



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

RUC up for grabs



Chris Patten, former Tory Northern Ireland minister is chairman of the Commission looking into the future of policing in Northern Ireland. Having recently returned from Hong Kong where he served as the last Governor before the handover to China, he would appear admirably suited to the task of handing over the Royal Ulster Constabulary to the wolves of Irish Republicanism.

The Irish Times newspaper reported that the Patten Commission was considering the effective disbandment of the RUC. When Chris Patten accused the newspaper of printing a 'work of fiction', *The Irish Times* refused to back down, stating that it was satisfied that its information was correct.



Chris Patten

In its report, *The Irish Times* said that the name RUC and the emblems of the force would be dropped and serving members would be forced to resign and reapply for jobs within a new police service. Since this is just what Sinn Fein is looking for, it most likely is not far from the truth. Such early reports are but kite-flying exercises to test the reaction of Unionists and see what their response is to such a proposal. About a week after these reports appeared, Chris Patten forecast a 'broad basis of consent on the future of policing' to parliamentary reporters at Westminster. He said that such consent will require 'understanding from both communities.' This is political-speak, meaning that it will require further compromises from Unionists!

Sinn Fein has maintained a vicious campaign of verbal abuse against the RUC. It goes to great lengths to keep anyone from within the nationalist community expressing any sympathy with the police or even coming into contact with the force. An example of this was the campaign of intimidation it mounted against a football game between a West Belfast football team, Donegal Celtic, and the RUC team in the semi-final of the Northern Ireland Junior Cup competition. At first there were doubts about the match taking place, with Sinn Fein repeatedly calling for the RUC to be shunned. Then it was announced it would take place. The decision was taken in a secret ballot with the majority of club members, 108--70, voting in favour, despite reports of threats to players. Two players were reportedly visited and told that if they played against the RUC it would be their last game. That was reported in the press on November 9th. Four days later, the game was off with Donegal Celtic blaming unreasonable pressure being exerted to stop the game.



It is believed threatened players refused to play. The withdrawal effectively ends the club's ambitions to join the ranks of the senior clubs. The club could be fined £10,000 and expelled from the league for refusing to play. Such is life under Irish Republicanism in West Belfast.



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It is pressure like this that will most likely win the day with regards to the format of the new police force. The politics of the gunman have so far won the arguments as far as Tony Blair and the British Government are concerned. Their persuasions have emptied the jails of gunmen, bombers and murderers and made backstreet gangsters into well-heeled 'political statesmen' and television 'personalities.'

I believe that it is safe to assume that in the case of the RUC it will be so again.