

The Battle of Lewisham

a design session for CLWG on 7 June 2026

Dave Boundy



Aims of the Session

I would like to develop a game about the so-called *Battle of Lewisham* (August 1977). As a design session, I have sketched out my first stab at the rules and I'd like to walk through them before having a free-for-all discussion. I have a large map of the area to use, large numbers of cubes and disks. I imagine this to be more of an operational game than anything else, but am happy to be wrong. I wish to do this game because of my links to New Cross and Lewisham and because the situation looks interesting and very much linked to my own views. I also discovered that Colin Watts and Neil Parker were there and I have obtained insight from them that doesn't appear in the wiki or other material.

Overview

The battle of Lewisham on 13 August 1977 centred around a planned march by the National Front from New Cross to Lewisham Clock Tower. The plan was then to gather around speakers. This was intended to provoke sentiments in a multi-cultural area. There were 500 National Front.

There were number of protesters who came out to object. They were formally in two groups: establishment figures such as the bishop of Southwark and the mayor of Lewisham and then a loose group of left wing activists. In fact, there were many sub-groups and a number that just turned up for a "fun fight". There were 4,000 protesters

The police took the threat of violence between National Front and protesters very seriously. They deployed in numbers with the objective of allowing the National Front march to take place as planned. There were 5,000 police. Police had riot gear available (the first time it was used on the mainland)

Objectives

The National Front is not played. Its fixed objective is to march from New Cross to Lewisham Clock Tower, avoiding dispersal by maintaining cohesion. The National Front plan to move direct from New Cross to Lewisham Clock Tower, then to spend 2 turns there hearing speeches.

The objective of protesters involves disruption along the way. Most factions have the objective of stopping and dispersing the National Front. They vary as to method. Trouble-makers have the objective of causing trouble by fighting.

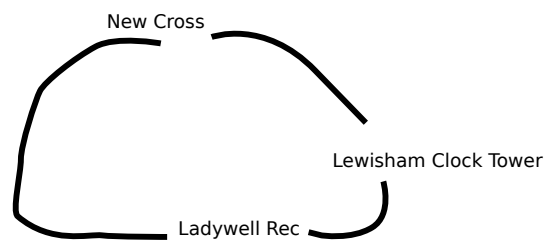
The police have the objective of ensuring the National Front march is successful while maintaining order and minimising disruption and damage.

Geography

The activities centred around three locations:

- New Cross on the main road, adjacent to New Cross Gate station.
- Lewisham Clock Tower half way down Lewisham High Street, where it joins the road to Lee.
- Ladywell Recreation Ground (“the rec”) a large open area between the river Ravensbourne and a railway line

These form a long loop similar to this:



The areas around and in between are criss-crossed with railway lines, canals and rivers. Neighbourhood areas coincide with the areas formed by these impassable barriers. Movement is difficult between areas unless on main road (as in the diagram) or you have local knowledge (where paths and tunnels go under railways or bridges go over etc.) Additionally, although major roads are wide, local roads are often narrow.

Groups

I have specified a number of sub-groups, each with a score on 4 axes:

Local: 0= foreign 10= steeped in local knowledge

Politics: 0: left 10:right

Aggression: 0=passive 10= aggressive

Cohesion: 0=fragments immediately 10 = acts as a unified body

Cohesion represents the ability to stay together, to pursue a shared objective, to follow local guides and to recover from setbacks

I have named the sub-groups and given them scores:

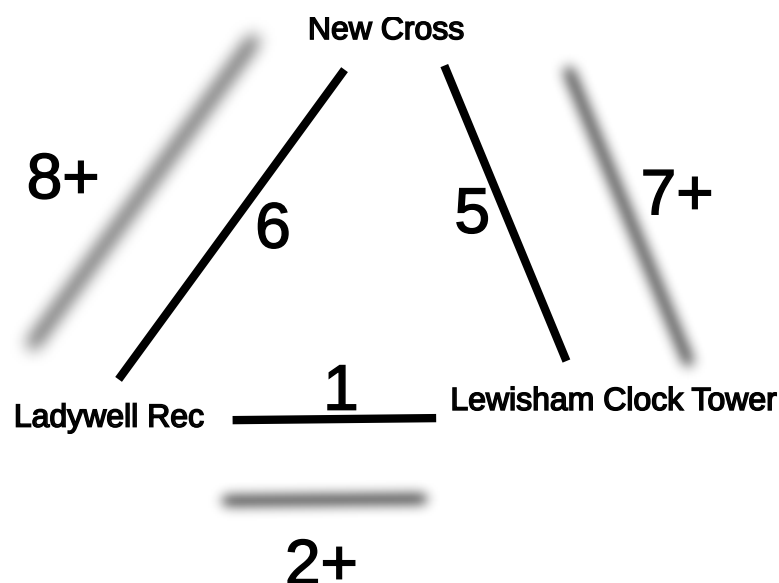
	Local	Politics	Aggression	Cohesion
Church	2	4	0	9
Mayor	7	2	2	8
Leftie Residents	10	3	3	8
Rightie Residents	10	7	3	8
Left Trouble	2	2	10	2
Right Trouble	2	8	10	2
Trotskyists	3	0	8	9
Left Wing	5	2	8	7
Solid Labour	7	3	5	8
National Front	2	10	5	9
Local Police	9	4	5	9
Outsider Police	2	6	5	8

Deployment ('00s)

	New Cross	Lewisham Clock Tower	Lewisham Rec	To Be Allocated
Church			1	
Mayor			1	
Leftie Residents	3	2	2	
Rightie Residents	2	1	1	
Left Trouble	3	1		
Right Trouble	3	1		
Trotskyists	1			4
Left Wing		1		4
Solid Labour	2	2		4
National Front	5			
Local Police	1	1	1	7
Outsider Police	3	2	1	34

The numbers show the numbers deployed in each location at the start of the game. The “to be allocated” column shows the numbers that can be deployed anywhere the players wish.

Movement



The inner numbers are the turn times for the direct routes. The outer numbers are the turn times for back road routes. Where it shows N+ , then roll d10 under the local rating of the group to take N turns – otherwise take N+2 turns.

Groups move in gangs of up to 500 (I defined it as 500 bcause any group loses cohesion beyond that size). Larger groups must be split into separate gangs. Each gang moves together, uses a single Local rating (the highest rating of the 100 person groups that are in the gang). They fight together and use a single cohesion rating.

High-cohesion groups reach intended destinations more reliably while low-cohesion groups are more likely to be diverted by disorder and nearby confrontations.

Cooperation

Political agreement does not automatically imply cooperation. Groups may cooperate for operational reasons whilst disagreeing politically. Some combinations may cooperate poorly despite sharing broad objectives.

Examples include:

- Trotskyists and Labour moderates
- Church groups and militant activists
- Local residents and outside activists

This is to be represented by negotiation and player interaction rather than formal rules initially.

Conflict

When 2 groups meet, the chance of conflict is:

Protester vs Protester

Conflict factor = aggression1 + aggression2 + difference in politics + player allocated 0-20

roll d100. If less than Conflict factor then conflict occurs

Protester vs Police

If aggression >5 then protester player decision

Police vs Protester

Police player decision

Protester vs National Front

if no police in way or previous conflict result is breakthrough then protester player decision

Conflict result are decided by rolling 1d6 for every 100 and counting 6s then refer difference to:

	Police Win	Protester Win
0-5	Brushed off – no effect	
6-10	Stand-off – both sides don't move next turn	
11-15	Loser pushed back 1 turn	
16-20	Loser takes damage and 100 withdraw for medical attention	
Over 20	Stopped them dead. A number of losers are arrested and removed from play. The number is equal to the number of police 100s	Breakthrough. Loser takes damage and 200 withdraw for medical attention. Winner may attack again

To be Developed

The ideas above need to be tested, ripped apart and put back together again. There are, however, some areas that will need development:

areas

the concept is there, but how to set them up is not. Each area could be put into disorder by game actions. Disorder represents property damage, loss of control, media attention and public alarm and may attract troublemakers. Police may attempt to control areas rather than specific routes. This will need to be developed

morale

morale could move during play while cohesion remains largely fixed e.e each group could be inspired, steady or shaken

a group could be cohesive but lose morale or the reverse

conflict rules too simple?

The conflict does not reflect differences depending on who is fighting. As examples:

Trotskyists vs Police

A severe defeat might mean:

- temporary retreat,
- regrouping,
- renewed confrontation elsewhere.

Right Trouble vs Left Trouble

A victory may actually reduce cohesion:

- groups split up,
- individuals pursue fleeing opponents,
- disorder increases.

player roles

These will need to be developed. An obvious one is a Gold and a Silver police player, but player roles should have meaningful actions. Another alternative under consideration is that Left Trouble and Right Trouble are not player-controlled but moved towards disorder and confrontation.