

C O N F I D E N T I A L



cc. Mr Stephens-B
Mr Chesterton-B
Mr Innes-B
Mr Miles-B
Mr Spence-B
Mr Bell-B
Mr Blackwell-B
Mr Daniell
Mr Hewitt-B
Mr J McConnell-B
Mr Masefield-B

Mr Burns-B

CONFIDENCE BUILDING: THE RUC

Attached is an extremely rushed first attempt at a paper on the above for consideration at the meeting on 29 March 1988.

(signed)

A D SHANNON

Police Division (B)

28 March 1988

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CONFIDENCE BUILDING AND THE RUC

1. As a basic premise it seems reasonable to suggest that alienation from the RUC results from:-
 - (a) the tensions which exist in large, working class housing estates in most parts of the world where social deprivation and crime are rampant,
 - (b) the sectarian dimension which creates the feeling in certain sections of the community that the RUC is an instrument of a government which does not represent their interests, and perhaps also an instrument of the "other side" in the community conflict.
2. The second factor is of course not exactly novel. The RUC and the RIC before it, have always been organised on a "national" basis and have always played a role in the government's drive against politically motivated crime. Against this background it would be unwise to assume that efforts to improve police acceptability will produce dramatic results unless and until there are political structures with which the majority of both communities can identify.
3. Nevertheless there is evidence that the perceptions of at least some can be changed and every advance in support for the police is worth having. We should therefore consider what scope exists for action by government or police which might further this end.

Ethos

4. The image of the RUC could hardly be described as "user friendly". Police stations are increasingly grim fortresses, all concrete and barbed wire. The armoured landrover is the normal mode of transport and hard skinned saloon cars are

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becoming more common. Individual officers carry weapons at all times and often wear flack jackets. An experiment is currently underway into the use of military style helmets in certain areas. At least in difficult areas, therefore, the style of the force is a very militaristic one, with very little obvious constructive contact between individual officers and the public.

5. Some efforts are being made to alleviate this. In the Shantallow area of Londonderry and parts of West Belfast, apparently normal beat patrols are being carried out with the support of heavy army backup along parallel streets. It is important that experiments such as these are carried out wherever possible, and are fully assessed. Possible indicators of success would be the number of public order/terrorist incidents, the amount of reported crime and the level of complaints against the police. However the militaristic image is an inevitable consequence of the paramilitary role required of the RUC by government security policy and terrorist tactics which in recent years have taken the form of attacks on police personnel and buildings with more and more sophisticated weaponry. It would be unrealistic to expect any dramatic improvement in this in the short term, certainly not unless lives are to be put at risk.
6. Another area of concern to some is the British ethos of the force. The Irish have suggested a modification of the Oath and more sensitive use of the Union flag by police stations. These are of course highly emotive issues and before addressing them seriously we would need to be convinced that any marginal gains in Catholic support would not be offset by loss of morale within the force and by Protestant alienation.
7. The most effective way of changing the perception of the force as a one sided one would of course be a substantial infusion of Roman Catholic recruits. Although the Chief Constable has recently agreed to set up a proper monitoring procedure, accurate figures about the percentage of Roman Catholics in the force are not yet available but the overall figure is thought

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to be between 5 and 10%. In recent years about 10% of new recruits have been Catholic. The force has been making serious efforts to address the problem by advertising in appropriate newspapers and visiting Roman Catholic schools, but the lack of Catholic candidates, and the relatively low turnover in the force mean that there is little prospect of the balance changing significantly in the foreseeable future.

Communications

8. The RUC is very aware of the importance of the relationship between individual officers and the public. The Code of Conduct is in one sense no more than a codification of existing practice but in another sense has considerable presentational value as a clear statement of the force philosophy. We should therefore persist in our efforts to overcome the Chief Constable's reticence in claiming full public credit for its promulgation.
9. Candidates for recruitment are subjected to attitude tests designed to eliminate those whose attitudes to the minority community are so entrenched that they are unlikely to meet the degree of objectivity required. Interpersonal skills are a constant theme in both recruit and higher level training and I am assured that every effort is made to ensure that officers are fully aware of their responsibilities in this respect. The only weakness I can detect in the training arrangements is that the RUC Reserve is not trained in interpersonal skills - but given the role of the Reserve it is arguable that this is not a problem. Discussions concerning the accompaniment of UDR patrols by RUC officers suggest that there is acceptance in the minority community that RUC officers do possess certain skills in this area. It may well be that the hostile attitude of some officers to the minority community, reported in Mr Blackwell's paper, is due not to any lack of training or awareness, but to the particular circumstances of policing in certain areas.

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10. The PANI proposal to launch its initiative on local liaison committees next month is a welcome development. Full details are not yet available but I understand that the committees will relate to RUC sub-divisions, will be primarily district council based but will also include representatives of churches, voluntary groups, tenants associations and so on. Where District Councils do not co-operate ad hoc arrangements will be considered. There is no doubt that such committees have the potential to significantly improve relationships and police acceptability at the local level. It is in these committees, in the first instance, where problems of effective policing, unsatisfactory attitudes by officers and inadequate attention to ordinary crime and vandalism, can best be resolved.
11. At the centre communications between the RUC and the community are mostly through the media of the Police Authority and the RUC Press Office. The Chief Constable and his senior staff regularly attend meetings of the Authority and its sub-committees. In structural terms this is very satisfactory but there are 2 weaknesses. Firstly the recent review of the NIO/PANI/RUC relationship concluded that PANI should progressively disengage from its logistical function in favour of a more strategic role, and to this end the Chief Constable was to produce, for discussion with the Authority, an annual strategic plan setting out his objectives and priorities. Fifteen months on he has still not done so. Secondly the relationship between PANI and the community its purports to represent leaves much to be desired. There are several contributory factors - the personal security of PANI members, the preponderance of Secretary of State nominees, and the absence of representatives of the SDLP and the trade unions. The new Chairman has been trying very hard to open dialogue with church leaders, the unions and other groupings. We should consider what support we can give to this process and whether there is scope for any formal consultative structures which might draw in those who are inhibited in stepping forward for full membership. Consideration should also be given to other means of publicising the work of the Authority (an annual report?).

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12. The RUC has an active Press Office which reacts quickly (sometimes too quickly) to controversial incidents. In addition the Chief Constable, Divisional Commanders and Sub-Divisional Commanders give occasional television interviews. However the vast majority of such media output relates to terrorist incidents. Success in dealing with ordinary crime is usually reported by way of the annual publication of crime statistics, the Chief Constable's Annual Report or the outcome of individual court cases. No local newspapers have crime reporters. The Chief Constable is the only senior officer who regularly appears on television and his performance often gives the impression of inflexibility and aggression. A comparison with the involvement of British policemen on programmes such as Crime-Watch, where they appear as decent men, relaxed and in short sleeves, actively pursuing those whom the whole community would like to see apprehended, suggests that more thought could be given to this aspect of image building. The police will reach more people through television than they will ever do in street patrolling. Issues like crime prevention, child abuse and victim support schemes could well facilitate bridge building. Would there be merit in employing public relations consultants to advise on presentation?

Accountability

13. RUC accountability would be significantly enhanced by:-

- (a) a more representative PANI, with a proper strategic role and a network of contacts with community representatives,
- (b) an active system of local liaison committees, and
- (c) the new Independent Commission for Police Complaints with its supervisory powers and members with the capacity to give it the right public profile.

14. In addition we have the imminent promulgation of PACE. Although a balanced package, which includes enhanced powers of

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arrest, detention, search, and seizure, these are for the most part either already available in one form or another or are likely to bear on narrow interests such as those engaged in major fraud. The real innovations lie in the additional protection to be afforded to suspects under detention. They represent a major step forward in the rights of the individual and in police accountability. We must ensure that we achieve full public recognition of this.

15. Whatever measures are taken to try to improve police acceptability, it is important that we find some means of measuring achievement. Questions on the public view of police performance were included in the continuous household survey in Northern Ireland in 1985. This exercise will be repeated in 1987 and we are taking steps to ensure that the results will be available more quickly than last time. In addition I would hope that we can add questions about the police complaints procedure. Other surveys are of course carried out from time to time but unless they are made at regular intervals they are likely to be less reliable in terms of measuring what is inevitably a long uphill struggle. We hope over the next year or two to persuade the RUC to take on board a series of performance indicators and we should ensure that indicators are developed which will give some measure of public support and acceptability.

Summary and Conclusions

16. In the absence of political developments which will reconcile the major part of both sections of the community to the state, improvements are likely to be small but worthwhile nonetheless. Serious and genuine obstacles exist to a number of changes we would like to see, but the following appear to be worth considering:-

- (a) evaluate success of experimental beat policing,
- (b) continue attempts to improve recruitment of Catholics,

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- (c) consider whether interpersonal skills training should be extended to the RUC Reserve,
- (d) support PANI initiative on local liaison committees,
- (e) press Chief Constable to produce strategic plan,
- (f) improve representative nature of PANI,
- (g) encourage PANI to foster community links and publicise its works,
- (h) consider means of better publicising RUC non-terrorist activities,
- (i) consider RUC media image, with possible advice from PR consultants,
- (j) ensure maximum public appreciation of benefits of PACE.