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COPY NO 78

1889
27 June 1988

CABINET

DISORDER IN RURAL AREAS

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Home Department

INTRODUCTION

The recent disorders in rural areas have to be seen against the general profile of crime in this country. Recorded crime figures per 100,000 population in the metropolitan forces are about double those for non-metropolitan forces. However, the figures for the first quarter of 1988 and those for 1987 confirm that the trend in metropolitan areas is slightly downward (down 1 per cent year on year). The figures for non-metropolitan areas continue to rise (3 per cent up year on year). The national rise is substantially lower than in most recent years. So broadly speaking crime in the cities is much higher than elsewhere, but falling: in the Shires lower, but still rising. Within these totals crime against property in the metropolitan areas, in particular burglaries, has fallen, but has continued to rise elsewhere. Violent offences (5 per cent of the total) continue to rise everywhere. Offences of violence in county and rural force areas totalled 83,000 last year, half as much again as in 1980. There was a similar increase in metropolitan areas. Care must be taken in using these figures because they are liable to fluctuate and cover only recorded crime; but they give a sketch.

POLICE

2. Our first line of defence against crime and disorder is the police. We made it a priority in 1979 to increase their strength from the low levels we had inherited. The result is a police service of 124,182 - some 12,600 stronger. They have also grown more efficient by introducing value for money concepts and new technology, and streamlining procedures. Extra civilian posts have released many more officers for operational duties - 3,300 over the last 5 years. It is no longer easy to recruit the civilians needed in London and the South East. They cost half as much as police officers.

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INNER CITIES

3. Much of the extra police resources has gone to the seven metropolitan forces. Their strength has increased by 7,781 since 1979, with 2,687 new posts approved. The riots of 1981 and 1985 were vivid proof that this was where the manpower was needed most. This is where the greatest problems for the police - and the most serious for society - remain. High levels of street crime - particularly drug-related - against a background of high tension mean that another Tottenham-style riot would surprise no one. I have minuted colleagues separately on this.

MARKET TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS

4. The media have turned their attention to the Shires. There is nothing new in market town disorders. Drunken mob violence goes back centuries; teddy boys in the '50s, mods and rockers in the '60s, punks and skinheads in the '70s inherited a long tradition. But I am concerned that the problem is getting worse. The violence over New Year 1987 and Spring Bank Holiday 1987 was an indication of a trend of disorder spreading to the suburbs and Shires, as I pointed out in my note of July 1987 to the Prime Minister and members of the Ministerial Steering Committee on Economic Strategy Sub-Committee on Urban Policy about public order in the inner cities. As a result, I set up a working group of officials and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) to examine how best the police could tackle the problem. I attach at Annex A a summary of the main points of the ACPO report compiled by the Chief Constable of Surrey. The police certainly regard the problem as an increasing burden on them. I am commissioning urgent research into the matter. This will involve a field study of four towns (to be decided in consultation with ACPO), their demographic background, the relevant alcohol and licensing statistics and a survey of young males between 18 and 30. We shall have the results by the end of the year.

WHO ARE THE TROUBLE MAKERS? WHY DO THEY DO IT?

5. I see similarities between the rural rioter and the football hooligan. Many of the 16-25 year olds involved in these disturbances have a latent capacity for violence. Toughness is a proof of manhood. Drink removes their inhibitions and pushes them over the edge. There are few internal disciplines or external restraints to rein them back. Their parents are at home in front of the TV and their upbringing and education have failed to give them self-discipline, a sense of social responsibility or much in the way of interest except having a good time. They are well paid for their age and have no financial commitments. They spend their wages in clubs and pubs increasingly designed for their newly affluent age group. They have the means to drink too much and there are few older people around to tell them when they have had enough. They fight amongst each other. When the police arrive, both sides gang up and turn on them. In the inner cities, police win by quick intervention with large numbers. But in rural forces the police are dispersed and cannot concentrate quickly and effectively. Police arriving in ones and twos become an attractive target.

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LINES OF REMEDY

Penalties and Deterrents

6. The penalties are already tough. The range of public order and other relevant offences (set out in Annex B) is comprehensive. We have created the new offence of disorderly conduct to deal with hooliganism. But quick prosecutions and, where necessary, exemplary sentences, would act as a deterrent. The police at Lincoln feel they have; 58 convictions and a total of 128 years imprisonment followed the Lincoln disorder. There is a case for the police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to concert in quick prosecutions for those arrested. We shall be following this up. But such violence is in any case a calculated defiance of the rule of law. The prospect of getting caught is the real deterrent. We expect the strength of the non-metropolitan forces to reach 66,990 by 1988/89 (at a cost of £1,622.4 million) and under the present programme with the same share of extra posts as this year, to reach 67,347 by the end of 1989/90 (at a cost of £1,756.5 million). In the last round of manpower increases, the police outside London asked for 2,239 extra posts. We were able to give them 500. We had to turn down 967 new posts for non-metropolitan forces. There is strong dissatisfaction among rural chief officers, shared by our own supporters, that we could not give them more. The ACPO report reflects this. I have put before colleagues proposals for future expansion, still substantially less than those claimed by the police.

7. Police manpower is costly. It cost £2-2,500 a week to station one police officer permanently in one place. It would be wrong to pour additional resources indiscriminately into rural forces. But a combination of police operational, tactical and managerial improvements bolstered by some additional manpower could make a difference. The working group referred to in paragraph 4 has identified specific ways in which police handling of rural disorder could be made more effective:

1. better information and intelligence gathering and dissemination arrangements on individuals involved;
2. training in tactics of first resort before reinforcements arrive;
3. sharpening up and testing of mobilisation and contingency plans; and
4. better follow-up procedures including evidence gathering on those not arrested at scene.

I regard this last point as particularly important. The recent football hooligan trials failed through inconsistencies in evidence. I have discussed this with the Commissioner and he has called for an urgent report. He is all the more determined to act decisively against the hooligans, press on with infiltration of their gangs, gather good quality evidence and construct watertight cases. The group will also commend a

number of measures designed to prevent and pre-empt disorder. Some of their recommendations require a better use of existing resources; others call for more manpower.

Deployment of Police

8. Rural chief officers have to balance a number of competing and conflicting demands on their available manpower. The public press for more officers on the beat. To provide a visible police presence across the force, operational strength must be spread thinly over a wide area. At the same time, the public expect a rapid response to outbreaks of disorder. This requires a quick concentration of manpower. Planning for a quick response at known trouble spots cuts back cover in other areas; Taunton makes do with fewer police so that any disorder in St Paul's, Bristol can be checked rapidly. Tilting the balance of priorities even further towards a quicker, stronger response to disorder would mean in effect reducing capacity to prevent and detect crime. Overtime can fill holes in ground cover when it is operationally essential. But budgets are tight and changes in conditions of service over the years have reduced chief officers' flexibility in using overtime. One more officer on duty at night usually means one less on patrol during the day.

9. Where disorder is predictable, chief officers can get any additional help they need through mutual aid; nine forces were involved in this year's Stonehenge operation. Mutual aid works smoothly and well. Better information gathering (paragraph 7) can help the police to anticipate disorder. But spontaneous disorder has always presented problems of response in rural forces. Only extraordinary increases in manpower would enable county and rural forces to tackle outbreaks of disorder as effectively as the inner city forces, with their greater operational strength and smaller territorial area. A "rural riot squad" is not the answer. They would spend their time chasing from one end of the county to another and, with incidents peaking quickly, would arrive too late to be effective. The sharpening and better testing by forces of their contingency plans (including arrangements for quick mutual aid) which the working group will recommend is a positive step, particularly if we are able to back it up with modest manpower increases. But securing a better police response is only part of the answer. Wider social issues are involved.

Alcohol

10. Alcohol featured in 90 per cent of the incidents covered by the recent ACPO survey on rural disorder; contributed a lot in 83 per cent; and 70 per cent of those arrested had been drinking. These are formidable figures. Drink is now much more affordable. The price of beer, cider and spirits has not kept pace with the growth in disposable income. The advertising of drink is pitched aggressively at the young male with a strong emphasis on its macho image. While this year's budget made a start, the tax structure does not provide much incentive to drink low-alcohol beers rather than strong, or give the brewers enough incentive to manufacture and push them. Many of the aspects which John Wakeham's Ministerial Group on Alcohol Misuse is looking at - advertising codes of

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practice; reviews of the way alcohol is portrayed on TV; and health education - are important contributions. So is encouraging local inter-agency co-operation on alcohol misuse. We have legislated to make it easier for the police to prosecute publicans who sell to under-age drinkers.

Licensing

11. But more is needed. Chief officers confirm that removal of a licence from a disorderly pub has an immediate effect on all pubs in the area. They feel that licensing justices do not take police objections about bad pubs and landlords sufficiently into account. We shall emphasise this in new guidance to go out shortly. The police need to adopt a more consistent and aggressive national policy on objecting to licences on these grounds. We have this in hand as well. This will provide the incentive needed to get the brewers, managers and tenants alongside to co-operate with the police in the "Pubwatch" and other schemes which have already shown some success in sorting out the difficult pubs and banning troublemakers.

CONCLUSION

12. This paper concentrates on the way in which the criminal justice system reaches the problem. Much of what we are doing at present, eg the Criminal Justice Bill, is relevant. The following are specific measures which I intend:

1. tough new guidance to licensing justices and the police on licensing of pubs and clubs (paragraph 11);
2. discussion with justices clerks and the CPS on quick prosecutions following incidents of disorder (paragraph 6);
3. encouraging chief officers to put into effect the working group's recommendations on tackling rural disorder (paragraph 7);
4. urgent research (paragraph 4).

13. These concentrate on more effective ways of tackling the symptoms. But the criminal justice system cannot tackle the root causes. At the heart of the problem is an absence of self-control and social responsibility on the part of the youths involved. Tackling this is a long and slow process. But we have made considerable progress in the last few years in policies which encourage people to take control of their own lives, be responsible for their own actions and have regard for the consequences. It is vital that this philosophy continues to underpin our policies on housing, education and all the other aspects which touch on the lives and activities of those who are involved in crime and disorder. We must ensure through specific groups such as the Ministerial Group on Crime Prevention (which will consider "Violence" at its July meeting) and in other ways that those policies are properly concerted and directed towards tackling the problem.

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Annex A

PUBLIC DISORDER OUTSIDE METROPOLITAN AREAS - ACPO

Study (The "Hayes Report")

In November 1987 a committee of the Central Conference of Chief Constables chaired by the Permanent Secretary at the Home Office and composed of Chief Constables, representatives of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and Home Office officials agreed that ACPO should conduct a survey of incidents of serious disorder in small towns and rural areas, where the police often had difficulty in mobilising a response. The survey was conducted by Mr Brian Hayes, the Chief Constable of Surrey.

A questionnaire was sent to each Chief Constable in England and Wales requesting details of all incidents in 1987 outside main Metropolitan areas involving group offences of public disorder or of assault or of criminal damages where 10 or more reinforcements in addition to normal sub-divisional patrol strength were needed and where experience showed that it would be difficult to mobilise that number of reinforcements in sufficient time. (The questionnaire had been drawn up in consultation with the joint Home Office/ACPO working group set up to examine ways of improving police response to disorder in areas where there were mobilisation difficulties). The results of the survey were presented to the Central Conference Committee and circulated within ACPO in early June. They have not been published, although details have been released to the news media.

Mr Hayes's report outlines the scale of the problem, the essential characteristics of the incidents surveyed, the difficulties posed for police forces and their arrangements for dealing with the problem. It also makes certain recommendations.

A total of 251 incidents as defined in the questionnaire were reported (ie an average of 5 incidents per week). The highest

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number of incidents were reported in the South of England, followed by the Midlands. Coastal resorts were particularly afflicted. Most incidents took place on Friday and Saturday evenings between 10.00pm and 1.00am and most involved young people who had been drinking (alcohol featured in over 90% of all incidents recorded). The numbers originally involved in an incident did not determine the eventual scale of the disorder. The incidents varied widely in location, duration and numbers involved.

The report recommends a common system for reporting incidents, a study of the relationship between disorder and licensing policy in particular areas and tentatively suggests research into the sociological and demographic factors involved. Police training should be reviewed to take account of the experience of disorder outside Metropolitan areas and forces should reappraise their contingency plans. Model intelligence gathering procedures should be devised and disseminated. Forces should consider whether greater attention should be given to licensing matters. The report also suggest that community groups may have a greater role to play both in controlling licensed premises and in providing alternative meeting places for young people.

The report states the author's view that the police cannot tackle this problem effectively without additional resources.

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OFFENCES AND PENALTIES

Offence

Public Order Act

Threatening or disorderly behaviour (general - Section 5) Level 3 fine. (£400)

Threatening or disorderly behaviour (towards another - Section 4) 6 months)
Level 5 fine) (£2000)

Affray 3 years and fine

Violent disorder 5 years and fine

Riot 10 years and fine

Offences of violence against the person

Assault 2 months or level 3 fine

Assault on police 6 months

Actual Bodily Harm 5 years

Unlawful wounding 5 years

Wounding with intent to do GBH Life imprisonment

Robbery Life imprisonment

Possession of offensive weapon 2 years and unlimited fine

Possession of knife in public (new offence in Criminal Justice Bill) Level 3 fine

Offences against property

Arson Life imprisonment

Criminal damage 10 years and unlimited fine

Criminal damage endangering life Life imprisonment