

6 Tactical Options II

Use of baton rounds establishes a dependency on the weapons and creates both a reluctance on the part of the user to revert to normal methods and a tendency to use increasing levels of weaponry.

ACPO Public Order Manual

When Chief Constables decided to keep secret their new *Public Order Manual* for fear of 'declaring to the enemy the order of battle', the final twelve categories of tactical options must have been foremost in their minds. These closely typed pages give the initial appearance of a 'how-to' handbook, setting out in laborious detail a sequence of technical procedures which might fascinate the specialist reader but offer apparently little to interest the uncommitted. Some of the pages also read like the ballroom dance-step guides which were popular thirty years ago. In this case, though, the formation team-work is designed not for *Come Dancing* but for the streets of Britain, and its purpose is to suppress public unrest and rioting. Here are set out in neutral terms the control techniques of the modern police force. They cover the operations of colonial-style riot squads, the use of dogs and police horses, the most effective ways of mounting a baton charge, and the technology of putting up a smokescreen. At the top of their hierarchy of police offensives are the three ultimate weapons: plastic bullets, CS gas and live firearms. Together, these twelve sections form a book of instruction in a radically new approach to British policing. The technical word for it is 'paramilitary': '*Paramilitary*: on military lines and intended to supplement the strictly military; organised as a military force.' (*Chambers 20th Century Dictionary*)

The decision to publish here extracts from these most forceful *Tactical Options* is not taken lightly. No journalist ought to overlook the possibility that disclosure may be against the wider public interest, and there are senior members of ACPO who maintain that public awareness of their tactics may obstruct the conduct of future police operations.

This anxiety is not shared by all serving police officers, nor even by all members of ACPO. We have already noted, in Part 3, the opinion of the West Midlands Chief Constable that the *Public Order Manual* should be published in full in order to allay suspicion about its contents, and the Metropolitan Commissioner's view that police have been far too secretive. The official spokesman for the Police Federation, representing the lower ranks, is also on record opposing the 'quite absurd degree of secrecy' which has surrounded the document. It is even suggested by some in a position to know that the Home Office would favour publication of the manual, and may take the view that ACPO has aimed a shot at its own foot by insisting on secrecy.

There is a practical consideration, too; that police tactics are designed for use in public. If they were truly to depend on secrecy to be effective, they could only be used once each. But the manual contains nothing to suggest that this is so. Indeed, it is presented to its readers as a broadly definitive guide for the foreseeable future.

There is also a powerful constitutional argument in favour of publication. One pillar of the British tradition, the principle of policing by public consent, has clearly been by-passed by ACPO. Any move towards militarization of the police service raises serious issues of public policy, and it is sophistry to suggest that the public can consent to developments which are kept secret from it. It is also possible that some of the approaches enshrined in the new *Public Order Manual* challenge the other pillar of our police tradition – the principle of minimum use of force. Nothing short of a detailed public debate can settle this second question, and such debate must surely depend on public access to information. It does not, however, require that precise details be given of individual manoeuvres. These will, therefore, not be included in the following pages.

Section 19 of the manual introduces what John Alderson describes as ‘a carbon-copy of the Hong Kong riot squad’. The official title is less dramatic and makes no allusion to colonial styles of policing – it is simply *Short shields*.

The short shield unit is defined as a specially equipped grouping of one Inspector, two Sergeants and twenty Constables – the standard formation of a Police Support Unit. What marks them out from their colleagues is that they carry light circular (sometime rectangular) shields on their left arms, and a striking baton in their right hands. One senior officer responsible for public order training fancifully compares their appearance to that of Roman gladiators. It is undeniable, though, that the colonial policing model has been influential in the use of tactics and equipment. If a British short shield unit were dressed in khaki shorts instead of blue overalls, they would indeed be the Hong Kong riot squad as it appeared in the late sixties.

The manual lays down some guide-lines for the selection of short shield men. They should be young, fit and properly trained, with a quality of maturity and strong self-discipline. They will be required to operate at speed and will need very strict supervision. Their shields will not afford them the same protection as long shields, and they should never be left alone under bombardment with missiles and petrol bombs. But they gain extra protection from the nature of their tactics: ‘Because the manoeuvres are offensive, the shields do provide sufficient protection to the fast-moving, advancing units, especially if the officers have the added advantage of protective clothing.’ The shields themselves are described:

Equipment

The majority of forces possess short shields made from polycarbonate (trade name MAKROLON) measuring 762 x 578 mm. These shields have the same qualities as long shields. Additionally, a number of forces use round black shields made from polycarbonate (514 mm. diameter). Apart from not being transparent, these shields have the same qualities as the standard short shield. It is considered an advantage, however, to have the word ‘POLICE’ on each shield as this may have an inhibiting effect on rioters.

The first of the seven manoeuvres in this section was left out of the version which was read in court at the Orgreave trials, though it is not especially controversial. Manoeuvre one is designed to protect Inspectors or other officers in charge of a long shield unit, while giving them the advantage of a lighter and more manageable short shield.

Each of the remaining six manoeuvres is as set out in the trial transcript which is reproduced in Appendix C, but there are significant omissions. Just as with long shields, the lists of advantages and disadvantages have been edited out, so that the court never heard, for instance, the list of advantages and disadvantages attached to manoeuvres five and six, which send short shield units into action with their batons drawn:

Advantages

- (i) provides a fast aggressive action
- (ii) allows a good degree of manoeuvrability
- (iii) psychological effect on the crowd will probably cause them to disperse
- (iv) provides a good distraction for arrest teams to move in.

Disadvantages

- (i) affords less protection than the long shields
- (ii) in advanced position the shield carrier may become more concerned with his own safety than what is going on around him
- (iii) over a sustained period the shield will place a strain on the officer’s arm
- (iv) it is possible for rioters to grapple with the short shield, and there is a risk of the shield arm being twisted and injured
- (v) fitness of individual officers is essential
- (vi) speed of advance will be dictated by that of the slowest team member
- (vii) unless objectives are firmly set, control of the teams may be lost
- (viii) there is a possibility of teams being overwhelmed by crowd

- (ix) in certain circumstances the use of short shields by arrest/dispersal squads may be regarded as over-reactive and aggressive. This factor may be used as anti-police propaganda
- (x) possibility of serious injury to crowd if they have insufficient room to disperse in safety.

For manoeuvre six, a further disadvantage is also listed:

- (xi) officers require training in use of batons to incapacitate instead of causing serious injury.

We may only guess at why this interesting list was not presented to the court. But it does contain a revealing illustration of police double-think. The manoeuvres are commended in Advantage (i) for providing an 'aggressive action', while at the same time Disadvantage (ix) warns that they may be regarded as exactly that and contribute to anti-police propaganda.

The manual recommends all seven of the short shield options, but stresses that manoeuvres five, six, and seven may only be used on the authority of an officer of ACPO rank.

Section 20 sets out the rules for giving *Warning* messages before certain options are used against a crowd. Some warnings are couched in general terms, such as:

THIS IS A POLICE WARNING. YOU ARE CAUSING AN OBSTRUCTION AND YOU MUST LEAVE THIS STREET.

or:

THIS IS A POLICE WARNING. VIOLENCE HAS BROKEN OUT. PLEASE LEAVE THIS AREA.

These might be used in the early stages of disorder, and given out over hand-held amplifiers, backed up by the local media and even police helicopters. At the same time, large printed banners may also be held up bearing the same message. Police officers are told to make a written note of the time and date of each message, its contents and method/s of delivery, the name of the officer issuing the warning, and the 'crowd situation' before and after it. 'It is recommended that if force is to be used to clear the area then if practicable and time permits, three warning should be given to the crowd prior to tactical deployment of force.'

Once disorder has turned into rioting, serious rioting or lethal rioting, other warnings should be used to announce that the police are about to launch an offensive:

THIS IS A POLICE WARNING. UNLESS THE DISORDER STOPS, POLICE HORSES WILL BE USED TO CLEAR THE AREA WITHOUT FURTHER WARNING.

THIS IS A POLICE WARNING. DISPERSE OR BATON ROUNDS WILL BE USED.

THIS IS A POLICE WARNING. UNLESS THE RIOTING STOPS, TEAR GAS WILL BE USED WITHOUT FURTHER WARNING.

Once again, officers are told to give such warnings three times 'if practicable and time permits'.

The specimen warnings given in this section do not include those relating to the last resort of police planning – the use of live firearms against members of a crowd during lethal rioting. They do, though, include a warning that water cannon will be used, which may be taken as another indication that water cannon were considered as a tactical option at one time, and omitted from the manual only during the latter stages of preparation.

Section 21 deals with *Mounted police*. Seventeen manoeuvres cover the use of police horses to provide a display of strength, to make cordons, to open gaps by making wedges in a crowd, to clear a street and to sectorize an area. Edited versions of the most controversial of its manoeuvres, numbers ten and eleven were read in court during the Orgreave trials, and are transcribed in Appendix C. The manual says they may be authorized only by an officer of ACPO rank. Manoeuvre eleven involves cantering horses into a crowd in a manner indicating that they do not intend to stop. The version read out to the court omits, once again, the

customary list of advantages and disadvantages of the option, and also omits the ‘Special Considerations’ which are given for the benefit of officers contemplating the tactic. The court was not informed of these omissions, and no explanation has been offered for them. The deleted parts could hardly be more strongly worded:

Advantages

- (i) extremely effective for crowd dispersal in an ‘in extremis’ situation.

Disadvantages

- (i) advance at such speed is very difficult to control. The rioters and horses, the foot police and the public are all at risk of very serious injury or death.
- (ii) carried out at faster speed the publicity aspect might well be angled against police, especially in built-up areas.

Enhancement

If the circumstances justify adoption of this extreme tactic, there is little doubt that the mounted officers will be wielding their batons.

Special considerations

THIS MANOEUVRE MUST ONLY BE USED IF THE CIRCUMSTANCES ARE SUCH THAT IT COULD BE TIGHTLY CONTROLLED AND IN PARTICULAR THE CHIEF OFFICER MUST BE CERTAIN THAT THERE IS AMPLE SPACE INTO WHICH THE CROWD MAY DISPERSE.

The risk of injury to everyone concerned increases proportionally to the rate of advance.

A warning to the crowd should always be given before adopting mounted dispersal tactics. A fast rate of advance may subsequently need justification. Manoeuvre Eleven is capable of physically sweeping away all opposition by weight and force – but the risk to life is very considerable. The laws regarding manslaughter and cruelty to animals may be brought into play if a crowd fails to disperse in sufficient time, resulting in serious injuries.

Recommendation

The manoeuvre is recommended for use on authority of ACPO rank only. (The risk is thought to exceed that arising from use of baton rounds.)

We may only guess how the court (and the public) might have reacted to the disclosure that one of the police tactics at Orgreave is officially considered to carry the risk of ‘very serious injury or death’ for all parties concerned, and to be more hazardous than the use of plastic bullets. It is also worth noting that the FBI equivalent of the ACPO manual, which is called *Prevention and control of riots and mobs*, specifically rules out this tactic in its own instructions on the use of horses: ‘Under no circumstances should horses be used to charge the mob.’

Section 22 is about *Police dogs*. Their use by the police to deal with disorder is said to be a sensitive and emotive subject with the potential for public and political reaction against the police service. The manual does not make clear whether such reaction is more likely to come from civil liberties groups or from animal-lovers. It stresses, however, that the limitations of police dogs in dealing with disorder should be understood and that police commanders must consult with their dog section officers to seek specialist advice.

The manoeuvres with dogs include the guarding of vulnerable property, isolating particular areas during serious disorder, supporting a police cordon, dispersing small hostile groups, and running towards a hostile crowd ahead of an advancing shield line. This last manoeuvre is recommended only if authorized by an officer of ACPO rank. The manual expresses ‘serious reservations’ about it and says it should only be considered ‘as a desperate measure where other means of dispersal (e.g. CS agents or baton rounds) are not available’. Some idea of the implications of using dogs against a crowd can be gained from the discussion of this ‘desperate measure’:

Advantages

- (i) the use of dogs conserves manpower, which may then be deployed elsewhere.

Disadvantages

- (i) the use of dogs may appear provocative and invite hostility.
- (ii) the use of dogs may attract adverse publicity.
- (iii) the use of dogs in immigrant communities could draw undesirable parallels with some foreign police forces.
- (iv) handlers and dogs could be vulnerable to attack from petrol bombs or other missiles.
- (v) the advance of dogs and handlers may panic a crowd, and cause injuries.
- (vi) danger of indiscriminate biting to public and police alike.

Commanders are told to think about withdrawing handlers and dogs as soon as there is a heavy missile attack or where petrol bombs are thrown.

Section 23 sets out a ‘new concept’ for British police – the *Arrest team*. The purpose is to target ringleaders and agitators involved in disorder in much the same way as active criminals may be targeted at present. The arrest teams identify their targets and attempt to prevent disorder by arresting them promptly for any offences committed prior to the outbreak of disorder. They may also catch up with them during and after disorder. Once arrested, the ringleaders and agitators find the same team collecting evidence against them, interviewing witnesses and in other ways supporting the prosecution of cases.

This tactic appears to have been learned directly from the Royal Hong Kong Police, where the teams are commonly called ‘snatch squads’. Their former Commissioner, Roy Henry, cites it as one of the clear influences of colonial policing methods on the new direction adopted by ACPO.

Section 24, by contrast, presents what it says is one of Britain’s oldest tried tactics, the *Baton charge*. It is commended as a fast and effective way of dispersing and arresting rioters, with one considerable advantage: ‘What is perhaps more important is that the public accept it as a legitimate tactic, provided that it is controlled, and within the bounds of reasonable force according to the scale of disorder.’

The batons involved in these eight tactical options are the ordinary police truncheons known as short batons. They may be used to present a display of strength, to assist in making arrests or to disperse a crowd. The police unit concerned is instructed to form up out of sight of the crowd and then march smartly into view, making sure that the crowd is shown ‘a well-organized, highly-disciplined unit of baton-armed officers’. Then they form a line facing the crowd with their batons drawn. For arrest manoeuvres, they next go forward in pairs to protect and assist each other. In some circumstances, they may also carry short shields, and it may be decided that they should go in groups of four. For dispersal manoeuvres, they may all charge towards the crowd at once, or go in smaller groups. Their primary purpose is to cause a riotous crowd to scatter; they must therefore not use this tactic against a densely-packed crowd where there is no avenue of escape.

The manual is quite explicit about the dangers of these options. It says that any commander is bound to be reluctant to order a baton charge since it ‘will probably result in injuries’. In spite of the long tradition of using truncheons, it gives a clear warning about their potential for injury: ‘There is surprisingly little training given in baton techniques. It can be a lethal weapon, particularly if used as a club directed at the head, but it can also be used as an invaluable aid for restraining prisoners.’

This section also contains some general points about the use of force by police officers, which could apply to many tactical options throughout the manual. It is the closest ACPO comes in the whole document to defining the traditional principle of minimum force. Its appearance among the techniques of the longest-established police weapon may be intended to remind officers that even a familiar weapon may be ‘lethal’, and that even policemen are subject to the law on assault and may be called upon to account for their conduct:

- (i) There is a clear and absolute duty on the police to enforce the law and maintain the Queen's peace. There may therefore be occasions when the application of lawful force will be necessary.
- (ii) During serious public disorder, it is the duty of the police to protect life, prevent injury to any person acting lawfully, and prevent damage to property. In performing these duties, the police may use such force as may be reasonable in the circumstances.
- (iii) The degree of force to be used in order to maintain or restore order must always be the *minimum* necessary in the particular circumstances applying at the time. And force should be used only with the objectives of restoring order, preventing crime or arresting offenders.
- (iv) The principles governing the use of force are: No more force should be used than is necessary; Force must not be used as a punitive measure; Force must cease immediately the objective has been achieved.
- (v) Nothing in these guide-lines will affect the principle, to which section 3 of the Criminal Law Act 1967 gives effect, that only the minimum force necessary in the circumstances must be used. The degree of force justified will vary according to the circumstances of each case.

The baton charge is recommended for use only on the authority of an officer of ACPO rank and with the condition that it should be used only 'where other methods of control have failed or are unlikely to succeed'.

Section 25 covers much the same ground, but with ordinary truncheons replaced by *Long batons*. The recommendations for use are similar, but most of these options are restricted to conditions of 'extreme disorder'. Confusingly, this is a term which does not appear in the 'Stages of a riot' set out in the introduction of the manual.

Section 26 concerns the *Tactical use of vehicles*, which it says is an emotive subject. The vehicles involved are those designated 'protected vehicles', that is to say, specially reinforced police vans. They may be lined up in a display of strength or, to give a greater sense of display, shown off amid great noise from their engines, klaxons and the like. They can also be used to aid intelligence-gathering, by monitoring the periphery of disorder. They may be used to divide a crowd, to tow other vehicles out of the way of an advancing police line, or to deal with vehicles being driven at a police line. As in other sections of the manual, it is the techniques for crowd dispersal which receive the greatest attention and carry the clearest warnings to police officers. This, for example, is the comment on breaking up a crowd by driving into it:

Advantages

- (i) A method of dispersal which does not require a substantial commitment of manpower.
- (ii) Can be used to relieve pressure on foot officers, and will boost their morale.

Disadvantages

- (i) this is a dangerous manoeuvre which may result in serious or fatal injuries.
- (ii) adverse criticism is inevitable.
- (iii) there will be civil liability for any injury caused.
- (iv) drivers may be affected by concern over their criminal liability for any injury caused.
- (v) vehicles may be encircled and attacked.
- (vi) unless the manoeuvre is supported by foot officers, the crowd may only move aside rather than disperse ahead of the vehicles

This is one of the most potentially dangerous manoeuvres considered in this section.

IT CANNOT BE EMPHASISED TOO STRONGLY THAT THE MANOEUVRES CONTAINED IN THIS SECTION ARE ONLY TO BE CARRIED OUT BY TRAINED OFFICERS, USING ALL THE SAFEGUARDS DESCRIBED.

As an enhancement, it is suggested that the use of a sufficient number of vehicles to confront the whole width of the crowd will increase the effectiveness of the manoeuvre. The general tactic is recommended only where other methods of control have failed or are unlikely to succeed, in conditions of 'extreme disorder', which remain undefined.

Section 27 marks a transition. None of the tactical options set out in the final four sections of the police hierarchy has yet been used in mainland Britain, though they are all now available

in almost every city and in many rural forces. The first of these untried manoeuvres concern the use of *Smoke*.

Smoke is not the same thing as tear gas, which is covered in a later section. The smoke dealt with here is intended for use as a smoke-screen, which can act to conceal movements of the police or confuse a crowd by isolating some parts within it. It can also be used to encourage a crowd to disperse.

These two tactical options involving smoke are said to depend on suitable weather conditions. Once the smoke grenades have been fired, there is no available method of controlling the direction or speed of the drifting clouds. As the manual expresses it: 'The random effect of the spread of smoke, coupled with the safety factor, makes these less than simple options'.

The description of the manoeuvres makes it clear that the cloud would have to be dense enough to block out all visibility in the target area. The smoke grenades land well short of the crowd, leaving the wind to take the smoke on towards its target, to avoid the chance for rioters to simply pick up the smoking grenades and hurl them back at the police. These tactics may also be used to smoke out a crowd, and arrest selected individuals as they run out of the cloud.

Being an untested option, the advantages and disadvantages must be considered theoretical, and they are presented in some detail:

Advantages

- (i) Individual crowd members are visually and psychologically isolated from each other, thus breaking down the group unity so that leaders no longer effectively exercise control.
- (ii) Psychologically, most rioters will associate obscuring smoke, harmless though it may be, with the fear of fire, tear smoke, or an increase in police offensive measures.
- (iii) Smoke may decrease the amount of physical contact within the crowd, which will limit violence to persons and property.
- (iv) Smoke can obscure police manpower and resources from the crowd and gain a short term advantage.
- (v) Results in minimum of contamination and annoyance to residents and to areas with schools, hospitals, etc.
- (vi) Smoke dissipates rapidly, whereas chemical agents such as CS linger and contaminate the area.
- (vii) Smoke can be useful in determining wind direction and area coverage as a prelude to the use of CS.
- (viii) Respirators are not required by police.
- (ix) Relatively inexpensive, non toxic.
- (x) Obscuring smoke, combined with good tactical evaluation and application, could provide a 'soft' but powerful weapon in controlling disorder with the minimum of force, expense and casualties.

Disadvantages

- (i) No police operational experience in the United Kingdom in the use of smoke in an urban environment.
- (ii) Dependent on type and height of surrounding buildings, control of smoke could be very difficult if not impossible. Once smoke is generated, there is no method of dispersing it or controlling its direction.
- (iii) To maintain a screen of smoke, constant supply must be available.
- (iv) The effect of smoke on rioters in this country is unknown:
 - (a) They may panic, causing injury;
 - (b) Advantage may be taken of screen to cover increased looting or damage;
 - (c) They may imitate police and create their own smoke by offences of arson.
- (v) Police will be prevented from observing rioters' behaviour unless officers were using expensive thermal imaging systems.
- (vi) Benefits provided to police by using a smoke screen would also afford equal benefits to rioters.
- (vii) Successful use of smoke is entirely dependent on favourable prevailing wind.

One particular use of a smoke-screen is mentioned, namely to obscure the movement of police officers when a 'strategic withdrawal' is a necessity. The two tactics using smoke may only be employed if authorized by an officer of ACPO rank.

Section 28 outlines the uses and dangers of one of the newest 'specialist weapons' in the police armoury. In plain English they are universally called plastic bullets, but ACPO follows

colonial practice by referring to *Baton rounds*. The original baton rounds were developed in Hong Kong during the mid-sixties to deal with widespread political and industrial unrest. They were made of wood, like a policeman's truncheon, and fired from a wide-barrelled discharger. The name 'baton round' was chosen to convey the sense of a little truncheon being loaded up as a form of ammunition.

In 1970, the practice was introduced in Northern Ireland, using rubber instead of wood. Experience in Hong Kong had shown up a serious danger of splintering in the original design, and a more predictable round was wanted for use in the United Kingdom. In 1974, rubber gave way to plastic bullets. One of the principle suppliers is Brock's, the firework company. Each round consists of a fat black metal cartridge just over 4" long, which houses a small explosive charge and the bullet itself. This is a flat-nosed cylinder of solid plastic weighing only slightly less than a cricket ball. It is fired at a speed of 160 m.p.h.

The decision to include seven manoeuvres using plastic bullets in the ACPO manual has effectively sanctioned their use in any part of the British mainland. That which was controversial in Northern Ireland and politically unthinkable for the rest of the United Kingdom in the seventies, has now become a fact of life for the whole country.

The manual's introductory remarks about baton rounds make no attempt to play down the risks they carry:

Baton rounds can cause serious and even fatal injuries. They are to be used only as a last resort when conventional methods of policing have been tried and failed, or must from the nature of the circumstances obtaining be unlikely to succeed if tried, and where the Chief Officer judges such action to be necessary because of the risk of loss of life or serious injury or widespread destruction of property.

The danger of severe or fatal injury is said to be greatest if the weapon is used at short range:

Baton rounds are not to be fired at a range of less than twenty metres, unless there is a serious and immediate risk to life which cannot otherwise be countered. Rounds should be fired at selected individuals and not indiscriminately at the crowd. They are to be aimed directly at the lower part of the body, and never at the head or neck.

Police forces are told to take urgent steps to ensure that early medical attention is provided for any casualties. They are also reminded of the legal considerations outlined earlier (in Section 24) on the lawful use of extreme force. Every police officer called upon to use baton rounds must be instructed that although they may not be intended to cause death, they are capable of doing so if they hit a vulnerable part of the body. The principles governing the reasonable use of force are repeated, and a new point is added: 'Every officer using force must be able to justify the legality of his conduct which cannot be done merely on the basis that he is acting under the orders of a senior officer.'

This is a summary of the Nuremberg principles. Its potential for conflict with the demand for obedience and discipline in a paramilitary unit is left unexplored. The manual says that it is essential that all officers are fully informed by their seniors as to what is happening, if this principle is to be honoured. But it leaves open a possible loophole: 'The law however recognises that it is not always easy to apply careful consideration of legal niceties in stressful situations.' The comment of the Lord Chief Justice in 1972 is quoted with approval: 'In the circumstances, one did not use jeweller's scales to measure reasonable force.'

The seven manoeuvres follow. The first is designed to create a show of strength, without actually firing the weapons. It carries a clear warning that the sight of baton gunners may precipitate the crowd to increased disorder and escalate rioting.

Manoeuvre two is the real thing. Baton gunners are brought up to the front line of long shields, where they go down on one knee, load their weapons and then bring them up to eye-level for the firing position. They take aim, and on the order to fire, they shoot plastic bullets at the crowd. After the order to stop, they retreat into the main body of police, regroup well away from the front line and await further instructions.

To date, this manoeuvre has been used only on training grounds in Britain. If it were ordered against a real crowd, the manual's customary list of disadvantages would represent immediate dangers. They make sombre reading. Members of the crowd could be seriously injured or even killed; the police themselves could become dependent on their new weaponry and reluctant to settle for anything less; and the crowd might respond to the use of police weapons with firearms of their own. In blunt terms, plastic bullets could set off a shooting war on the streets of Britain. The prospect of this manoeuvre must be considered imminent, as almost all major police forces have already trained and equipped themselves for it. Its consequences could scarcely be more grave. Yet public debate has been denied information about how the police themselves view these preparations.

Here is how the Association of Chief Police Officers, with the approval of the Home Office, consider this crucial tactical option:

Advantages

- (i) Can be used with discrimination.
- (ii) Will distance crowd from police preventing or reducing further injuries.
- (iii) Will lead to dispersal of some rioters.
- (iv) Ringleaders within front ranks of a crowd can be incapacitated.
- (v) Confirms police determination to take offensive action by use of baton rounds.
- (vi) Maintains confidence of police cordons of the intention to use necessary force.

Disadvantages

- (i) If a baton round strikes a vulnerable part of the body serious or fatal injuries may result.
- (ii) Innocent parties may be injured.
- (iii) Cannot be safely used at short range.
- (iv) Use of baton rounds establishes a dependency on the weapons and creates, both a reluctance on the part of the user to revert to normal methods and a tendency to use increasing levels of weaponry.
- (v) Baton round dischargers are single shot weapons, with a necessity to stop and reload after each shot with inherent difficulties involved.
- (vi) Crowd experience may bring about armed response to use of this weapon with associated cycle of escalation.

The remaining five manoeuvres in this section amount to variations on a theme. Each of these tactics carries the explicit instruction that it must only be used on the order of a Chief Constable or his deputy. The line of command is set out as follows: the Divisional Commander (or deputy) makes a request to the Assistant Chief Constable in charge of operations as soon as he considers the use of plastic bullets to be necessary. The ACC evaluates the request in the light of all the information available to him and then, if he wishes to proceed, seeks approval from the Chief Constable (or deputy). If this is granted, the ACC mobilizes the gunners and orders the release of the appropriate weapons and ammunition to the Divisional Commander. The Commander then directs and controls the actual operation. Exactly the same hierarchy applies to the use of weapons in the next set of options.

Section 29 is about *CS agents*. The use of noxious chemical clouds can serve two distinct purposes for the police. On a small scale in a confined space, they can be directed against individuals or groups under siege in a building or in an incident involving hostages. The purpose is to clear a specific area, such as a room, using the technological development of the old art of smoking-out familiar from tales of the Wild West. The appropriate gas cartridges and their dischargers have been held in British police armouries for at least twenty years. A quite different approach, using different weapons, is now recommended for a second purpose – the control and dispersal of large crowds gathered in the open air.

The confusion between these two sets of chemical weapons is not always appreciated even by the police themselves. When the Merseyside force used CS gas against a crowd for the first time in mainland Britain during the Toxteth riots of July 1981, they made the serious mistake of firing the wrong kind of cartridges. As the *New Statesman* reported the following week, some of those actually fired had been intended for shooting through doors when

storming a besieged building, and were clearly marked ‘Specifically designed for barricade penetration only. Do not fire at any person or crowd. Projectile may inflict serious injury should it strike anyone within a range of approximately 300 yards.’ The reporter was Rob Rohrer. In evidence to Lord Scarman’s inquiry, the Chief Constable of Merseyside, Kenneth Oxford, said he was ‘fully aware that some of the equipment should not be used again to deal with public disorder’, but defended his decision to use CS gas as the correct use of minimum force which was necessary and available.

There are also different types of chemical which can be used for both police purposes. The original tear gas, developed in 1871, is a synthetic compound customarily abbreviated to CN. A more potent type was produced in 1928 in the form of a white powder known as CS. It is roughly five times as irritating as its predecessor. A third type was synthesized in 1962 of even greater potency – thirty times the original – which is called CR.

The type approved for use in the ACPO *Public Order Manual* in 1983 is CS. It is the same as that used throughout the colonies and sometimes known as tear gas. More usually, to avoid any link with gases used in the trenches during World War I, the colonial police forces referred to it as ‘tear smoke’. This was supposed to sound more calming not only to the public but also to serving police officers, who were apparently untroubled by the order to put on a ‘smoke mask’, but could have been alarmed by the dangers still resonating in the words ‘gas mask’.

To colonial police, CS gas offered a cheap alternative to the crowd control techniques which had been developed for mainland Britain. According to Michael Macoun who was a British police officer in the colonies for twenty years, and then Inspector General of Police (Dependent Territories) under the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the traditional British domestic tactics were far too wasteful of manpower: ‘I know it’s a dirty word – “tear smoke” or “tear gas”, but a few well-directed rounds of tear smoke can save an awful lot of sweating and heaving and punching and thumping and so on.’

In the colonies, the preferred method of using CS gas was by firing small cartridges from dischargers known as pistols. Police were taught to fire over the heads of a crowd, and in general, according to Michael Macoun, a couple of rounds would be enough to make a crowd run away. For him, this represented the ‘disciplined’ use of tear smoke. His anxiety is aroused by the decision to bring this tactic to Britain, particularly if large amounts of CS gas were to be used:

Let’s face it, we have seen enough tear smoke being used recently in South Africa. I mean indiscriminate discharge of tear smoke; and if it is not very strictly controlled it can be counterproductive. It merely antagonizes the whole population.

Michael Macoun retired in 1979 and has not seen the ACPO *Public Order Manual*. If he were permitted to read it, he would find some of his own apprehension reflected in it. But he would also find that his favoured technique of firing small CS rounds from a special pistol is only one of the tactical options it recommends.

Section 29 begins with warnings which are very similar to those given for plastic bullets. The use of CS gas carries risks for both the public and police and is to be authorized ‘as a last resort’, only when conventional methods of policing have failed or must from the nature of the circumstances be likely to fail. There must also be a risk of loss of life or serious injury or widespread destruction of property. Authority for use can be given only by a Chief Constable or, in his absence, his deputy. An oral warning should be given beforehand that unless the crowd stops rioting or disperses, CS will be used without further notice, though such a warning need not be given if the officer in charge considers it ‘impracticable’. Then the ‘Conditions of Use’ are laid out:

CONDITIONS OF USE

- (a) Only approved CS equipment authorized by the Home Office for dealing with a riot or serious public disorder in the open air is to be used: that is to say

- (i) Grenade, anti-riot irritant L11A1 (this is the preferred weapon as it cannot be thrown back by rioters;
- (ii) Cartridge, anti-riot irritant L3A1;
- (iii) Grenade, hand, anti-riot irritant L1A2.

A description of the characteristics of the approved equipment is given below.

- (b) Wherever CS is used, attention should be paid to the direction in which the wind is likely to carry the smoke cloud. Police officers downwind without respirators are likely to experience severe discomfort. Respirators should therefore be worn by police wherever possible.

Once again it is stressed that records must be kept of the use of CS gas with full details of the background of the incident, the reasons for using the weapon and information about the outcome. Any injuries should also be noted, and early medical attention must be provided for casualties as a matter of urgency. Then the principle of minimum force is restated and attention is drawn to Section 3 of the Criminal Law Act of 1967 which gives it effect. The degree of force justified is said to vary according to the circumstances of each case,

The effects of CS gas are listed as follows:

CS smoke is a powerful lachrymator and sneezing agent. It produces a stinging in the eyes, a painful burning sensation of the nasal passages causing severe coughing, pains in the chest and irritation of moist skin areas. These effects are immediate and last for two to five minutes after removal to an uncontaminated area. The smoke is visible and has the appearance of a dust cloud.

The objectives for its use are given under six categories:

- (i) To warn a disorderly crowd by the open display of protected officers equipped with respirators and CS launchers.
- (ii) To subdue a disorderly crowd by a small discharge. This could be followed by further and larger use of CS or the employment of an entirely different tactical option.
- (iii) To lay down a barrier along a prescribed area to control the movement of a disorderly crowd.
- (iv) To select and disperse a small section of a disorderly crowd, by the use of a minor discharge.
- (v) To achieve complete crowd dispersal, if the level of disorder has reached such proportions that this becomes necessary.
- (vi) To protect both the individual and small groups of officers.

Then come the tactical options in the form of eight recommended manoeuvres. They provide instructions for CS gunners firing singly or in formation, and give detailed orders for different patterns of firing. Some of them carry the important warning that 'it is inevitable that some innocent persons will be affected'. As in other parts of the manual, the most sensitive comments come in the discussion of pros and cons of each tactic. Manoeuvre two, for example, stimulates the following catalogue:

Advantages

- (i) A small and controlled escalation from the display stage, which gives both time and opportunity for dispersal with only minimal offensive action having been taken.
- (ii) Confirms the determination to take further offensive action if necessary.
- (iii) The discharge over the crowd breaks its cohesion and causes maximum disruption for minimum use of force.
- (iv) Maintains the confidence of police cordons of the intention to use necessary force.
- (v) Air-burst grenades disperse the CS preventing the crowd throwing back the grenades.

Disadvantages

- (i) A favourable wind direction, or the absence of wind is an essential element in the discharge of CS. Unfavourable wind direction limits this option if personnel without respirators are in the vicinity.
- (ii) Will affect innocent persons as well as rioters.
- (iii) Heavy use of CS can contaminate an urban area for periods between minutes and months.
- (iv) Police officers and members of the emergency services who become seriously contaminated will require medication.
- (v) Imposes on officer in command an increasing level of responsibility and accountability.
- (vi) Requires rigid control of gunners and must be applied exactly, to limit the effect of the tactic.

- (vii) Use can increase anti-police propaganda.
- (viii) Use of CS establishes a dependency on this option with resultant reluctance to revert to lesser options for riot control.
- (ix) Crowd experience increases to meet new options and causes natural cycle of escalation.

A vivid illustration of the effects of CS gas on a crowd came during a boxing match in February 1988, when a canister was set off near the ringside at Bingley Hall in Stafford. A member of Margaret Thatcher's government, the Sports Minister, Colin Moynihan, was present as member of the audience, and spoke of 'the appalling nausea that results from CS gas being thrown' which had been produced throughout the whole stadium: 'It was sickening in every sense of the word.' The Minister also criticized the 'disgraceful scenes' that followed, in which brawling was reported as hundreds of people were overcome by fumes, and 'panic-stricken spectators – many with handkerchiefs over their faces – scattered in all directions' (the *Sun*). It was also reported that a policeman was taken to hospital after a canister blew up in his face.

The phrase 'as a last resort' is routinely introduced into discussions of police use of plastic bullets and CS gas. It is written into both the relevant sections of the *Public Order Manual*. HM Inspector of Constabulary wrote in his report for 1985 that these measures are 'weapons of last resort' for the police. They do not mean what they say. Plastic bullets and CS gas are to be reserved for extreme conditions of disorder, where life is at risk or the widespread destruction of property is threatened. They may only be drawn from the armoury once other policing methods have been tried and failed, or where they would have no hope of succeeding. But they are not the last resort.

The *Public Order Manual* completes its catalogue of tactical options with no more than a heading for the options to come, a blank space waiting for details of the real last resort.

Section 30 is to present the approved tactics for use of *Firearms*. At the time the manual was prepared, it could say little:

FIREARMS

The question of the use of firearms by police in public order situations is currently review by the ACPO Joint Standing Committee on the police use of firearms.

When their findings are known, an entry on this subject will be prepared.

In February 1986, the Home Secretary, Douglas Hurd, set up a formal working party on police use of firearms under the chairmanship of a Home Office official. Two of its leading members were Kenneth Oxford and James Anderton, the Chief Constables of Merseyside and Greater Manchester. Other members represented the Metropolitan Police, Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, the Police Complaints Authority and two trades unions, the Police Superintendents' Association and the Police Federation.

A year later, in February 1987, they produced new guide-lines for all forces in the use of firearms, and a summary of important points to be issued to every firearms officer (see Appendix D). Some of their phraseology is identical to sections of the ACPO *Public Order Manual* sections on plastic bullets and CS gas. Firearms are, for example, to be fired 'only as a last resort when conventional methods have been tried and failed, or must, from the nature of the circumstances obtaining, be unlikely to succeed if tried'. The statement of the principle of minimum force, too, is strikingly similar to that given by ACPO in its sections on CS gas.

The working party recommends that further work on the implementation of its guide-lines should be left in the hands of the ACPO Joint Standing Committee on police use of firearms. Section 30 of the tactical options is in preparation. [See Appendix E]

One subject the manual passes over in silence is the use of water cannon. Opinion polls have recorded a marked reluctance among the public to accept some of the tactics recommended in the tactical options, such as plastic bullets, CS gas and firearms. But water cannon have

consistently scored high in popularity, and their omission from the approved list may strike some people as curious. No explanation is given, though, as was noted earlier, the authors of the manual seem to have contemplated their inclusion at one stage, and the Metropolitan Police still have two of them sitting almost literally like white elephants in the car-park at Hendon. The official reasons for rejecting their use were given on 18 March 1987 in a written answer to the House of Commons by a junior Home Office Minister:

Any benefits in the deployment of water cannon would be outweighed by their operational and tactical disadvantages, including lack of manoeuvrability, quick exhaustion of water supply, and vulnerability to attack. It is not therefore proposed to add water cannon to the range of equipment now available to the police to deal with serious disorder.

In private, Metropolitan officers have concluded from their experimental testing of the two models of water cannon they bought that there is a real danger of killing innocent people with the force of water produced in their jets. It also became obvious during the operational tests that weapons of crowd control which work well in vast open spaces, like the Place de la Concorde in Paris, can be less useful in pursuing rioters through the back alleys of Brixton. Half a million pounds were spent on official evaluations of water cannon, only to conclude (in the words of *Police Review*) that they got 'the thumbs down'.