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On January 18, the Harper government announced the appointment of a new chair to the Commission for Public Complaints about the RCMP (CPC) – the organization tasked with conducting investigations into complaints about our national police force. Ian McPhail, a lawyer specializing in wills & real estate and a long-time contributor to the Conservative Party was appointed to the position despite having no previous experience in criminal law. In an interview with Colin Freeze of the Globe & Mail, Mr. McPhail told Freeze “you probably know more about the background [of the CPC] than I do”.

Paul Kennedy, the outgoing chair of the CPC expressed concern over McPhail’s qualifications, as well as the seemingly partisan nature of the appointment. Both he and Shirley Heafey, the previous CPC chair, had extensive experience working with federal security and regulatory bodies before taking on the role as chair of the CPC. McPhail’s only experience working with a federal security agency was his week long appointment as vice-chair of the CPC just prior to the January 18th announcement.

Not that McPhail is completely inexperienced. In Ontario, under the Conservative government of Mike Harris, he was appointed to serve as Chair of the Environmental Review Tribunal, Chair of the Alcohol & Gaming Commission of Ontario, and Acting Chair of the Ontario Educational Communications Authority (TV Ontario). These appointments were widely seen to be patronage for his donations to the Conservative Party and his work as a Conservative organizer.

While it is true that McPhail was only appointed as an interim chair with a one-year mandate, his appointment appears to be a move by the Harper government to push Mr. Kennedy out of the position. According to the National Post, a government spokesperson stressed that McPhail would only hold the position while the federal government searched for a suitable candidate. The spokesperson gave no indication as to why the widely respected Mr. Kennedy – who had indicated a desire to stay on and continue his work as the CPC chair – was no longer seen as a suitable candidate. McPhail himself praised Mr. Kennedy for his work in leaving the CPC an “extremely effective and well-run organization”.

In his time as the head of the CPC, Mr. Kennedy publicly advocated for change within the RCMP and was openly critical of RCMP policies and practices. He published a report that was highly critical of the use of RCMP detectives when investigating complaints against their own officers and another that criticized RCMP policies on Taser use. Mr. Kennedy has also been vocal in his criticism of the federal government for their refusal to give the CPC either the funding or the powers it needs to do its work effectively and actively advocated for the establishment of an independent civilian body to oversee and investigate complaints

against the RCMP. The Harper government has not reacted favorably to Mr. Kennedy's criticisms of the RCMP or themselves and has been slow to produce anything more than rhetoric on the subject of RCMP reforms. Many observers feel that Mr. Kennedy's public criticisms are behind the government's decision not to renew his appointment and instead replace him with the inexperienced McPhail.

Currently the CPC relies on the voluntary cooperation of the RCMP in its investigations, which have included high profile cases such as the 2007 death of Robert Dziekanski who was repeatedly Tasered by RCMP officers in the Vancouver Airport, or the 2005 death of Ian Bush who was shot in the back of the head in while in custody at an RCMP detachment. No charges were laid against RCMP officers in either case. Given the "trust deficit" that exists between the public and the RCMP as a result of incidents such as these, the appointment of McPhail is a particularly offensive display of Conservative patronage and yet another case in which the Harper government has moved to silence federal watchdogs who voice their disapproval of government policies. While the Harper government is quick to trumpet their "tough on crime" approach to policing citizens, when it comes to policing the police, it appears that no news is good news.

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### 3 Responses to "Harper Government Names Realtor as Royal Canadian Mounted Police Watchdog"

1.  *Travis Martin* Says:  
[February 3rd, 2010 at 2:57 pm](#)

Ha ha ha ha! Political Patronage at its best! So bold, so blatant, and so insanely absurd you would think that the Liberals were doing it! Sad to say, but this is more and more, across all parties, becoming the status quo. The only thing new here is that the Conservatives are doing this as openly as the Martin and Cretien governments. Next in queue will be a bunch of trumped up and useless