

7 Related Matters

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ACPO Public Order Manual

Part Four of the manual is printed on pastel pink pages and covers the 'Related Matters' referred to in the title of the whole publication. The reader is offered no guidance on what exactly its strange assortment of matters might relate to. They certainly bear little relation to one another, and the pages could aptly have been labelled 'Odds and Ends'

The section on *Hand signals/whistles and flags* need not detain us, nor the systems for deployment of *Traffic department, Police observers, Casualty bureaux* and the *Special constabulary* during public disorders.

The much-discussed topic of *Operational stress* affecting police officers during and after riots is raised in one section, but nothing of substance is said about it except that ACPO is commissioning workshops on a national basis to look into it.

The section on police *Staff associations* recommends the 'tactic' of consulting with representatives of the lower and middle ranks in the formulation of policy on public disorder. But this apparent rush of democracy into the police service goes no further than to note the importance of striking 'the correct balance' with union officials, and ACPO's notion of balance is robustly uneven. The Chief Constables have ensured, for instance, that even the manual in which these benign generalities on consultation are written has been kept secret from both the major staff associations – the Police Federation and the Superintendents' Association.

Amongst this mass of clay, there are a few hidden gems. Three sections in particular reveal a great deal about current police attitudes to themselves and their place in the social order. They set out the ground rules for contact with other centres of localized influence and power: schools, town halls and the media. Another section gives a sketch of official masculinism in the form of notes on the perils of *Women and children* in public protests. Lastly, a description of *Inter-force liaison* which is buried away alphabetically between helicopters and Interpol, gives the clearest available statement of ACPO's drive toward a national police blueprint for containing public disorder. (Details of this section are given in Chapter 9 which examines the emergence of national control of the police.)

Taking the town halls first, the manual confirms what has often been claimed by radical local authorities: that co-operation between municipal services and the police in quite uncontentious matters can suddenly be hi-jacked by a Chief Constable and turned against pickets and protesters. A hostile line of argument has been put forward by some councils that joint planning for an emergency, including civil defence planning, is a trap designed to win their complicity in police operations against subversion or unrest. The manual connects the two spheres of operation in explicit terms:

EMERGENCY SERVICES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT LIAISON

Liaison between the police and other emergency services is essential in respect of contingency planning for major incidents such as flooding, rail, train or plane crashes. Many aspects of that planning can be applied to police arrangements with regard to situations of potential or actual widespread large-scale public disorder.

Police forces are then told that the precise form of liaison will vary between different areas, but that it will involve their well-established formal and informal links with the ambulance and fire services and extend to the local government utilities.

There has been a similar reluctance by some education authorities to develop projects with the police in their area, because of their suspicion of police motives. Some schools have

cancelled previous arrangements for police officers to give lessons in crime prevention, on the ground that visits of this kind can be exploited by the police for partisan purposes and many also be used for gathering low-level intelligence about pupils and their neighbourhoods. Once again, the manual explicitly confirms the motives suspected behind police liaison with schools. Two of the advantages listed for this kind of approach are that it can 'engender pro-police attitudes conducive to good citizenship' and that 'useful intelligence can be obtained once dialogue is established'.

The manual also notes that political opinion within the education system in certain areas limits police involvement, and warns forces to be aware of the political implications of using this tactic, though it stops short of telling them what those implications are.

This the *Education* section in full:

Description of tactic

Involvement of police officers in the education system to deter young people from participating in public disorder.

Relation to state of disorder

- (i) during normal policing conditions;
- (ii) during escalation towards disorder;
- (iii) following public disorder.

Existing expertise

- (a) Most forces have regular input to schools by accident prevention, schools careers department, schools liaison officer, community contact officers and periodically by local operational police officers.
- (b) Many forces operate community contact projects involving young people, e.g. establishment of sports clubs, camping holidays, visits to police stations.
- (c) Forces foster good relations by encouraging school visits to police premises.
- (d) With police assistance young people are encouraged to undertake educational and community ventures.

Alternative developments

- (a) Some United States police forces recruit young people as a voluntary peace corps or anti-vandal patrol;
- (b) Some United States police forces permit young people to patrol in company with operational police officers.

Advantages

- (a) Police contributions can engender pro-police attitudes conducive to good citizenship;
- (b) Young people can be persuaded against public disorder;
- (c) Regular contact with schools and youth clubs will identify causes of tension;
- (d) Useful intelligence can be obtained once dialogue is established
- (e) It helps police officers involved to keep in touch with the needs and aspirations of this section of the community;
- (f) Radical groups seeking to influence young people lack unity and have conflicting aims. The police service can take advantage of this situation, to counter subversive information;
- (g) Police usually identify well with young people in a non-conflict situation, thus countering the image that they are hard on the activities of youth.

Disadvantages

- (a) Political opinion within the education system in certain areas limits police involvement;
- (b) Police projects are costly and involve a non-operational manpower commitment;
- (c) Police projects can involve entering the political arena;
- (d) Involvement of young people as a peace corps is not yet acceptable in the United Kingdom.

Training

Already undertaken:

- (a) Forces train officers for community contact duties;
- (b) Community contact is taught to officers at all levels during periodic courses.

Considerations for use

None, but forces must be aware of political implications.

Conclusion

Most forces have facilities for formal liaison with schools through the education system. This is an area which falls within the sphere of community relations and one which is vital to the continuation of good police/public relations. It is therefore necessary to continually monitor and review this type of contact in order that new initiatives may be fully exploited.

The decision to include two 'alternative developments' in this section is unusual in the manual. ACPO does not often mention possibilities from police forces in other countries without actually endorsing them. It may well be, as Disadvantage (d) states, that the recruitment of young people as a police peace corps is 'not yet acceptable' in the United Kingdom (though there is nothing in the manual to indicate who has declared it so.) But the fact that it is raised at all suggests the ACPO would like it to become acceptable (to the Home Office?) in the future. The same may be true about the suggestion of young people patrolling with operational police officers. The links between police and schools in some parts of the country, and also these 'alternative developments', may find a readier political climate as control of school curricula shifts from local to central government. A sympathetic Cabinet could find scope for further educational developments to support the ACPO curriculum of engendering 'pro-police attitudes conducive to good citizenship'.

Relations between some police forces and the media, particularly television and radio, have been notably antagonistic in recent years. A conference held in 1986 brought fifty representatives of the two sides together in Cumberland Lodge, next to the Queen Mother's home in Windsor Great Park. They met in almost total incomprehension, as if divided by a mental barricade. Some senior police officers have become convinced that journalists are seeking to get at them by publishing accounts of police corruption or allegations of brutality with a close attention to detail while leaving no space for the hard daily graft of honest coppering. On the other side, a number of experienced and respected journalists now regard the police as potential obstacles to their daily task of honest reporting. Even some who are far from the political left have made formal complaints of systematic harassment by police officers in uniform apparently trying to prevent them reporting or filming scenes of police action against public disorder. One distinguished BBC news reporter maintains that, on occasions, squads of policemen have broken cameras and other equipment, blocked direct views of a scene and even attacked journalists with physical violence in order to stop them going about their lawful business. After a violent night at Wapping in January 1987, BBC TV News lodged a formal complaint against the Metropolitan Police over the treatment of Kate Adie, a reporter, who claimed that she had been hit on the head with a truncheon.

A photographer for the *Independent* newspaper, Jeremy Nicholl, was quoted as follows:

The police have come to regard the press as a legitimate target. Now when I am sent to cover a public disturbance, I always take extra flash equipment, knowing that police usually aim to rip that from the camera.

He too claimed to have been hit by a truncheon at Wapping. There are mainstream journalists who are convinced that their phones are tapped by the Special Branch or others, and some of them say they have evidence in the form of tape-recordings or tip-offs from inside sources. It is a remarkable aspect of London life in the late eighties that guests at a media cocktail party can stand in small groups holding glasses of champagne, while swapping stories of their harassment by the police. Some of the police reaction to these complaints has been combative. The editor of *Police*, the magazine of the Police Federation, wrote after Wapping:

Incidents between police on duty at Wapping and the press led to official action last year, when the police were told not to treat the media as the enemy. The message was received with a certain amount of resentment by the 'troops', who felt that if anyone was doing the harassing, it was the lads with the lenses.

An editorial in the same edition expressed mocking bitterness at the complaints made by journalists against their treatment by police officers:

The media, counting its casualties and licking its wounded ego, joins the chorus of disapproval of police 'over-reaction', and the Commissioner sets up an investigation, accompanied by announcements from the Police Complaints Authority ... Once the rule of law has been defended, and public tranquillity restored, we put the police in the dock. Not for nothing was Lewis Carroll British.

The manual's section on the media was written before these attitudes had hardened, but reflects some of the same suspicion of journalists. It contains nothing at all to suggest that police forces, as public services, owe a duty of openness to the public. Not one of the listed advantages of liaison with news media even hints at the concept of the public's right-to-know through newspapers and broadcasting networks. Press relations are presented as another 'tactic' to be used for specific police purposes, and to be handled with care or, more usually, with suspicion.

The warnings are clear: 'The media is controlled by financial interest. Concern to produce a story can override the requirement to be accurate'; and: 'Close liaison with politically motivated factions of the media requires careful control.'

Scenes of disorder are treated as if they are police property, rather than public events with a presumption of free access to reporters. Police commanders are told that 'the media are *allowed* access to events and scenes of disorder' [my emphasis].

The reasons given in favour of good press relations tend to concentrate, perhaps inevitably, on the advantages for the police: 'All police forces are aware of the need to liaise with the media and the value of fostering the police image through media releases'; and: 'Public confidence, approval and sympathy can be gained from media interviews with police officers, for example officers in hospital following injuries sustained during public disorder.'

There is also the potential for issuing mass orders: 'Police forces can make use of the media to publicize instructions to the general public'; and the suggestion that something like a propaganda battle is under way: 'Representatives of extremist groups make full use of media coverage. The police service can take similar advantage of the media facilities to influence public opinion.'

Any underlying resentment of the independence of journalists, is tempered by one conciliatory observation: 'In general, media reporters will try to give a balanced story if there is a flow of information from the police.' The actual point of balance which police officers have come to rely on from Fleet Street was identified by the editor of *Police Review* in one of the more entertaining of his consistently candid leaders, which was published in December 1986:

There's a general (and only sometimes justified) police complaint that the media deals in bad news about the police but ignores the acts of quiet heroism, the commitment beyond the call of duty, the boring daily dedication. So how would you bet on the space allocated, to the following stories? A chief inspector caught in compromising circumstances in a public lavatory; a WPC who saves a baby from a fire; a sergeant suspected of cheating in his promotion examination; a dog handler coming to terms with life after losing his legs to a terrorist's bomb.

If you bet on the lavatory and the cheat coming top, you would have lost your money. The four stories appeared in most papers last week. The chief inspector made no more than two inches in two papers; the exam cheat possibly rated twelve inches; the fire heroine made almost every daily paper; and the disable dog handler was the subject of a two page feature. And if you're still convinced that the media are biased against the police, think of the coverage given to the death of PC Olds, the memorial to PC Blakelock, and the struggle to live by PC George Hammond.

While we're about it, might we not admit, too, that we read the bad news much more thoroughly than the good? Those of use who had nothing to do but browse through the papers last weekend probably remember the full details of the episode involving the chief inspector, including the bizarre titbit that one of the other men arrested wore suspenders and stockings. We may also recall that the promotion exam story involved Freemasons and the Royal and Diplomatic Protection group. But can we remember just how the WPC came to rescue the baby, or what the incident was in which the dog handler lost his legs?

We don't remember good news.

The section dealing with *Women and children* seems out of place even by the loose criteria governing the manual's 'Related Matters'. Much of its content deals with circumstances of public order rather than disorder, in which women and children are behaving in apparently law-abiding and peaceful ways. A possible explanation of their inclusion is suggested early on: their non-violent actions are said to be 'calculated not necessarily to breach the existing law but to cause frustration to police officers or police arrangements'.

It is noticeable that many of the most serious recent disturbances have been almost exclusively male events, both on the side of the public and among the ranks of police. As John Alderson remarked after watching the police video of Orgreave, the young men of each tribe are sent forward for the fray. But ACPO (which is a male forum) includes a warning on the guile which can be shown by the second sex:

Experience in Northern Ireland has shown that women ... are capable of doing anything to discredit the police, including striking their own children and making accusations against the police. There is no reason to believe that such a ploy could not be used in mainland Britain.

The main concern about policing women and children is their considerable potential for arousing public sympathy if the police use violence against them. The manual presents this in fighting terms – as part of the continuing propaganda war between the police and unspecified forces of darkness:

Mishandling of the situation could provide adverse publicity for the police which subsequently can be used as grounds for criticism and propaganda ... It is often possible to capitalize upon emotional factors; physical lack of endurance and the dislike of discomfort of women and children. Should force become necessary, the less its degree, the less will be the adverse propaganda value ... The deployment of specialist equipment such as baton rounds against women and children, has heightened public/media negative emotive response potential.

This last point almost certainly refers to experience of the Royal Ulster Constabulary in Northern Ireland, where outrage has followed incidents in which young children have been killed or maimed by plastic bullets fired by security forces in the course of disturbances. The campaigns such incidents have generated have attracted considerable support, which seems to translate through ACPO's word-processor into 'heightened public/media negative emotive response potential'.

The manual concludes this section with the observation that a variety of tactical options have been considered for use against women and children, including the deployment of mixed sex or all female Police Support Units.

Methods of effecting removal of demonstrators presenting passive to aggressive resistance (short of open violence) have been examined, and specific information can be obtained through direct liaison with the Public Order Forward Planning Unit, A8, New Scotland Yard.