

Patten Report and Police Bill

Wed, Aug 09, 2000

Sir, - The UK ambassador (August 5th) must improve his research skills. He quotes me as writing in the Guardian that Patten recommended the disbandment of the RUC, when Patten did not. If he had read on he would have seen that that the Guardian subsequently publicly corrected the error which its editing had occasioned. What I said in my original, as the Guardian pointed out, was that Patten had recommended that the RUC Reserve be disbanded. A fact and one avoided by the ambassador. I do not expect an apology, though it is warranted. For a diplomat he excels at misleading rancour. The rest of his letter is repetitious sound and fury.

The Alliance Party spokesman (also August 5th) questions my signing my article in my academic capacity. I researched and cowrote, with Prof John McGarry, a book on policing Northern Ireland, and submitted it to the Patten Commission - which cited it in its report, positively. The book was carefully researched and, as far as we are aware, has not been faulted factually. It was generally reviewed, including by Fintan O'Toole in The Irish Times, as a positive contribution to achieving its sub-title, Proposals for a New Start. We publicly supported the Patten Report, although it was not identical with the recommendations we had made.

When I read the first draft of the Police Bill I felt obliged, as an academic, and not, as the Alliance spokesman states, as a nationalist, to speak truth to power. I thought the same after carefully watching the Bill go through the Commons, with some but insufficient improvements. When you speak truth to power you must expect abuse - see, for example, the ambassador's suggestions that I grind axes, and his hints that I am naive or soft on political violence. When academics publicly indicate that a government and its paid servants are falling short of a solemn public commitment, in this case to implement the Patten report, they are, I submit, performing a fundamental intellectual duty. - Yours, etc.,

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