

PLASTIC BULLETS



NEWSLETTER
OF THE
CAMPAIGN
AGAINST
PLASTIC
BULLETS

Issue 1 Autumn 85

Organised by the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science and the National Council for Civil Liberties.

TEN BLOODY YEARS

Stephen Geddis, aged 10, died on the 30 August 1975. He was the first fatal victim of a plastic bullet.

Stephen Geddis was near his home at Divis Flats, West Belfast, when he was hit on the side of the head by a plastic bullet fired by soldiers of the Royal Anglian regiment. As reported in the *Sunday Times*, 'By all accounts Stephen was not one of the city's wild youngsters. He was withdrawn and rarely went outdoors, spending most of his time playing with toys and learning the guitar and mouth organ.'

He had refused to go outside for three weeks since returning from an NSPCC-sponsored trip to America. On the 28 August his father finally persuaded him to go out to play. Near where he was playing a patrol tried to remove two cushions which some boys had set fire to in the road. The boys stoned the soldiers. A soldier, pursuing the boys, fired a plastic bullet. Stephen fell to the ground with a head wound. He was about 40 yards away and, according to eyewitnesses, was not involved in the stoning. He died three days later.

Plastic bullets were issued in the North of Ireland in August 1972 and were first used in action on 7 February 1973. At first they were used sparingly. Only 258 had been fired by the end of 1974. But in 1975 over 3,500 plastic bullets were fired, and by the end of that year they had completely replaced rubber bullets. In 1981, the year of the IRA hunger strikes, as many as 30,000 plastic bullets were fired.

The attraction of the plastic bullets for the army and RUC were their greater range and accuracy. Rubber bullets were designed to be fired at the ground, so that they would ricochet and strike demonstrators in the legs or lower part of

the body. They quickly became unstable in flight, so, although they were recommended for use against targets between 25 and 55 yards away, they were generally considered inaccurate at much above 20 yards.

In contrast, the plastic bullet is designed to be fired directly at the target, and at longer range. So they should be more likely to hit selected targets, thus reducing the bad publicity that resulted from hitting bystanders.

The officially inspired *Jane's Infantry Weapons 1976* suggested that rubber bullets were withdrawn because the disability and serious injury rates 'were not considered acceptable' — although the fatality rate was considered moderate. But the only explanation ever given in parliament for replacing them with plastic bullets was the plastic version's greater accuracy — no



mention was made of its greater safety.

In fact plastic bullets have proved significantly *more* dangerous than rubber bullets. For plastic bullets there has been approximately one death for every 4,000 rounds fired, compared with one for every 18,000 rubber bullets.

Regulations which govern the use of plastic bullets in Northern Ireland state that they should be aimed at the lower part of the body and not used at ranges of less than 20 metres 'except where the safety of soldiers or others is threatened'. Even if these regulations were observed plastic bullets can still kill and maim, but these regulations are routinely breached. Of the twelve people killed by plastic bullets all died from head and/or chest injuries, as did Stephen Geddis. There is no way that regulations can safeguard the use of plastic bullets.

The European Parliament has repeatedly called upon all member states to ban the use of plastic bullets, but the British government has steadfastly refused to comply. On 11 October 1984 a further call for an immediate ban was carried by 150 votes to 29. The British Conservatives and Ian Paisley, leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, were alone in opposing the motion.

Ten years on from the death of Stephen Geddis twelve people are dead and many more injured. A fitting commemoration of the loss of Stephen's innocent life would be to achieve a ban on plastic bullets.

PLASTIC BULLETS KILL AND MAIM-BAN THEM NOW!

In 1983, the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science and the National Council for Civil Liberties, who shared a common concern over the issue of plastic bullets to police and army in Britain and Northern Ireland, formed the Campaign against Plastic Bullets to demand the implementation of a total ban on the use and deployment of these weapons.

This is a broad-based, non-party organisation; its supporters include many Members of Parliament, Trade Union activists, community organisations and individuals.

Statement of Objectives

Plastic bullets have killed and are killing women, men and children in Northern Ireland. Many more have been maimed and hundreds have required hospital treatment. The availability of plastic bullets to police forces throughout Britain now threatens a repetition of this carnage on a larger scale.

We support the demand that these weapons should be withdrawn from service both in Great Britain and in Ireland; and that their manufacture, stockpiling and export should be terminated.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Organise discussions on the issue in your organisation. We can provide you with speakers, publicity literature, videos etc.
- Get your organisation to affiliate to this campaign by adhering to CaPB's Statement of Objectives (see above).
- Pass resolutions calling for a total ban on the use and deployment of plastic bullets in your organisation.
- Urge your Council to pass a resolution on the issue and affiliate to CaPB.
- Publicise all your activities in the local press.



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CAMPAIGN IN IRELAND

The United Campaign Against Plastic Bullets was formed on 6 September 1984, at an open meeting called after the death of Sean Downes, killed by a plastic bullet fired at close-blank range by a member of the RUC on August 1984. He was the 15th person to die, seven of them children, after being struck with these lethal weapons. The campaign is organised by the relatives of those killed and injured, with the backing of several political parties, human rights groups and clergy. Their sole aim is the banning of the plastic bullet. Some of the groups activities included: a picket of Brocks factory in Sandquhar, Dumfriesshire, Scotland, which assembles plastic bullets; lobbying of labour MPs at Blackpool, picketing local police stations to commemorate the anniversaries of those killed and endeavouring to have the whole issue internationalised. Despite the fact that at several court cases for compensation, the victims were found to be totally innocent persons and that plastic bullets had been fired at times when they were uncalled for and unjustified, only one member of the security forces has been charged in connection with the deaths.

The campaign, directed by the families of plastic bullet victims, is determined to bring about an end to the use of these lethal weapons, responsible to date for the deaths of 15 people, many of them children.

UNITED CAMPAIGN AGAINST PLASTIC BULLETS, c/o Claire Reilly, 20 Monagh Crescent, Belfast 11.

PLASTIC BULLETS

Plastic Bullets is collectively produced by Gerry Danby, Sarah Huey, Gill Lewis, Charlie Owen, Jonathan Rosenhead, Nishaharan Vaithilingam.

Thanks to Liz Curtis for the article 'Fractured Lives' and to Information on Ireland for the photographs.

Plastic Bullets is available free to anyone living in London. People living outside London please send 20p per copy to cover postage.

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VIDEO: Plastic Bullets — the deadly truth

'Plastic Bullets' — the deadly truth! is a video commissioned by the campaign and produced by Independent Irish Television.

The video exposes the hypocrisy of the British Government policy of 'Law and Order' when it seeks to drive people off the streets in an attempt to depoliticise them and militarise a 'peaceful' solution in Ireland.

Plastic bullets, the deadly truth! tells the story of families who have lost relatives as a result of this murderous policy. It portrays the strong resistance of these families and also the terrible pain inflicted upon them. It lays bare 'the shoot to kill children' policy of the British security forces in their attempt to keep the nationalist areas of the north of Ireland and the dignity and sense of justice of those directly affected by the deadly weapon, the plastic bullet gun.

The video is on VHS format and lasts 60 minutes. Available from us for £32.00 (plus postage).

BROCKS DAMP SQUIB BACKFIRES

One of Britain's leading firework manufacturers — Brocks — as well as making bangers and sparklers also turn out plastic bullets at their Dumfriesshire factory. This was revealed for the first time by a BBC *Heart of the Matter* documentary last October.

On October 22nd the Campaign against Plastic Bullets and two other organisations (the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science and Information on Ireland) issued a joint press statement drawing attention to this fact. We said that it was paradoxical that whilst one of Brocks' products (fireworks) brought such pleasure to many children another (plastic bullets) had caused death and disfigurement to other children — 6 children under 15 have been killed by plastic bullets.

However you probably won't have read what the press statement said, because the very next day it became subject to injunctions issued in the Scottish Court of Sessions and the English High Court, so that no-one could repeat a word of it! The *Scottish Daily Record* had phoned Brocks for comment on the statement. Their response was to despatch their lawyers to prevent the reporting of either the statement or any comment. Brocks, which sells more than £2 million worth of fireworks, clearly feared a threat to their sales so near to Guy Fawkes night.

Brocks never admitted on the BBC programme that they did actually produce plastic bullets. But in fact they have a contract to supply both the Ministry of Defence and British police forces. This was revealed in their petition in support of the Scottish proceedings which stated that: 'In addition to the manufacture of fireworks, the petitioners also make military pyrotechnics, including smoke and signal flares and baton rounds (otherwise known as plastic bullets). . . . In any event, the said baton rounds are not weapons.'

Brocks' strategy somewhat backfired in that reports of their injunction were carried fairly widely in the press — probably attracting more attention than would the original press release. Further, as the *New Scientist* put it: 'Luckily for free speech, the High Court lifted the injunction on Monday 5 November, by which time most people had bought their fireworks. But at least it was in good time for Guy Fawkes 1985.'

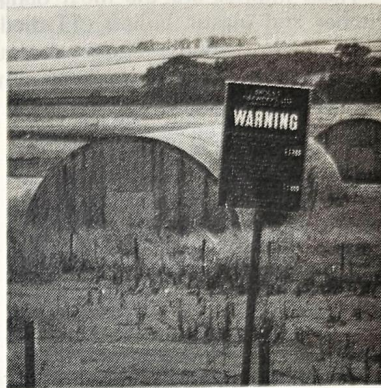


Photo credit: Information on Ireland

On 16 May the Government published its White Paper on Public Order. The White Paper comes as the result of a review which began after the events in Southall in 1979 and following a year which has seen the miners' strike and large anti-nuclear demonstrations.

There are three major proposals in the White Paper which cause particular concern.

1. Advance notice of processions

The advance notice proposals mean that spontaneous demonstrations will no longer be lawful without police permission. These proposals would create a criminal offence of organising a march without 7 days' notice. By doing this, the government will criminalise those who make a public response to an immediate event — such as a leak of chemicals from a local factory. Such restrictions are quite unnecessary: in fact, the police are told of 80-90% of demonstrations, and the former Metropolitan Police Commissioner has said that he was unable to remember any march where prior notice would have avoided disorder.

2. Power to impose conditions on a march or procession

That conditions should be imposed on marches, processions and demonstrations to prevent disruption to 'the normal life of the community' fails to recognise that in democratic society, marches and processions are and should be, part of our normal way of life. A large range of activities may 'disrupt' community life, including conventional processions, a Royal wedding or the switching on of the Regent Street Christmas illuminations.

PUBLIC ORDER WHITE PAPER

These events also require major police resources, but the proposed restrictions would not apply to them. The White Paper also suggests that conditions might be imposed to 'keep down costs', thus allowing the administrative convenience of the police to override the rights of peaceful protest.

The new criterion of 'disruption' is additional to 'serious public disorder'; under it police could impose conditions on a completely peaceful march which was likely to include a large number of people and take a long time to complete its route, and police could assert that disruption was to be anticipated.

3. Conditions on pickets and meetings

The Government's proposals do not require advance notice of static demonstrations, nor do they propose powers to ban such demonstrations. However, the proposals do provide powers to impose conditions restricting the duration, location and numbers of people at such a gathering. Such conditions if imposed could virtually amount to the very ban that the White Paper says, quite rightly, is unacceptable. If, for example, a group of

people wished to hold a 24-hour vigil outside the Northern Ireland Office to highlight a particular abuse of plastic bullets, the police could instruct the organisers that the vigil must take place half a mile away, the numbers of participants should be restricted to two, and they should stay for only half an hour. The effect of such conditions would be virtually the same as a complete ban.

If these proposals are embodied in legislation, the rights to and effectiveness of peaceful protest will be seriously eroded. The result can only be an escalation of conflict between would-be demonstrators and the police, with the increased risk of police use of riot control weapons such as plastic bullets.

Comments on the proposals contained in the White Paper were requested to be sent to the Home Office before 30 June. A Bill can then be expected, probably before the end of the year. NCCL is briefing organisations on the implications of the proposals and will be launching a massive campaign to oppose restrictive measures contained in the Bill. Any individuals or organisations wanting further information should contact NCCL at 21 Tabard Street, London SE1 4LA.

A broad based campaign to fight these proposals was formed on the 31st July this year. For further details contact: Campaign for the Right of Assembly and Dissent (CROWD), 38, Mount Pleasant, London WC1. Tel: Cathy 734 5831; Maggie 833 2701.

The killing of John Downes last August by the Royal Ulster Constabulary in front of the world's media brought public attention at last to the fact that plastic bullets kill. But beyond the borders of the North of Ireland little has been said about the terrible injuries that these weapons cause, wrecking havoc on the lives not only of the injured people but also of their families and friends.

Head injuries are the most dangerous. Of the fifteen people killed by rubber and plastic bullets, 11 died from wounds to the head, and four from chest wounds. Those who survive plastic bullet head wounds are considered by doctors to have almost miraculously escaped death: 'One doctor said it was like winning the pools,' said one survivor. But the price of survival may be very high.

Emma Groves

Emma Groves is now in her sixties and has 22 grandchildren, only one of whom she has ever seen. She was blinded in 1971 when a British soldier fired a plastic bullet through her living room window smashing her face at about eight yards range. Most of her 11 children, as well as her 3-year-old grandchild, were in the room when it happened. It was a traumatic experience. Her daughter Roisin, who was 13 at the time, recalls: 'Her face was just completely blown off. There was blood everywhere, blood up the walls, blood up the windows. It was absolute bedlam, because nobody knew what to do, we thought she was dead.'

Emma Groves spent only two weeks in hospital because, as she says, 'There was nothing they could do.' The doctors rebuilt her face with plastic surgery and gave her artificial eyes.

Life for her and her family changed utterly. A very active woman, proud of her efficiency in looking after her large family, Emma Groves was suddenly unable to do anything for them. 'I couldn't cook, I couldn't shop for them any more, I couldn't dress them any more.' She sank into a deep depression from which she didn't emerge for two years.

Roisin remembers: 'It was very strange coming in from school and she was still in bed. Everybody had to be quiet. For two years it was very bad in the house.' The second oldest daughter, who was 19, gave up her job to become mother to all the younger children. Emma Groves's husband, who died in 1984, continued working as a linesman on overhead pylons, but nearly had a nervous breakdown. 'He couldn't cope with the fact that I couldn't see any more. It kind of a way split us. We weren't able to do the kind of things we'd always done together.'

She was given £35,000 compensation, which she accepted reluctantly. 'I didn't want it, quite honestly. I wanted the soldier who shot me brought into the court to account for shooting me and leaving me the way I am.' As in many other cases, the soldier was never charged. 'I think that all the people who have been

hurt, and the parents of the children who have been killed, find this all very frustrating. The injustice of it all. All the sorrow and the heartbreak that's left behind, and nobody has to account for it. I think that if some of them had had to account for it a long time ago, there wouldn't have been as much more killing. It's a downright fact that they do have a licence to kill. To stand in your own living room and be shot, and nobody have to account for it, I just think it's all wrong.'

Now she campaigns to have plastic bullets banned, going to as many meetings and protests as she can, always with a relative to guide her. 'When you've suffered yourself, you understand and you want to help, and you also don't want anybody else hurt. The sooner it's stopped the better.' But sometimes, still, her situation overwhelms her. 'It's so frustrating that I end up crying, even after 13 years. Because I still am a fit woman, and I have to sit on the settee most of the time.'

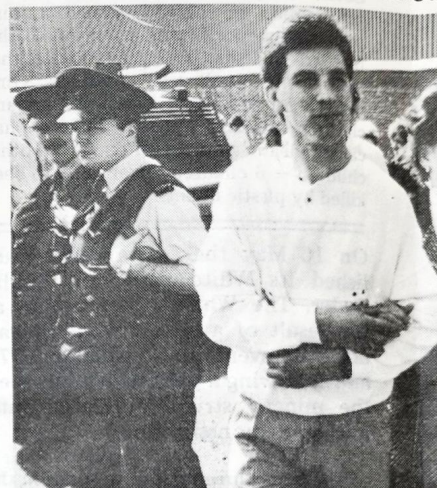
Dominic Marron

In May 1981, the month when Bobby Sands MP died on hunger strike and when the RUC and troops fired nearly 17,000 plastic bullets, the Association for Legal Justice, a voluntary group, received details of 27 people in Belfast with head injuries from plastic bullets. Four of these people died: two young girls, a housewife and a 39-year-old man. Several of the survivors had severe long-term injuries, among them Dominic Marron and Sean Tumelty, both paralysed down one side of their bodies and without the use of an arm and a leg.

Dominic was nearly 16 when he was shot on 9 May 1981. The plastic bullet, fired by the RUC, hit him on the side of the head. Doctors and the family thought he would die. He was operated on immediately and then spent a week on the life support machine. Later he had a steel plate inserted in his head. I visited him at his home near the Falls Road in September 1984, three years after the injury. His powerless left hand is banded to a plastic support, to prevent it

FRACTURED LIVES

Liz Curran



Protest outside Woodville
Emma Groves (centre) with Claire Reilly of the Women's Peace Union

lying limp. His mother explains, 'It's just like a baby's arm, all withered away, and the fingers are all turning in.' He can't control his left leg either, and drags it when he walks — as a result getting through a pair of shoes every few weeks, which his mother can't afford. He has not yet had any compensation for the injury — nor was the RUC man responsible charged — and receives only £29 a week in state benefits. He needs help getting dressed: 'He can't tie his laces, and he needs help with his trousers and buttoning his shirt,' says his mother. He is also, she says, 'sometimes very hard to put up with. He gets very aggressive at times.' Occasionally he has epileptic fits, apparently brought on by stressful situations. 'He's lucky to be alive — but sure what future has he?' asks his mother.

Sean Tumelty

Sean Tumelty was living in Divis Flats with his wife and four young daughters at the time he was shot. He was 26 years old and a supporter of the Irish Republican Socialist Party. In the early hours of 31 May 1981, he was hit on the head by a plastic bullet fired by a British soldier. His wife found the strain of life after the

TUMELTY YES

Curtis

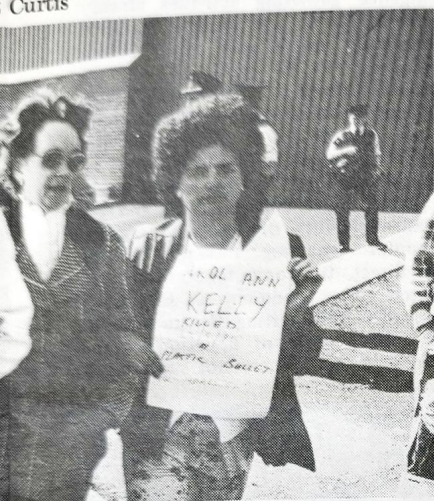


Photo credit: Gerry Casey

Woodburn RUC Base.
of the Association for Legal Justice (right)

injury too great, and left, taking the children. When I visited him in September 1984, he was coping alone with some help from his mother, determined to be as independent as possible, and living on social security.

Sean was on the life support machine for five days, and then spent seven months in hospital. The injuries are permanent. He explained: 'I was left paralysed down the left side of my body, which means I can't see out of the left eye to the left side, and my left arm is completely useless. It just dangles there. And I can't move my left leg — I have to walk with the aid of a caliper, which I've to keep on at all times. I've a platinum plate in the right side of my head. The consultant opened my skull to see what damage was done, and the bones just fell away.'

For months afterwards, Sean couldn't speak properly, couldn't dress himself, couldn't write and couldn't talk. 'I had to learn to do things. My own mind wasn't my own, I was talking slurred, till my voice got stronger.' It took him nearly a year to learn to dress himself, but he still

can't tie lace-up shoes. His blurred vision in the left eye means he bumps into things. He forced himself to learn to walk, refusing point blank to use a wheelchair.

Sean also has occasional epileptic fits and is temperamental: 'I feel very agitated and lose my temper. I don't know what it is — I can't seem to settle.' There are other psychological problems: 'I've got this thing in my mind, when I go to clubs if there's a dance or disco on, when I see girls, I'd be timid to get up and go over and ask them to dance. Because I'd say, 'What would a girl want to dance with me for? Look at the state of me.' People keep telling me it's stupid, but that's the way I feel.'

Since the injury, the authorities have behaved with extraordinary vindictiveness, literally adding insult to injury by bringing a succession of charges against him, possibly in order to nullify his claim for compensation. The first charges, brought while he was in hospital, included rioting on the day he was shot: he was found not guilty. Next he was charged with attempted murder and possession of explosives on the word of 'supergrass' Jackie Goodman: the charges were withdrawn when Goodman retracted. The next charges, brought on the basis of a 'verbal' statement which he denied making, included membership of the INLA on 30 May 1981 — the day before he was shot. These charges were later withdrawn. He was then charged on the word of another 'supergrass', Harry Kirkpatrick. The trial is taking place at the time of writing. Sean Tumelty is remanded in custody in Crumlin Road prison, and has collapsed twice in court. The soldier who shot him was never charged.

Larry O'Hara

Larry O'Hara's injury was, by comparison, relatively minor: one of the many that usually passes unpublicised. Yet a year after he was hit, his face is still partially paralysed. He was not the first in his family to suffer: his brother Patrick lost an eye several years ago, later receiving £5,000 in an out-of-court settlement, when a British soldier shot him with a rubber bullet.

Larry was taking photographs for the Sinn Féin paper *An Phoblacht/Republican News* at the rally outside Connolly House on 12 August 1984, and had just taken a picture of John Downes running across the road seconds before his death, when a plastic bullet hit him behind the right ear. It had been fired by a policeman from about ten yards away. 'It was as if some-

one had smashed this gong right beside your head,' Larry recalled. His first response was to go on taking pictures, but he found it difficult to focus. He took refuge in the People's Democracy bookshop, where a miner from a visiting delegation from Britain put damp cloths on his head to keep the swelling down.

He was taken to the hospital, but refused to stay overnight, and then had to return every day for a month of tests. Half his face and neck was completely numb. His hearing was reduced. His right eye wouldn't close at all for about six months, and he had to wear a patch over it at night to sleep. Because the eye wouldn't blink, it got dirty and irritated. In April when I spoke to him, Larry still couldn't blink properly, so that his vision was getting blurred when he was outside trying to take pictures. When the weather is cold, the eye swells and becomes sore. The feeling is gradually returning to his face, but his appearance is still distorted. Doctors have told him that the right hand side of his forehead will always be numb. He has not yet received compensation, and no member of the RUC has been charged with shooting him.

When he was hit, the doctors told him that he was very lucky that the bullet hit where it did, and at an angle. 'If it had hit anywhere else, it would have killed me from that range. They said if it had gone to the right, it would have broken my neck, and to the left it would have gone up into my head and smashed my skull.'



Photo credit: An Phoblacht



POLICE TECHNOLOGY AND THE MINERS STRIKE

The miners' strike of 1984-85 was the greatest internal crisis faced by the British state at least since the General Strike of 1926. The police were a key element in the defeat of the strike (though other factors, such as the legal system, the social security system, the split in the miners' ranks, the media, were of comparable importance). The police intervened in the strike in many different ways, employing new methods and new technologies. Yet plastic bullets were not used. This is a fact which needs some explanation.

It was by no means obvious that plastic bullets would be kept out of the conflict. Indeed the Police Federation's parliamentary spokesperson, Eldon Griffiths MP, was by September preparing public opinion for the likelihood that the police would 'have to' use them. One can be reasonably sure that among the equipment in some of those ubiquitous police transit vans were boxes of plastic baton rounds and the riot guns to fire them.

But they remained in the vans. It would be reassuring to believe that the police reluctance to use them was due to the strength of the anti-plastic bullet campaign. Indeed in a sense this may have been true — for the growth over the past few years in public awareness of the dangers of these weapons is one of the factors which police and government have to take account of. With most of the major parties either formally opposed to their use (Labour, Liberal) or openly split (SDP), any use of plastic bullets on miners pickets could have sparked a wave of public sympathy, or a trade union reaction in solidarity.

Given this situation, much of the police activity during the strike can be read as an attempt to contain the picketting, and allow coal to be mined by strike-breakers and then distributed, *without* the need to use plastic bullets. The new police methods were aimed primarily at preventing the formation of concentrations of strikers, such as those which closed the gates of Saltley coke depot in 1972. Where miners did gather in large numbers, the police employed the new techniques of 'crowd control' which they have been polishing up over the last few years. It was, but only just, enough.

The police approach to the miners' strike is best understood in terms of the strategy of 'targetting and surveillance'. This concept was acquired by Sir Kenneth Newman from the British Army when he was Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. From his influential position as Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, his advocacy has promoted targetting and surveillance into the new orthodoxy. Crudely, it

involves deciding who 'the enemy' is, and collecting by all available means a mass of low-grade detailed information which enables individuals to be identified and organised activity prevented. It yokes the multi-agency approach of 'community policing' to the iron-fist of reactive policing.

Evidently in the context of the 1984-85 miners' strike, the enemy were the active pickets, especially those willing to travel to working coal mines in other areas. The police problem was to know who was going where and when. Most mining communities are right-knit, with little opportunity for covert information gathering by plain clothes police. As a result telephone tapping was heavily relied on. Phone tapping only comes to light when slip-ups are made, but evidence of interference with telephones has come from all round the country, and at every level from rank-and-file miner to national HQ. Evidently the practice was widespread.

Acting on the resulting information, police could try to dissuade coach firms from transporting parties of miners, obstruct their departure, tail coaches from patrol cars or helicopters, and arrange their interception at remote locations (such as motorway service stations). The various technologies of electronic and physical surveillance were combined together for a common purpose.

Such harassing tactics could only be partially effective, and clearly could not cope with pickets travelling in hundreds of separate private cars. To stop them from getting through a second line of defence was required — and a police cordon was thrown round, in particular, the entire county of Nottinghamshire. Initially this caused scenes of confusion, with any able-bodied male being hauled out and required to produce evidence of (non-mining) identity and an acceptable (to the police) reason for travelling. To avoid such potentially damaging confrontations, the police once more resorted to technology. Cars turned back at police road-blocks or otherwise attracting their attention had their numbers recorded in the Police National

Computer. (The numbers were entered in the Stolen and Suspect Vehicle Index, under the category 'seen or checked in noteworthy circumstances'.) If seen on subsequent occasions the occupants of these cars were singled out for police attention (and often for arrest) while other travellers could be allowed through the cordon with minimal disturbance.

Would-be pickets who managed to filter past the cordon and join up with those who lived more locally usually found themselves confronted at the pit gates by a numerically superior body of police. These were predominantly police from other forces, provided for service in the coalfields under so-called 'mutual aid' arrangements. Their timely presence was made possible by the intelligence gathering activities already described. But it also required national coordination on a scale never before attempted by the police. This was achieved through the National Reporting Centre established for the duration of the emergency at Scotland Yard. The NRC received information, and sent instructions for the deployment of police, by telephone, telex and the 'broadcast facility' of the Police National Computer (enabling messages to be sent direct to computer terminals in selected police headquarters). Effectively the National Reporting Centre acted as the control room of a national police force — which we are not supposed to have.



The police at the pit-head were not only superior in numbers; they had also graduated in 'crowd control' techniques, having trained to a common syllabus all round the country. Police support units from as many as 14 separate police forces could wheel, manoeuvre and charge to the same commands. Relatively lightly-armoured snatch squads would dart through sudden gaps in the walls of plastic shields to make their arrests. Land-Rovers fitted with 'gull-wing' plastic shields headed up columns of advancing police, rather as the military deploy tanks and infantry. Meanwhile police video teams, from high buildings or nearby private premises, recorded the action, to provide evidence for later arrests in less provocative circumstances.

The police were one factor in the defeat of the miners' strike, and the new police technology and techniques formed one element of their contribu-

tion. What the police learned from the miners' strike is now being employed against other targets — CND groups attempting to track Cruise missiles across-country, hippies trying to attend a free festival at Stonehenge. The new confidence of the police will affect the way in which we are all policed.

There are some particular lessons which those who wish to see plastic bullets withdrawn from the police must draw from the miners' strike. One is that the campaign for police accountability is closely linked to that against plastic bullets. It is of limited value to persuade local public opinion, elected representatives and Police Authorities to ban plastic bullets if such decisions can be off-handedly ignored by the police themselves. The conduct of the police during the strike, often in total disregard of the resolutions of their own Authorities, indicates the need for real rather than paper controls.

Secondly, the move to a national police force is eroding the scope for local options by particular forces — witness the uniform national training programme in crowd control. So far the campaign against plastic bullets has managed to restrict the number of police forces with these weapons to 12 out of the 43 forces in England and Wales. Such local inconsistencies could interfere with the smooth operation of the police machine. Pressure can be expected to bring the others into line — and indeed while the strike was still on the Police Federation issued a call for all forces to be equipped with plastic bullets. Any such move by the Home Secretary must be strongly resisted.

Lastly, the police are now, whenever the government chooses, a centralised, militarized national police force. Plastic bullets are just one of the 'technology transfers' from the army to the police; and the current trend to iron fist policing will if anything lead to still more brutal weaponry being deployed. The campaign against plastic bullets can with advantage alert public opinion to the growing danger.

The non-use of plastic bullets during the miners' strike does not mean that the police are either soft-hearted or forgetful. It means that the political risks of first use of these weapons against the organised labour movement were adjudged to outweigh the advantages. In a confrontation, say, between the police and black youths or football fans the political calculations could well produce a different answer. Once used, they will be used again and again on widening circles of targets, unless an outraged public opinion draws the line. It is the job of the Campaign Against Plastic Bullets to ensure that, whatever the pretext, there is full public awareness of the implications of the use of plastic bullets.

SHOOTING OF MICHAEL DONNELLY — JUDGE SAYS 'UNCALLED FOR' AND 'UNJUSTIFIED'

On the 14th June this year a Belfast High Court Judge awarded the father of Michael Donnelly, a youth and community worker, who was killed by a plastic bullet in 1980, £8,500 compensation against the Ministry of Defence. According to the evidence of a local witness Michael was walking along a side street near the Falls Road when a soldier fired the fatal bullet. A hospital pathologist substantiated the evidence that the bullet was fired from a range of 15-20 feet. Rejecting the army witness' evidence that the soldier was approximately 130-200 feet away from his victim, the Judge said that 'the firing of the plastic bullet was uncalled for and unjustified'.

Michael Donnelly was hit just above the heart and died shortly afterwards. It's worth noting that all of the fifteen

victims of rubber and plastic bullets died as a result of heart or head injuries and that this was in clear breach of the guidelines issued by the authorities. To this date no army or police personnel have been convicted.

The evidence showed that at the time of the incident the street was almost deserted. Army witnesses claimed that there was a riot when the shooting of Michael took place. However, awarding the compensation, the judge nevertheless felt it important to point out that the soldier 'had no intention to kill or injure Michael Donnelly'. No-one has been charged with the killing of Michael Donnelly.



REVIEW: TECHNOCOP Steve Peake

The TechnoCop police force of the 1980s 'must maintain a strong repressive presence in the estates and decaying inner city slums to remind the powerless of their impotence. It must collect and manage the mass of information which, given the rupture in communication, is their substitute for knowledge of the community. And it must deploy a technology appropriate for divide-and-rule so that where and when discontent erupts in challenging forms it can be dealt with — and in ways which are not so openly provocative as to unite opposition in a common cause.'

TechnoCop is a sequel in many ways to the *Technology of Political Control* of the late 1970s. The two books share some of the same authors and almost identical concerns about the use that the state can make of repressive technology. What separates the two is half a decade and more of the rapid development and deployment of this technology. The *Technology of Political Control* looked forward to the situation in which we now find ourselves: something akin to a police state.

As the authors say about the 1984-5 miners' strike: 'We have lived through the first outing of the national police force. The government has marshalled the Chief Constables of ACPO and their flying police officers in a massive display of state power. Constables and Chief Constables have intercepted and arrested without reference to any law. Their legitimisation has come from the certainty of political backing from the magistrates, the media and the Home Secretary. The technology — its acquisition so often justified as aimed at criminals, hooligans, terrorists — has been openly deployed against its prime target, the organised working class.'

TechnoCop looks at the controlling technologies available to the police: 'Surveillance technology provides the unobtrusive automated nervous system, detecting evidence of organised dissent. Information technology stores the mass of data necessary for "pervasive policing" of

target sectors of the population, monitored through such apparently benign schemes as Neighbourhood Watch and community policing. Communications technology provides the electronic sinews of the police, merging them into a national force in all but name. And riot technology gives them the muscle to act as effective enforcers.' The book also examines the changes in police methods which accompany the introduction of the new technologies, and with their recent use in the miners' strike. The final chapter asks 'What factors in the Britain of 1985 encourage the development of such a high-tech police force?'

TechnoCop is a better book than its predecessor. It is shorter, sharper, and more shocking, as the Home Secretary might say. It gives an excellent and very timely summary of the publicly-available knowledge in this area, placed and discussed in a political context.

There are a few problems with it however. First, it lacks both an index and references, the latter being a particularly serious omission in a book of this type, given that most of its material is drawn from published sources.

A second difficulty is that *TechnoCop* still has a hint of that 'technological determinism' that made the *Technology of Political Control* seem just a trifle offshore from reality. The authors have reduced the impact of this by usually firmly placing into their broader political contexts the technologies they are discussing. But there is still a feeling from the book of technology having an unstoppable life and dynamic of its own, despite the authors' discussion on 'Controlling the Controllers'. This implicit fatalism makes the book almost as depressing as it is informative; a sequel on subverting repressive technology should follow as soon as possible.

TechnoCop: New Police Technologies by the BSSRS Technology of Political Control Group, with RAMPET. 112 pp. £3.50. Published by Free Association Books and distributed by Turnaround Distribution (for trade orders). Available from BSSRS, 25 Horsell Road, London N5.

WHAT EUROPE DID NOT DECIDE

On 4 October 1976 Brian Stewart, a 13 year old from Turf Lodge in Belfast, was hit in the head by a plastic bullet fired by a member of the British army. Six days later on the following Sunday he died in the Royal Victoria Hospital.

With the assistance of the NCCL Kathleen Stewart, Brian's mother, took the circumstances of her son's death before the European Commission on Human Rights. She alleged that there had been a breach of the right to life protected by Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights. In October of last year, just eight years after Brian's death, the Commission ruled Kathleen Stewart's application inadmissible. But in doing so it was a long way from giving 'the human rights seal of approval' on the use of plastic bullets.

The press reports which were to appear shortly thereafter presented a wholly misleading account of the Commission's decision. This publicity caused the Police Federation, albeit not for the first time, to demand that all police forces in England and Wales (and not just 12 as at present) should be equipped and trained in the use of plastic bullets: 'we have never gone along with the hysterical propaganda against them' said a Federation spokesperson.

In fact the European Commission failed to face up to the real decision with which it was faced; perhaps this was one which was just too 'hot' for it. The Commission took the view that it had *not* been 'called upon to examine the general or wider issue of whether plastic baton rounds should be issued to soldiers as a means of riot control'. Instead the role of the Commission was to 'examine, in the light of the specific circumstances of the incident which led to the death of the applicant's son, and without losing sight of the general context, whether the degree of force used was in conformity with Article 2' [our emphasis].

In the course of argument before the Commission the Government sought to argue that the right to life which is protected by the Convention was solely concerned with intentional killing and that it therefore could not be infringed by the death of Brian Stewart. This was a proposition which was firmly rejected by the Commission which went on to state that Article 2 'enjoins the State not only to refrain from taking life intentionally but, further, to take appropriate steps to safeguard life'. The Commission concluded that 'any other interpretation would hardly be consistent with the object and purpose of the Convention'.

The importance of the Commission's decision is two-fold. Firstly, it is based on the particular facts of the Stewart case and is not, nor was it intended, to

be seen as any form of approval of the British Government's policy on the use of plastic bullets. Secondly, the Commission has in fact now recognised that unintentional killing could amount to a breach of the right to life. The way remains wide open for a declaration that plastic bullets are incompatible with the European Convention. And that is the message from Europe.

COME OFF IT COMMISSIONER!

On 5 December 1983 Douglas Hurd MP, then a Minister of State at the Home Office, stated in answer to a parliamentary question that '15 police forces in England and Wales hold, between them approximately 20,000 baton rounds [plastic bullets]'. There are now 12 such forces and on the available information it would appear that the Met holds the vast majority, perhaps in excess of 19,000 rounds, of plastic bullets. But the Minister declined to provide this or any other significant information about plastic bullets which prompted the CAPB to write to the Commissioner of Police, Sir Kenneth Newman, to see if he could be persuaded to be more forthcoming.

In replying to the Campaign, Deputy Assistant Commissioner McLean was, perhaps not surprisingly, unhelpful. He sought only to reiterate previous public statements of the Home Secretary.

On the question of how many plastic bullets there were in London he stated, somewhat evasively, that a 'sufficient number of baton

rounds are held in London to meet the operational requirements of the Metropolitan Police'. And on the issue of training, 'a limited number of mature, experienced police officers have been adequately trained'. What was perhaps a little surprising was DAC McLean's claim that 'neither the Special Patrol Group nor District Support Unit personnel have been trained in the use of this equipment'. Further details were refused on the ground that it was not policy to provide operational details.

Undaunted the Campaign wrote again, in March 1984, to New Scotland Yard seeking clarification of certain points, particularly in regard to training. This proved to be no avail for the subsequent reply stuck to reiterating what was already public knowledge, but added to the one point of interest in the earlier letter that officers trained in the use of plastic bullets 'are selected from throughout Metropolitan Police Districts [sic] and otherwise perform ordinary operational duty'.

In January of this year the Home Office, trespassing on the sanctity of the Commissioner's operational independence, revealed that the Met have held four training courses in which 40 firearms instructors received training. The only other police area where training has taken place on a comparable scale is Lancashire, in the rest of the country it is virtually nil.

In December 1984 the Greenwich Police Sub-Committee Support Unit published a report: 'Riot Training in Greenwich'. At a planning inquiry on the development of a riot training centre in Greenwich by the Met, Deputy Assistant Commissioner Thornton stated that plastic bullets were generally fired about once a month at the River Way Centre and that the training of District Support Units involved the use of plastic bullets. So DAC Thornton says they do and DAC McLean says they don't! When asked to comment on this glaring inconsistency, New Scotland Yard tried to wriggle out by explaining that the SPG and DSUs are trained to execute tactics in support of baton round techniques, individual officers from those units are not trained to use [i.e. fire] baton round launchers'. Not very convincing.

Meanwhile there are 88 allegedly local police officers in London trained to use lethal weaponry against the civilian population. The Commissioner says you're not entitled to know anything about that.

VICTIMS OF RUBBER AND PLASTIC BULLETS

Killed	Age	Date	Place
Francis Rowntree*	11	20 Apr 1972	Divis Flats, Belfast
Tobias Molloy*	18	16 Jul 1972	Strabane
Thomas Friel*	21	17 May 1973	Derry City
Stephen Geddis	10	28 Aug 1975	Divis Flats, Belfast
Brian Stewart	13	4 Oct 1976	West Belfast
Michael Donnelly	21	10 Aug 1980	Ballymurphy
Paul Whitters	15	15 Apr 1981	Derry City
Julie Livingstone	14	12 May 1981	West Belfast
Carol Ann Kelly	12	19 May 1981	West Belfast
Henry Duffy	45	22 May 1981	Derry City
Nora McCabe	30	8 Jul 1981	West Belfast
Peter Doherty	33	24 Jul 1981	West Belfast
Peter McGuinness	41	9 Aug 1981	North Belfast
Stephen McConomy	11	16 Apr 1981	Derry City
John Downes	22	12 Aug 1984	West Belfast

* Denotes Rubber Bullets. N.B.: dates given are dates of injury, death frequently occurred some days later.