

10 Shooting in the Dark

Eventually, all the top people who have held back the tide of paramilitarism for the last ten to fifteen years will have gone. The whole nature of policing will have changed by the beginning of the next century if the trend continues.

John Alderson, *BBC File On 4*, September 1987

With the objections of police authorities swept aside, the most forceful of ACPO's tactical options, including plastic bullets and CS gas, have secured their place in the armoury of every major police force in the country. Tens of thousands of constables have been trained in the techniques of front-line riot control. Thousands more belong to elite squads whose job will be to conceal and protect specialist gunners as they are brought forward to fire one of the new weapons into a crowd. The prospect of paramilitary policing is no longer confined to futuristic fantasies in the anti-establishment press. It has become a present reality of British life, stamped day after day into the tarmac of police training grounds. It can be a matter only of time before some Chief Constable gives the order to open fire in the streets.

In doing so, he will take an enormous gamble. For not even the ACPO hierarchy can be sure what would happen next. They hope that the police would gain ground, quell the disturbance, make arrests and go home victorious to public approval. But this result is not guaranteed. ACPO itself explicitly acknowledges in its *Public Order Manual* that the consequence could be disastrous – an escalation of violence and an armed response from the crowd precipitating gun warfare in the High Street and the back alleys. How long it would last is anybody's guess. The days and weeks that follow could be marked by further disorder, or by intermittent sniper fire, which would make it impossible to resume normal policing by unarmed foot patrols. The effect on other cities would be incalculable.

These fears are shared, and discussed with candour, by many senior police officers. They point to an inescapable conclusion: every plastic bullet or CS gas canister fired in a British city will be a shot in the dark. It could prove fatal not only for those at the scene, but ultimately for the police tradition which Britain has pioneered.

It might be comforting to dismiss these speculations as alarmist. But the comfort would hardly survive a visit to one of the inner-city areas already scarred by rioting, the very areas which are most likely to see the use of ACPO's toughest tactical options. In July 1986, *Brass Tacks* reported from Handsworth in Birmingham, where rioting had been so destructive only nine months earlier that the Chief Constable had abandoned his earlier opposition to plastic bullets. As the West Midlands force began to lay in stocks of this new weapon and train gunners to shoot them, the crucial question became what would happen if they were used against a crowd. The answers were startlingly consistent. As we spoke to leader after leader of the black communities, they all expressed their grave fears for the future. It proved impossible to find a youth worker or project co-ordinator who did not foresee armed retaliation against the police if they were to fire plastic bullets. These are not, by any means, people who relish the prospect of street warfare (though there are others who clearly do). They are the patient men and women who help everybody carry on life in poor black neighbourhoods and keep the lid on most of the resentment around them. They run scruffy advice centres in church basements, organize literacy projects for the Manpower Services Commission and help ex-offenders. One of them is a former officer of the British Army, who has spent many years suppressing uprisings in the colonies and has himself fired plastic bullets into crowds on many occasions. They all draw comparisons between Britain and South Africa. They watch events in Crossroads and Soweto and apply their conclusions to Lozells and Handsworth: if the police are tough, a crowd grows tougher; if shots are fired,

they are answered in kind. They have weighed their warnings carefully, and issue them with little hope:

1. Part of my job is to reduce the level of violence on the street and prevent serious injury to people living in the community.

We don't want plastic bullets used in Handsworth. There were meetings throughout the area and the audiences voted overwhelmingly against plastic bullets. So I am disappointed that the Chief Constable is planning to increase the level of violence. There is an old saying that you fight fire with fire. I am worried that if the police use plastic bullets, people who have got guns within the community will start using them.

Year after year, people have watched the use of plastic bullets against brothers and sisters in Africa, and they know exactly the type of damage they can do. What I fear is that the introduction of these weapons into Handsworth will inflame the situation.

2. If the Chief Constable decides to use plastic bullets, there will be total panic, chaos and then a form of retaliation. People are not going to stand by and be shot at, they will actually fight back. The moment you bring in plastic bullets or any other sort of heavy weaponry, they will see it declared as a war zone. The police will be declaring war against the community. I don't see that as deterring riots, it will increase them alarmingly. If somebody shoots at you, you are going to shoot back.

3. If they resort to plastic bullets, the next step will be hit squads that will hit out at the police. The police are put there as a front for the government. But people can't go and stone Margaret Thatcher's house. The police are going to be there in front of it, so they become the obvious target. The fight is not really with the police, it is with the government. But the police become the jam in the sandwich.

4. Bullet will be met with bullet.

5. I spent nine years in the British Army, and had specialist training up to a high level using firearms and plastic bullets. I was trained to oppress people but in the long run they did not sit down and take it, they fought back. People would regroup, learn new strategies and come back the following day. I think people in this community will do that too.

Those uttering these warnings believe that they would be powerless, in a real confrontation, to stop them becoming reality. The tide of anger and frustration would run so strongly against the police that no even the most respected community leaders could turn it.

From the police side, the dangers look surprisingly similar. Those responsible for policing inner city areas sometimes privately express their nightmares in terms which are hardly distinguishable from those above. They know only too well the potency of the apartheid image of white police officers facing a mainly black crowd. They fear that it could become even more potent if they were to adopt a repressive, technological approach to unrest in Handsworth, Brixton, Tottenham or Toxteth.

The officer who developed Handsworth's show-piece community policing scheme in the seventies, Superintendent David Webb, has now left the force after a series of internal disputes, and runs a sportswear business in the same area. His differences with former colleagues reached a peak with the decision to buy plastic bullets for riot control. He knew from intelligence sources when he ran the divisional police station that there were many licensed gun holders in Handsworth and a large number of unlicensed weapons as well. He also knew of the existence of stocks of hand grenades:

We know that all those weapons are down there. The moment the police start using plastic bullets, it is my fear that those weapons will come out onto the streets. The police will find themselves in very serious trouble and people will be killed.

Ex-Superintendent Webb's fear is compounded by his informed guess as to what would happen next. He believes that a combination of guns and hand grenades could force the police into a tactical withdrawal, but only for a short time. They would come back with live firearms of their own, to reply to the shooting from the crowd.

The Chief Constable of the West Midlands agrees with him. He calls the possibility of armed retaliation from rioters 'a very serious risk that has to be taken into account'. He knows that there are people in Handsworth who already compare their lot with that of blacks

living under apartheid, and though he might disagree with their analysis, he accepts their conviction:

They will no doubt go on to argue that they should respond in the same way as blacks in South Africa, and that is obviously one of the risks that I have to take into the equation when deciding whether to use plastic bullets on the night.

What concerns him most is the unpredictability of the next few days. He has little doubt that the police would be able to win the immediate battle, by virtue of superior weaponry and training. 'I don't think there is a great army waiting to come into action if we use plastic bullets.' But he is less confident about the following days. He can make no useful estimate of the strength of response the police would encounter once their opponents had regrouped and drawn on their own reserves of firepower. There would be a real possibility that the police could be outclassed within a day of their initial shot: 'We could win the first round in a pyrrhic victory, and the next night be losing.'

Another risk is that retaliation could take a less organized form, with sporadic sniper attacks on police officers returning to the beat after the disorder. It is a common concern among police officers of all ranks that they should not be expected to perform riot duty in their normal beat area, partly for fear of personal retaliation. But there is a more general danger that uniformed officers could be attacked just for being policemen if local feeling ran high after a pitched battle. The Chief Constable has little reassurance to offer them:

What happens when they go back the next day is debatable. A lot of people would probably welcome them with open arms for restoring order. But there would be a number, one hopes a minority, who would be deeply displeased that they had lost and the police had won. The response from them could be anything. It could be glowering hostility, passive acceptance or active physical opposition of all sorts.

The significance of this last sentence lies in its acknowledgement that police officers returning to normal duties after a battle could find themselves targets for lethal attack. If this were to come about in fact, the potential would exist for indefinite periods of militarization in certain places. For which Chief Constable would dare to send his men and women out undefended against the threat of sniper fire?

It is a relatively simple matter to train police officers to act like soldiers, as ACPO has demonstrated in the eighties. It takes considerable reserves of public expenditure and the support of the Home Office, but given these political clearances the process has proved straightforward. It is also comparatively easy to escalate police response to disorder into the paramilitary realm. But how easy will it be to go back again? Once the battle-lines have been drawn and the first shots fired, how will the mechanism of de-escalation operate? The *Public Order Manual* gives clear instructions on each shift up the gears of increasing force, but then offers only an outline of how to put the machinery into reverse. ACPO has thus provided a detailed blueprint for turning policemen into soldiers, with relatively little guidance on how to turn them back into policemen.

The effect on public opinion is equally unpredictable. If the battle goes well for the police, with victory on the night and little violence afterwards, then senior officers may well prove right in their assumption that the public will applaud their success. It is, though, worth recalling the consistent finding of opinion surveys over many years, that people in Britain like their police officers unarmed and in ordinary uniform and that they oppose the use of plastic bullets and CS gas in cities on the mainland. The only additional weapon the public says it wants deployed against rioters is the very one the police force rejects – the water cannon. Lord Knights, the former West Midlands Chief Constable Sir Philip Knights, argued for restraint shortly after his retirement in 1985:

I never felt during my period as Chief Constable that there was any necessity to stockpile weapons of that kind. We have had CS gas to deal with armed, besieged criminals but not for use on the streets, and neither have I ever felt that plastic bullets were necessary. If we ever reach that stage then we have got to

recognize that we have lost the support of the community in maintaining the law. If I said I needed plastic bullets as a last line of defence, it would have been as good as saying that I did not trust the public.

What the public would make of a police attack which went wrong, leading to increased levels of violence and the possibility of armed hostilities, is quite another matter. Some ACPO members believe that public confidence in the police could be damaged almost beyond repair by such a misjudgement. The stakes have been raised very high for a Chief Constable contemplating the use of these weapons.

Former Superintendent David Webb of Handsworth spent years building a relationship with leaders of each ethnic group in his division, in an early experiment with community policing which attracted national attention during the seventies. He found it an uphill struggle against deep-seated suspicion of police, often bordering on outright opposition. In spite of these odds, the scheme could boast some success. David Webb today maintains that the contacts he built would stand little, if any, chance of surviving a street battle in which police fired plastic bullets – whatever its immediate outcome:

The worst casualty is going to be the relationship between the police and the public as a result of firing these plastic rounds. There will be a very serious breakdown and long-term the traditional relationship would be finished. It is already seriously harmed in the inner city and if the police start firing plastic bullets, it will be gone forever.

You cannot go down into an area to do community police work, trying to solve the local problems, if the day before you and your colleagues have been firing plastic baton rounds at the community. The worst thing is that a lot of senior police officers know this is the case and the ordinary policeman on the beat is railroaded into a sort of policing he doesn't want. It is insidiously creeping into the police force.

Superintendent Webb claims that his network of 'community intervenors' went to work so effectively in 1981 that Handsworth escaped the possibility of a riot when other inner cities were suffering theirs. The Chief Constable at the time, Sir Philip Knights, has confirmed this view: 'We had considerable support from the community in dealing with their young people and getting them off the streets. That is much more important than driving them off with plastic bullets.'

The approach is modelled on successful ventures in some cities of the United States in the late sixties. In Atlanta, Georgia, for example, rioting was narrowly avoided in 1967 by the Mayor's timely action in calling community leaders to his office, including 'Daddy King', Martin Luther King Senior, and persuading them to go to the ghetto with police loudhailers and call for residents to remain calm. Their appeals were heeded and Atlanta saw relatively little violence that summer, in spite of the presence of Stokeley Carmichael and H 'Rap' Brown, the black militants, and the existence of the largest Ku Klux Klan membership in the country.

It is, of course, romantic to think that traditional British policing follows the Dock Green model of helping elderly ladies across the street and offering avuncular cheer to passers-by. Even elderly ladies, after all, sometimes get arrested. For police officers, there has always been a forceful side to the job, whether in the kicks, elbows and legendary clips round the ears for miscreants or in the plain brutality used in the thirties against hunger marches and demonstrations of unemployed workers. What worries some in ACPO is that public tolerance of this violence is dependent on the image people have of the police. They may accept the odd disciplinary cuff from a policeman they see as one of their own – like an older brother, perhaps, or a strict uncle. Yet they can balk at the mere presence of the same officer dressed up like a member of the SAS. The *Public Order Manual*'s constant attention to the image of police officers reflects this. Its authors recognize that by ordering changes in the way officers look, such as dressing them in riot gear, and in the way they behave, ACPO could change the way people regard the police as a whole.

If the police come to appear generally intimidating or repressive in the eyes of ordinary citizens, they may find it harder to win public consent to their authority. The public may also

withdraw co-operation from all manner of police actions. The scale of difficulty this would present to the force is unlimited. Those few parts of Britain which are already very hard to police, the inner cities, tend to be areas where public consent and co-operation are already lowest. If such attitudes were to become common in towns and cities throughout the country, the task of policing would begin to outstrip the labours of Hercules. In this respect, ACPO's paramilitary policy already has an unsettling effect without a shot being fired. At Orgreave, Wapping, Stonehenge, Tottenham, Brixton and Handsworth, the public face of the police altered radically, with unknowable repercussions in the long term on public attitudes.

PC 2000 – a split personality

Paramilitary policing has brought a sense of confusion to the training of police recruits. Before 1981, training was a clear enough process involving several months of rote-learning, memorizing long passages of Acts of Parliament, interspersed with character-building bouts of physical exercise and drill. Once it was over, the real business of education could begin on the beat and in the panda car with older officers. Lord Scarman's report on the Brixton riots came as a body-blow to this arrangement, criticizing its effects in, for example, 'the ill-considered, immature and racially prejudiced actions of some officers in their dealing on the streets with young black people'. The Metropolitan Police began a revision of training at Hendon, designed to sweep away concentration on detailed knowledge of statutes in favour of developing personal skills the job requires of its constables. They must be fit and well-disciplined, so the gymnasium and parade ground have held their places in the curriculum. But they must also be attentive, sympathetic and calm in circumstances of great stress, so new classes were introduced on the skills of communication, personal development and stress management. They are taught the techniques of self-understanding and quiet assertiveness. Most significantly, the Met realized that Lord Scarman's criticism was directed at widespread behaviour which had been picked up from police colleagues rather than learned in training school. Its hallmarks were a macho stance coupled with arrogant displays of racism and sexism. Since 1981, Hendon has tackled this 'canteen culture' directly. Almost half the Met's serving officers have been trained in the new style, known as 'policing skills'. The officer commanding Hendon, Deputy Assistant Commissioner Alan Young, summarized the approach in three slogans: 'Macho is out, sexism is out, racism is out!' He calls those trained in this way 'the disciples', as if he were controlling a Jesuit seminary which scatters its flock far and wide among the unconverted. Other police forces have begun to follow similar lines themselves, and a steady influence from Hendon may continue to spread as officers leave London in their hundreds for promotion and cheaper housing in provincial forces.

It would be easy to present this initiative as the same old meat with a gravy of psycho-jargon. But a visit to Hendon today makes a deep impression. Wander down one of the corridors in the Peel Centre and you come first upon a class learning how to take statements. Next door is a lesson on making arrests. Nothing surprising so far. Then notice the lesson called 'aggression and emotion', which teaches the tactic of responding to anger with soft words (an option which is not included in the *Public Order Manual*). The recruits are busy role-playing a confrontation, and discovering how very difficult it can be to continue shouting at somebody who insists on speaking quietly and listens to what they say. The instructor, whose personal manner would do credit to St Francis of Assisi, then gives them a little lecture on body language. The gist of it is that if they storm about shouting and throwing their weight around, they will merely serve to raise the emotional temperature of an encounter and waste their most precious resources – time and energy. The trick, he tells them, is to recognize their own responses (as in the 'Self-awareness' classes) and to gain mastery of a situation by lowering their voices.

Back in the corridor, you check that this *is* the police training school and you have not strayed into a convention of Californian therapists. The next room is being used for an exercise simulating a marital dispute revolving around a large and disobedient dog. The police recruit has to find out who has done what, while fending off menaces from all three parties. The instructor has split the rest of the class into six groups for specialist observation:

‘Right then Group A, what were you asked to look at?’

‘Law and procedure, sergeant.’

‘Group B?’

‘Empathy skills, sergeant.’

‘Group C?’

‘Eye-contact and body posture, sergeant.’

Next along the corridor is the class on ‘Stress management’, with a discussion about the incidence of suicide, alcoholism, divorce and wife-beating among police families. The recruits are asked to suggest reasons for this unhappy trend. They talk vaguely about pressures of the job and long hours. The instructor leads them in deeper, asking them to explain the reluctance of many officers to admit the stresses of their work. They suggest fear of being thought weak, the difficulty of coming to terms with anxiety and failure. He takes them on to the ‘empty macho image-building of the John Wayne syndrome’ which denies officers the chance to face their own emotions with honesty. The lesson is over and as the recruits leave the room they speculate on how they will fare in their first posting at a real police station. The general conclusion is that the older officers will probably regard them as cissies.

The next class is sitting through a frontal assault on ‘Racism’ as a social evil. Their instructor presents the hard facts of racial attacks and shows them a letterbox with a locking device inside. He explains that tens of thousands have been sold to Asian families in London, to protect them from filth being pushed through their front door, or rags soaked in petrol. Ten years ago, he says, when he was a police recruit in Hendon, the force simply refused to recognize the existence of racist attitudes among its own officers. Today that has changed. The Met, he continues, is predominantly a white male organization socialized during the fifties and sixties and carrying the ineradicable marks of British racism. There is little that the recruits, or the force as a whole, can do about these prejudices. But the police establishment will insist that their behaviour be non-racist. They must at all times remember their obligation to protect the weak and vulnerable. In tomorrow’s lesson, they will examine ways of countering expressions of racist sentiment from their fellow officers when they leave the training school. At this point, you probably decide to skip the next classroom where a lesson is in progress on the danger of stereotyping, on the ground that your own preconceptions have already been so shaken that you feel you have got the point. But there is more. The knockout punch is waiting round the corner in a double classroom labelled ‘Starpower’.

Just before they finish their twenty weeks training, recruits at Hendon spend a morning playing a team game. They are divided into three groups and given coloured counters to trade with. As the game goes on they realize that it has been rigged to favour one group at the expense of the others. The result is that trading serves to increase the wealth of the richest group, while the middle group struggles to hold its ground, and the poorest just keeps on losing. The top team naturally becomes more and more cocky, while the bottom team starts to sulk. Then the WPC instructor who is invigilating the game cheerfully announces that it is based on the operations of capitalist society and awards the top group a special privilege: they may rewrite the rules of trade in any way they wish. They seize their advantage with vigour, and set out a draconian code which guarantees that all wealth will flow to them. Just in case, they invent a rule which says that they can make up new rules at any time. They establish a ‘sin bin’ for offenders and appoint a few members of the other groups as policemen and

gaolers. Then the game resumes for a few moments, but those in the lowest group refuse to play and make a gesture of defiance by putting all their counters in a heap and piling their hands on top of it. A prison is built around them by the appointed officers to prevent further acts of disruption. Meanwhile the middle group players discover that their only means of advancement is by cheating, and are hauled off one by one to the 'sin bin'. The whole thing ends in an angry stalemate.

Then the instructor asks them to draw conclusions from it, particularly concerning the nature of policing. They begin to talk about the unfairness of the rules of trade and the problem of enforcing them. They observe the equivocal position of police officers who are drawn from the lower groups to serve the interests of the rich and given inducements and social status as a reward.

After they have left for lunch, the instructor lists the lessons she wants them to remember from the game:

1. Social rules must be fair. It is difficult to police unfair or unacceptable rules.
2. The police are usually seen as outsiders by all three social groups.
3. The police often appear to be working on behalf of the rich, who give them power.

She rounds off her summary with a crisp defence of the game's assumption of a class analysis of British society:

We live in a society which is not classless and we are training recruits for the real world, not for a make-believe world which we would all like to see. The game reflects what society is and that is what we must train them for.

Since Lord Scarman's report in 1981, more than 8000 recruits have passed through Hendon and received the new style of police skills training. An additional 2000 experienced officers in police stations have also had an abbreviated version of the course. Those in charge of the programme talk about the Met as a long ship to turn round and confidently claim that the sheer weight of the force is now beginning to work for them as these 10,000 officers make their presence felt out in divisional stations. The Deputy Assistant Commissioner explains his policy of sending 'disciples' out in batches, so that they will be better prepared to face the unreconstructed attitudes they may meet on the beat and in the canteen.

A day or two at Hendon leaves little doubt that the training wing of the Metropolitan Police has responded to Lord Scarman's critique with considerable imagination. But this is where confusion arises. For training is not confined to Hendon. There is also the public order training ground at Hounslow, an enormous film set which serves as a purpose-built battleground known as 'Riot City'. It is rather like a remote RAF base with Kenneth More in command. Each day, hundreds of recruits and older officers alike are put through their paces in full riot gear, learning the long shield manoeuvres of Section 18 of the tactical options. They run up and down the mock streets in formation, storm into buildings under a hail of bricks and flush out their assailants, then take prisoners and move forward to gain new ground. Bound tightly like a rugby scrum behind their shields, under attack from real petrol bombs, they learn about team spirit and acting as a unit, in an atmosphere which is the very distillation of machismo. They then all go to the canteen for curried chicken and the conversation is high with the exhilaration of adrenalin. They go off together for a communal shower, then down a few pints before bedtime.

The instructors at Hounslow are action men. Slim, muscular figures in their late twenties or early thirties, with short-cropped hair. Several of them have military backgrounds, including service in the SAS. Among them are the specialist gunners trained to fire plastic bullets and CS gas, who were waiting in the background at Broadwater Farm in 1985 and during the Notting Hill carnival in 1987. The psychological distance between riot training at Hounslow and policing skills training at Hendon seems so wide as to be unbridgeable. Even

the Deputy Assistant Commissioner has to confess that his slogan 'Macho is out' does not apply at Hounslow: 'There comes a time when macho must definitely be "in".'

How the teenage recruit is supposed to make sense of this contradiction is never explained. For most of their training they are taught to be sensitive, unthreatening individuals with a finely developed faculty for initiative. Then they are bussed out to Hounslow to run about shouting and bundling people out of buildings. The switch between the two involves a comprehensive change of identity. It is, as the former Hong Kong Police Commissioner Roy Henry said, 'a complete volte-face'. Public order policing is as the ACPO manual says, in direct contrast to normal policing. The study notes distributed to recruits at Hendon make the difference clear:

PUBLIC ORDER DEPLOYMENT

(Deployment means 'a spreading out of the troops')

Most of your police duty will be a matter of doing your job as an individual. You will work your beat as you decide (within limits). If you see an offence, you will identify it, review the powers you have and act as you think the situation demands.

However, when you are deployed as a part of a large-scale police operation for public order purposes, your function changes. You will then be acting as a member of a team led by your supervising officer. You will depend on him for decisions and he will depend on you to be where he expects and to carry out his orders as well as you can.

This is an almost exact restatement of a distinction made in 1908, in the report of the Royal Commission on the duties of the Metropolitan Police, which stressed that the responsibility for police work must rest on the individual constable not his superior officers. The report contrasted the position of police officers with that of soldiers:

Broadly speaking, the force acts by, and through, individual constables. An army, for the most part, does its work through groups of its units, through divisions, brigades, regiments and companies, and the responsibility of a private soldier is, in practice, reduced to such a point that he becomes little more than an automatic part of a machine.

... The position of a constable in a police force differs greatly from that of the private soldier. A constable is, as a general rule, placed alone to perform his duty on one or more beats or patrols.

... It follows that a great deal of the most difficult work of the force is left to the initiative and capacity of the humblest unit in each division.

Eighty years on, the distinction between constables and soldiers has been so blurred that some officers complain of the stress induced by switching between their two roles. In the canteen at Hounslow, two experienced men, one a sergeant, the other a constable, reflect on their own experience:

I don't find this exciting, I find it a little worrying. I wouldn't like to say how I would react to policing a public order situation in the area where I work and then going back to work in the same place.

I might finish dealing with a public order incident at ten o'clock at night and at six o'clock the next morning be walking the beat again. You have to change as quickly as that and behave as if nothing's happened. But what you feel inside is something different and a lot of the time I am very confused.

The officers commanding training at Hounslow on the streets of 'Riot City', Chief Superintendent George Crawford, has felt this tension himself. When he joined the police as a young man he wanted to concentrate on community policing. But he now finds himself not only training officers in imaginary scenes of public disorder, but also leading them into real-life confrontations. He was in command of the shield units and baton gunners brought into Notting Hill during the 1987 carnival. Once the battle was over, he faced the task of returning them to normal duties:

It is a stress problem and when you bring them off the streets you have got to be careful. Divisional management has to watch officers for a couple of days after the disorder to ensure that they have found the level of policing that we require for normal circumstances in this country. It is no different from a rugby match in that you have got to bring them off the high again. It is certainly a difficulty.

The Metropolitan Commissioner, Peter Imbert, says that this dual role means that police officers now have a duty to be chameleon-like even 'schizophrenic'. The problem for recruits is how to reconcile these conflicting police personalities when they leave Hendon behind. One WPC, about to take up her first posting at Hornsey, said she found it very difficult to bring two contradictory types of policing together. Policing skills were designed for everyday occurrences, while the riot training at Hounslow represents force met with force. She had no idea how the two could live side by side and had received no guidance during her basic training: 'I can only hope that this will come along. It is something I will have to find within myself.' As the Parliamentary Advisor to the Police Federation, Sir Eldon Griffiths MP, wrote in *Police* magazine: 'Many police officers are getting confused over the job they are supposed to be doing. Are they law enforcement officers, social workers or poor bloody infantrymen?'

Senior officers at Hendon express anxiety that this confusion is affecting the whole force, leaving its future direction in doubt. They have problems enough, they say, trying to make policing skills effective in practice without having to contend with a powerful internal group of paramilitary officers pulling the opposite way. They speak of two schools of thought in competition with one another: the liberal, tolerant approach against the force of confrontation. What worries them is that while their style may hold sway at Hendon, the paramilitary could come to dominate everywhere else. They already see officers creamed off into the public order elite and the special squad for protecting royalty and diplomats, and they fear further drift in this direction.

Peter Imbert said in a *File On 4* interview in September 1987 that his policy as Commissioner would favour the policing skills style:

I do not see a place for paramilitarism in the police service. The emphasis is on relating to the community and making it a much better place for all of us to live in. Indeed, the emphasis I plan for the future is on reducing the appearance of paramilitarism. The less of it the better.

Those in Hendon hope that he is right, and that London's police will depend in future on the skills of eye contact and empathy rather than plastic bullets and CS gas. But they cannot be confident that this will happen. Some of the current 'top boys' in paramilitary units are, after all, making their way up the ranks and could soon bring a shift of emphasis in the force management. One of them may, before long, become Commissioner.

The idea of taking public order duties away from the police and giving them to a new force as a special assignment is attractive to many Metropolitan officers as a way out of the confusion of roles they suffer at present. It is also promoted by officers from other city forces within ACPO. But there are strong arguments against it. Peter Imbert, for instance, argues that public disorder is so rare in Britain that a third force of this kind would be looking for something to do most of the time. It would also, he fears, lack any rapport with the community. Others in ACPO maintain that their anxiety about 'the ratchet effect', in which public violence and police repression both escalate in response to one another, would only be heightened by the formation of a specialist riot control force. They point to experience in Paris, where the mere presence of the CRS can act as provocation to a crowd.

The prospects for political action to reverse the paramilitary trend of policing seem remote. If any of the opposition parties get into government, they will face a police force which has some years of dependence on the tactical options behind it. Could any Labour or Democrat Home Secretary stand up to pressure from ACPO to leave matters as they stand? It would be a considerable risk to outlaw, for example, plastic bullets. The Home Secretary would be open to the accusation after any future riot that violence could have been contained by the police if only the government had not tied their hands. This would be a powerful charge to answer, especially if it were made by the Chief Constable concerned.

As for the Conservative Party, the possibility of putting a brake on the police was ruled out by Margaret Thatcher in 1985: 'If the police need more men, more equipment, different

equipment, they shall have them.' So the future direction of policing in Britain seems to be left in the hands of the police themselves, commanded by the members of ACPO.

When police recruits finish their basic training at Hendon they are given a book of principles for professional behaviour, to guide them in their office of constable. It is commonly called 'the little blue book'. Among its more philosophical passages is a quotation from a bygone era, the mid-seventies, when Sir Robert Mark spoke as Metropolitan Commissioner:

The police function to which you and I are dedicated is perhaps the most worthwhile and most noble function in any free society. For you and I have this in common, that we represent government by consent.

If the drift of policing throughout the eighties goes on unchecked for a further decade, which form of government will Britain's police represent by the start of the next century?