

Security Forces

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FROM: D FELL  
8 DECEMBER 1994

- cc PS/Sir J Wheeler (DFP,B&L) - B
- PS/Mr Ancram (DENI,B&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- Mr Legge - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Daniell - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Williams - B
- Mr Brooker - B
- Mrs Brown - B
- Mrs Collins - B
- Mr Maccabe - B
- Mr Marsh - B
- Mr Perry - B
- Mr Stephens - B
- Mr Lamont, RID - B
- Mr Bramley - B
- Dr Rosborough - B
- HMA, Dublin - B

UNDER/ SEC 471/12  
- 9 DEC 1994  
CENT SEC

*in Conf...*  
*for info...*  
*9.2*  
*Minister*  
*8/14/12*

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (B&L) - B

POLICING REFORM

1. At the Ministerial meeting on 21 November, I undertook a commission to collate research into Nationalist attitudes towards the RUC. This minute is an interim report on that work. I am grateful to a number of colleagues, in the NIO, and in Central Secretariat, who have assisted with the work.
2. We have sought to divide the report into two broad categories. The first consists of a series of quotes at Annex A from Nationalist politicians, mainly drawn from the SDLP but also including references from Democratic Left and

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Fine Gael. Although some argue that SDLP views are not necessarily to be taken as a reliable pointer to attitudes on the Nationalist street, as it were, these comments, which are entirely typical, are nonetheless revealingly uniform in the picture they paint. I suggest that we cannot lightly set them aside either as a reflection of true Nationalist attitudes or as indicating the degree of commitment (in many cases not inconsistent with our own ideas) to pursuing reform of the police.

3. The second element of our research has sought to derive a view of the RUC from those who, although perhaps of Nationalist inclination and certainly with roots in Nationalism, are not engaged in active Nationalist politics. Inevitably, without going outside the Government system (for which I did not feel that I had Ministerial authority), such views as we have garnered are inevitably somewhat impressionistic. They are, nonetheless, again remarkably similar in their direction: given the broad spectrum of views to be found within Irish nationalism and the tendency of many Nationalists to be ambivalent towards organs of the Northern Ireland State, I suggest that, again, the uniformity is important and revealing. I attach at Annex B the accounts of Nationalist perceptions of the RUC that we have garnered from colleagues within the Government system, from Chris Ryder's recent book on the RUC [REDACTED] and some telling comments by a Belfast parish priest. The booklet published following the Community Conference on Policing in the Ardoyne, which I believe some Ministers may have seen, is also a useful pointer, and reinforces much of the comment in Annex B. The thread that runs through much of it is that the RUC, largely for historic reasons though some from only the recent past, is still not accepted across all its functions by the bulk of the Nationalist community; though many recognise the improvements

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in the RUC, its effectiveness and professionalism and the fine quality of certain individuals within it, including some in senior positions.

4. If Ministers would find it useful, the office would be content to continue to seek to build up a more complete picture of Nationalist attitudes on policing; though as noted it will be difficult to do so without going outside the Government machine, which I think myself might be rather dangerous. However, Sir John Wheeler has indicated that he plans to meet some articulate Nationalists (like Professor Mary McAleese) over dinner to discuss, among other things, policing issues, and this may prove the most constructive way forward, in advance of our publishing our own proposals on aspects of policing next year.

(Signed David Fell)

DAVID FELL

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POLICING

25 November 1994 Fine Gael

Without necessary changes to the policing of Northern Ireland, which are required to make it acceptable to all sections of the community, a lasting solution will not be possible.

21 November 1994 Patrick McClean, Chair of the Northern Executive of Democratic Left

The police service must be willing to express regret for past error, to listen to constructive suggestions and to take steps to ensure the delivery of a caring service for the future. The public must, however, be given the opportunity to feel ownership of the service and must be able to hold it accountable for failure to deliver and to be able to obtain redress should the occasion arise.

19 November 1994 SDLP Conference Seamus Mallon MP

There is a need for a fundamental reform of policing; for a regionalisation of the Northern Ireland police force and a separation of civil and security policing. The problem could not be solved simply by recruiting more Catholics into the RUC. What is needed is a new police service for Northern Ireland in which all sections of the community could have confidence.

19 November 1994 SDLP Conference Mark Durkan

The police force must be acceptable to the whole community and recent comments by the Chief Constable are to be deplored: 'It is surely a matter for public regret that cogent and competent

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proposals to that end by Seamus Mallon should be arrogantly caricatured and resented by the RUC Chief Constable. If the RUC hierarchy cannot display even token acceptance of, and confidence in, responsible public debate on policing, how can they demand total acceptance of and confidence in their force?'

19 November 1994 SDLP Conference Dr Alasdair McDonnell

The answer is fair and equitable structures giving accountability and acceptability within a widely accepted political system. Police opposition to internal reform must be addressed honestly. No Party has a greater interest in keeping policing out of party politics and in lifting the RUC above political cleavages than the SDLP, because the people it represents have seen the awful effects of politically partisan policing.

19 November 1994 SDLP Conference - Policing Debate

All speakers in the debate emphasised the continuing unacceptability of the RUC in Nationalist areas. While some accepted that there had been significant improvements in recent years, the RUC remained an 'alien force', seen as representing and upholding the interests of only one section of the community.

6 October 1994 Alex Attwood (SDLP)

The RUC is, and will always remain, unacceptable to the Nationalist and Republican communities, until it is re-named, re-uniformed and re-constituted. Without prejudice to that objective, however, there is a pressing need for interim arrangements. South Africa might provide a paradigm.

30 September 1994 Sean Farren (SDLP)

Essential that Nationalists should come to feel the police service is as much theirs as anyone else's. Changes to its make-up would be necessary, including most probably a change in its name. Some

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form of community policing, under the same overall hierarchy as the rest of the police service, is an essential element of making the police service acceptable.

**8 September 1994    Mark Durkan (SDLP)**

The Police Authority has no real powers over the RUC and could not address the vital issue of establishing a police force that would have the trust and allegiance of the two communities in Northern Ireland.

**September 1994    Democratic Left Policy Document**

Policing must be fair - and be seen to be fair. There should be a reconstituted unarmed police force, known as the Northern Ireland Police Service, which would be responsible to the Northern Ireland Assembly, and with public accountability at divisional level.

**9 July 1993    Eddie McGrady MP (SDLP)**

Policing and the administration of justice are a central issue. The police have to be community sensitive and the best way of achieving this is the establishment of local forces with no counter-terrorist functions. Symbols are an essential part of the equation too and a way would have to be found of making any new police service 'tradition neutral'. This would mean an end to the prefix 'Royal' for the police force, and the removal of crowns and other insignia from, for example, uniforms and Government premises. Nationalists are trapped in an alien land and could never come to terms with a British system of justice and public administration in Northern Ireland. Antipathy to the organs of the state runs very deep.

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NON-POLITICAL ACTIVIST NATIONALIST PERCEPTIONS OF RUCChris Ryder

Pages 9&10 of 'The RUC: A Force Under Fire' give a valuable potted account of widespread Nationalist views of the force. He writes:

'The legitimacy of the Northern Ireland state that was founded in 1922 was disputed, then and since, by nationalists of the minority Catholic community, who increasingly felt themselves to be second-class citizens under the heel of an unfair Unionist ascendancy. The Unionist majority, always distrustful that Britain would ultimately protect it from being swamped in a Roman Catholic-dominated Irish state, tried to secure peace of mind by adopting measures to dominate the minority and prevent it from getting any grip on the levers of power. The RUC was thus given a dual role: to protect the new state from armed subversion, internally and externally; and to provide a service of more routine law enforcement. So, although many Catholics served in the force, some with distinction, the RUC was never a conventional, community-based police force in the mould of the friendly British 'bobby'.

Memories of the violence surrounding the formation of the state and its responsibilities as a state defence caused Catholics to see the RUC more vividly as the armed wing of Unionism and from the outset this damaged its relationship with the minority community. In practice there was little hostility to the police as individuals when they were carrying out their other role as law enforcers but the lack of consent, so vital for a police service in a free society,



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was a corrosive factor. By contrast the majority community, Unionist and Protestant, regarded the RUC as 'our' police and cherished them as its defence against the IRA and any drift to a united Ireland. The fact that the police operated emergency legislation almost exclusively against the minority and sided with the Protestants in any confrontation endeared them further to the majority community as strong defenders.

Nevertheless for forty-five years the politically directed and supervised RUC, obsessively concerned with subversion of the Unionist government, subdued the festering rivalry between the two sides and any challenges to the uneasy peace were quickly extinguished. But the inevitable crunch came in 1968, when the Catholic minority, fortified by education and fired by the civil rights movement in the United States, demanded equal treatment between majority and minority. The Unionists at first tried to crush the gathering revolt, using the RUC as its sledgehammer, but in barely eight months the force was exhausted and overwhelmed by the scale of the disorder.'

Views from the Community

Central Secretariat undertook a brief canvas amongst some senior colleagues brought up in Nationalist areas of prevailing views of the RUC in that community. The emerging picture was of a community which mostly took a negative rather than positive view of the police. They would be praised for professional work in sensitive fields (eg in domestic violence, and in non-terrorist crime generally). But the historic role and actions of the police, most recently focussing on the hunger strikes in the early 1980s and the policing of paramilitary funerals are recent experiences turning many Nationalists, particularly in the light of historical experience, broadly against the police. While Nationalists are to be found who fully support the police, there are few entirely without reservations. Many would speak highly of

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individual officers and many would agree that the RUC today is a more professional organisation that it used to be. But generally the perception is of a force which has historically been used against the Nationalist community and which would be an uncomfortable environment for a Nationalist to work in. The fact that such a small proportion of the RUC throughout its history has been Catholic is doubtless the result of many factors, but one is certainly the widespread view in Catholic communities that the RUC is in some sense a hostile force.

It is particularly notable that these views chime fully with those emerging from the Ardoyne Community Conference on 24 November as reported in Dr Rosborough's submission of 1 December.

Father Eamon O'Brien

Father O'Brien, parish priest in the Short Strand, Belfast, was recently criticised by Sinn Fein for allowing the local RUC to use his parochial hall for a crime prevention presentation to elderly people. Revealingly, in his statement defending his action, he felt constrained to explain in the following terms:

'I gave permission as parish priest to the 'community involved' police to use the parochial hall...'

The key point here is that, even in one who was prepared to stand up to Sinn Fein and to encourage his parishoners to see the RUC as a positive force in combatting local non-terrorist crime, he felt obliged to qualify his support to 'community involved' police. In other words, he was unable to bring himself to endorse the RUC as a whole, not merely, it is suggested, because this would attract further criticism from Sinn Fein but for fear that he would stir up protest from his overwhelmingly non-Sinn Fein parish on the grounds that he was expressing undue acceptance of the RUC as a whole.

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