback, showed no inhibition about quoting from the FBI riot control manual. Indeed, the manual itself is a public document. It is also remarkably frank about the nature of police tactics in combating riots in American cities:

The organization adopted should be developed along military lines, i.e., squads platoons, companies and battalions. Military riot-control formations represent widely accepted uniform standards in general use by civilian law enforcement agencies.

Anybody who wants one can obtain a copy of this FBI manual simply by writing to the US Department of Justice.

But this spirit of candour has yet to permeate through the commanding ranks of ACPO. One of the Chief Constables most closely associated with the manual refuses even to discuss its existence, let alone its contents, in public. In an unattributable interview, he gave a vigorous defence of the policy of secrecy, and chose military language to make his point: 'No General would declare to the enemy his order of battle.'

1985 riots

In September 1985, rioting broke out again, this time on the Lozells and Handsworth areas of Birmingham. It was on a more serious scale than the West Midlands had suffered in 1981, and led to the deaths of two shopkeepers whose Post Office in Lozells Road was burned out. The men found themselves trapped inside the building and beyond the reach of rescue services, when fire engines were prevented from tackling the blaze by the crowd of rioters on the street.

Later the same month, there was a riot in Brixton. In October 1985, the most ferocious disturbances in post-war Britain took place on the Broadwater Farm estate in Tottenham. Many people were seriously injured, and a North London 'community bobby', Keith Blakelock, was hacked to death after he was caught on the wrong side of the police lines. Film and video of the night's events also showed clear evidence of a shot being fired from a block of flats on the estate. It seemed as if the ultimate 'scenario' of the Carruthers Estate war-game was moving from the table-tops of police training centres on to the streets of Britain.

The contention that riots almost always prove to have been triggered by police action was confirmed in each of these cases. In Handsworth, disorder began after police raided two premises, the Villa Cross pub and the Acapulco Café, looking for drugs. In Brixton, riots followed the shooting of Mrs Cherry Groce by the police. In Tottenham, Mrs Cynthia Jarrett died during a police raid on her home.

The response of police forces and the Home Office to these riots was in line with the policy that ACPO adopted in 1981. They continued to arm themselves against the possibility of further trouble, using weapons and tactics imported from Hong Kong and Northern Ireland. The Home Office urged the case for plastic bullets, which are a modern version of the wooden 'baton rounds' developed in Hong Kong twenty years ago. The Home Office also

pressed for what the British colonial police had widely used as tear gas, now in its latest form known as CS gas.

The Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Lawrence Byford, put the official view forward in his annual report for 1985:

The petrol bomb is now accepted by many disorderly elements as a legitimate weapon of first resort in confrontations with the police. With this in mind, and due to the stark escalation of violence in this country, the traditional equipment used for quelling public disorder may not be enough – as was evidenced at Tottenham. Reluctantly, therefore, the weapons of last resort, such as baton rounds and CS gas, need to be available to the police if their use may be the only means of dealing with major public disorder which seriously threatens life or property.

There were some Chief Constables who wanted these weapons but were denied permission to buy them by their police authorities. They were told by the Home Secretary, in a circular, that they could draw them from Home Office central stores in defiance of local wishes. The legal battle which ensued was to become a crucial test case for local accountability, as outlined in Chapter 9.

It was confirmed by the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Kenneth Newman, that police gunners with plastic bullets were brought on to the streets of Tottenham during the Broadwater Farm riot, though they were not ordered to open fire. This was the first reported occasion on which plastic bullets had been deployed in Mainland Britain, and the Commissioner made it clear that it may not be the last. He told a news conference that he was prepared not only to deploy plastic bullets and CS gas, but to use them: 'I wish to put all people of London on notice that I will not shrink from such a decision should I believe it a practical option for restoring peace and preventing crime and injury.'

By the summer of 1986, every major police force in the country was 'tooled up', in John Alderson's terms, and ready to fight something very like a war on the home front. At the same time, they gave unprecedented emphasis to publicizing initiatives in community policing. It was as if they were working hard to present the reassuring face of the British bobby, dear old George Dixon, in order to soften the dramatic change which had taken place.

But within the police service itself, nobody was fooled by appearances. A number of startlingly frank statements illustrate the internal tension police officers feel, between their normal duties and the new paramilitary role they have been trained for. One senior officer argues against the creation of a separate paramilitary unit to complement the existing forces of police and the Army. It would be redundant, he claims, because Britain already has just such a 'third force': 'It exists in hidden form, and goes back to wearing pointed helmets the next day'. The Chief Inspector of Constabulary made a related comment in an interview to mark his retirement in March 1987. Sir Lawrence Byford told *Police Review*: 'Now, even the rural policeman can be armed in riot gear one day and the next be required to return to his benevolent "Evening, all" attitude.'

Most candidly of all, an officer of the Metropolitan Police firearms squad told viewers of BBC Television's documentary *The Queen's Peace* in October 1986 that it had been hard to return to normal duties after Broadwater farm because he was still on a high from the previous night. He said it was unfair to expect police to switch between these two roles. A fellow officer expressed the conflict precisely: 'We can't pat kids on the head one day and then shoot with plastic bullets the next.'