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AMBASÁID NA HÉIREANN, LONDAIN



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9 February, 1988

Dear Declan,

I attach herewith a copy of a FCO "background brief" on the Provisional IRA's international contacts. I am also enclosing comments on the text by Richard Townsend.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick O'Connor  
Minister Plenipotentiary

Mr. Declan O'Donovan  
Anglo-Irish Division  
Department of Foreign Affairs  
Dublin 2

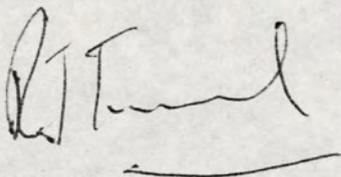
Mr O'Connor

FCO background brief on Provisional IRA's international contacts

1. I attach a copy of a recent FCO "background brief" on the international contacts of the Provisional IRA and also Sinn Fein. This was issued last month (this copy in fact was given to me by a colleague in the Danish Embassy; however, such background briefs are readily available and do not carry any security classification).
2. While the most interesting feature of the brief is, perhaps, the timing of its issue and its reflection of British current concern at Sinn Fein's international contacts, it seems to me that there are one or two statements in the brief which could be misconstrued. In particular, I am struck by the following references:
  - Page 1, paragraph 1 "It derives financial and other assistance from Irish expatriate communities which accept its claim to be the champion of Irish nationalism". The suggestion that Irish expatriate communities generally support Provisional IRA is hardly one that we could accept.
  - Page 1, paragraph 1 "Irish republican activists are careful to tailor their publicity to particular audiences, such as ..... the domestic audience in Ireland". It seems to me that this statement could be seen as going rather close to adverse comment on the domestic political process (depending, of course, on how one defines "Irish republican activists").
  - Page 2, paragraph 6)
  - Page 8, paragraph 2) The statements that the Workers Party of Ireland is "one of the usual contacts of Soviet international front organisations" and that "most East European political contacts have been with the Workers Party of Ireland or the CPI" could be seen as linking the Workers Party of Ireland to the central concept of the brief (i.e. international terrorist conspiracy supported by the Soviet Union and its allies). There seems to be an undoubted element of smear here.
  - Page 3, paragraph 4 Presumably the reference to the use of stolen Irish passports by Provisional IRA activists concerns something that is already public knowledge? One wonders if it was really necessary to mention that point.
  - Page 4, last paragraph "Irish solidarity groups, usually composed of anarchists or others on the Trotskyist fringe". I am not qualified to judge whether or not this is fair comment.
  - Page 8, paragraph 3 "To obscure the inconsistency of their reporting, Soviet sources try to blame British activity in the North for all the deaths, injuries and destruction ....." While I hold no brief for Soviet propaganda in this area, the

overall effect is to highlight the element of East-West ideological dispute rather than the basis of the problems which exist in Northern Ireland (this comment could also be applied to the paper as a whole).

3. While much of the information given in the brief is doubtless correct (and also very disturbing), one wonders whether the broad thrust is not to exaggerate somewhat the real significance of Sinn Fein's international contacts and to give them a significance (e.g. on a par with liberation movements such as the PLO) which they do not deserve.



R J Townsend  
5 February 1988

January 1988

THE PROVISIONAL IRA:  
INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES

The Provisional IRA seeks support from the widest possible range of political groupings overseas. It derives financial and other assistance from Irish expatriate communities which accept its claim to be the champion of Irish nationalism. Support also comes from political extremists - including some Communists, Trotskyists and anti-Western groups. Libyan support was highlighted in October 1987 when the French authorities seized the MV Eksund containing a large quantity of arms destined for the Provisional IRA. Sympathy for the Provisionals' cause has also been a recurring theme in Soviet propaganda (though many Communists criticise "mindless violence"). Irish republican activists are careful to tailor their publicity to particular audiences, such as conservative Irish expatriate communities, more radical supporters in Western Europe and the developing world, and the domestic audience in Ireland.

In the search for political allies, the Provisional IRA exploits such issues as the hunger strikes at the Maze Prison in 1980-81, when it tried to claim that international humanitarian concern for the strikers represented support for its aims. World opinion, however, quickly perceived the marginal and opportunistic nature of the Provisionals' international political contacts.

At home, the Provisional IRA portrays the brand of Irish republicanism represented by its political wing, Sinn Fein, as a national liberation movement, and in Marxist terms, as part of a worldwide campaign against "imperialism" (represented by the United States and its major allies). In December 1982, the National Catholic Register in Los Angeles reported that many of the posters at the Belfast headquarters of Provisional Sinn Fein featured guerrillas from different leftist movements. It noted that "Sinn Fein's expressions of solidarity include the PLO, the Basques, and more recently, the radical feminists, all united by various Marxist slogans".

International activities

The Provisionals' propaganda makes much of the presence of Sinn Fein leaders at international meetings, particularly in the developing world. Their participation in such conferences, however, more often follows a request

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This paper has been prepared for general briefing purposes. It is not and should not be construed or quoted as an expression of Government policy.

to attend rather than an invitation from the organisers. In January 1981, for example, the Non-Aligned Movement's Coordinating Bureau rejected an IRA application to participate, with observer status, in the forthcoming NAM Foreign Ministers' meeting in New Delhi.

Typical of the conferences attended by the Provisionals have been:

- The Conference of Western European Stateless Nations held in Barcelona, 27-30 December 1985, which was the first full international conference of the CIEMEN, a group based in Catalonia, and attended by representatives from 60 organisations in 16 Western European "stateless nations".
- The conference "against imperialism, Zionism, racism, reaction and fascism", held in Tripoli in March 1986 and addressed by Qadhafi.
- The festival of "left-wing political parties, anti-imperialist groupings and colonised peoples involved in armed and political struggle across the world" (An Phoblacht/Republican News, 25 September 1986), organised near Athens, 10-15 September 1986 by the Greek Communist Party of the Interior (KKE-Es). It was also attended by delegations from Southern Africa (the ANC), Eritrea, the Middle East (the PLO), El Salvador and Nicaragua.
- The conference in Athens, 7-11 November 1986, staged by the International Lelio Basso Foundation for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples (founded in 1976 at the Russell Tribunal II on Latin America). The Conference, commemorating the Algiers Declaration on the "Rights of Peoples", was addressed by the Greek Prime Minister and attended by representatives from Greece, Algeria, Syria, Burkina Faso, Nicaragua, PLO, ANC and Eritrea.

#### International Communist front organisations

The Workers Party of Ireland (formerly Official Sinn Fein) and the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) are the usual contacts of the Soviet international front organisations, although the Provisionals have had some direct contacts with these organisations (which comment freely on Irish affairs). The World Peace Council (WPC) and its associates were particularly active in the aftermath of the hunger strikes at the Maze Prison. In May 1981, the WPC condemned Britain's "continued military oppression and violation of human rights" in Northern Ireland. The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), based in Prague, issued a statement in November 1980 during the first hunger strike backing the prisoners' five demands; in January 1981 it published a letter from certain H-Block strikers, concluding, "I exhort you all in the words of Marx, 'Workers of the World Unite', unite and help smash England's Hell-Blocks". The World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), based in Budapest, sponsored a "Round-Table Conference on Ireland" in Dublin in February 1981 in conjunction with the British Young Communist League and the Irish Connolly Youth Association (the CPI's youth organisation).

In July 1985 three Provisionals, members of Sinn Fein, attended the 12<sup>th</sup> World Festival of Youth and Students in Moscow, sponsored by the WFDY and the International Union of Students (IUS). The three went as members of the CPI's delegation and Sinn Fein was keen that they should not be recognised as Sinn Fein members. An Phoblacht/Republican News did not mention their membership

of the CPI delegation, referring to them merely as representatives of other pressure groups.

In May 1986 the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL), based in Brussels, petitioned the Dutch Government not to extradite the Maze Prison escapees, Brendan McFarlane and Gerard Kelly. In Geneva in August 1987 the WPC tried unsuccessfully to lodge a complaint about British policy in Northern Ireland with the UN Commission on Human Rights.

#### Libya

Irish terrorist contacts with Libya have fluctuated on both sides. There was clear evidence of Libyan support when in March 1973 the Irish Navy intercepted the Cypriot vessel, Claudia, carrying arms and detained six Irishmen, including Joe Cahill, a Provisional leader. The arms, mainly of Soviet origin, had been loaded in Tripoli by Libyan soldiers.

Early in 1986, police in the Irish Republic discovered two large caches of arms in County Sligo and in County Roscommon (five men were arrested). Crates of weapons subsequently displayed at Dublin police headquarters were clearly marked "Libyan Armed Forces". Included in the find were 90 AK47 assault rifles of East German and Rumanian origin and large quantities of ammunition manufactured in Yugoslavia for the Libyan Army.

In October 1987, French customs officers detained the Panama-registered ship Eksund, with five Irish nationals on board. The French Press reported that the vessel had been booby-trapped, and a search eventually revealed 120 tons of weapons and ammunition including surface to air missiles, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, machine guns and assault rifles, explosives and detonators. Serial numbers had been removed from many of the weapons, which had been loaded in Tripoli. Three of the crew have been identified as Provisional IRA activists, two were using passports from a batch of 100 stolen from the Irish authorities in 1984. One man (Gabriel Clery) was subsequently identified as head of the Provisional IRA's Engineering Department, arrested in the Irish Republic in the 1970s for arms offences. According to both Irish and British authorities, four other arms shipments from Libya reached the IRA in 1985 and 1986.

There have also been persistent though unconfirmed reports of other forms of aid. In 1979, for example, after the conviction in Dublin of Thomas McMahon for his part in the murder of Lord Mountbatten, Press reports suggested that in about 1975 McMahon had gone to Libya for training in the use of explosives.

Qadhafi's publicly expressed support has varied in accordance with the current state of Anglo-Libyan relations, the Libyan regime apparently believing that threats to aid the Provisionals were a means of exerting pressure on Britain. Thus, in the mid-1970s, after visits by members of the "loyalist" Ulster Defence Association (who spoke about proposals for an independent Northern Ireland) and a Irish parliamentary delegation (who emphasised that they did not want to see Ireland united by force), the Libyan leader apparently reconsidered his support for the IRA, although in April 1979 he told Time magazine, "We don't consider the Irish fight for freedom to be terrorism".

In the early 1980s Anglo-Libyan relations deteriorated after the assassination in London of prominent opponents of Qadhafi. Britain eventually broke off diplomatic relations with Libya after, in April 1984, a woman police constable was killed by shots fired from the Libyan People's Bureau in London. In a Press interview (2 May 1984), Qadhafi again insisted that "we do not consider the IRA a terrorist army". He claimed that Libya had stopped giving "material support to the IRA in order to establish good relations with Britain, but Britain seems not to have appreciated this. Therefore we shall deal with these colonialists on a reciprocal basis ....". In those years the Press also speculated that the Libyans had financed Sinn Fein in elections. During the 1982 Assembly elections, for example, the Sinn Fein leaders spent two or three times as much as non-republican candidates.

Sinn Fein has reciprocated Qadhafi's support. In March 1986, its representatives attended an "anti-imperialist" conference in Tripoli, addressed by Qadhafi. In April 1986, Gerry Adams denounced the US air raid on terrorist targets in Libya as an "act of international terrorism" (Belfast Telegraph, 16 April 1986). Also in April 1986 Danny Morrison said that "The Libyan people ... the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the IRA are not the terrorists. The real terrorists are the governments of Britain and the United States" (An Phoblacht/Republican News, 14 April 1986).

In June 1986, the Irish Government formally protested to the Libyan Government over reports that Libya intended renewing financial support to the Provisional IRA. The then Irish Foreign Minister, Mr Barry, described the Provisionals as "the enemy of the Irish State and of the democratically elected institutions of this State". Nevertheless, in October 1986, Qadhafi again claimed in an interview on Irish television that the Provisionals' cause was "just" and urged young people in both parts of Ireland to take part in the "struggle for liberation". In March 1987, the Observer (London) reported Qadhafi as saying that he had increased arms supplies to the IRA in retaliation for Britain's involvement in the US air raid on Libya. The then Irish Justice Minister, Mr Dukes, commented that "Anyone who gives arms to the IRA is helping to carry out the murder of Irish people". In April 1987, two senior Sinn Fein members visited Libya on the anniversary of the US air raid; while they were there Qadhafi's son, Saadi, stated that Libya would open offices for the IRA and the PLC in Libya. In October 1987, Sinn Fein representatives attended a reception in Dublin held by Libyan, Palestinian and other Arab students to celebrate the anniversary of Libya's independence. In November 1987, after the arms' discovery on the Eksund and murder by the Provisionals of 11 people gathering for the Remembrance Sunday service in Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh, the Irish Government cancelled an official visit to Libya and instructed the Irish Ambassador in Rome to travel to Tripoli to deliver a protest.

#### Western Europe

In most West European countries there are now one or more "Irish solidarity" groups, usually composed of anarchists or others on the Trotskyist fringe. Many of these groups originally supported the Official IRA/Sinn Fein but, after the Official IRA declared a truce in the early 1970s, they tended to transfer their support to the Provisionals or the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) which broke away from the Officials in 1974-75. In recent years, the Provisional IRA has sought to extend its contacts to enhance its claim to political importance, but most of these contacts are with minor political

groups (their ability to generate publicity is often greater than their numbers might suggest).

#### West Germany

One of the earliest European support groups was the West German-Ireland Solidarity Committee (WISK), based at Oberursel near Frankfurt-am-Main and founded in 1972. It is associated with other groups including the Irland Komitee West Berlin. Originally supporting the Officials, it subsequently switched support to the IRSP and the Provisionals: it organised a number of solidarity conferences, including a "European conference" in January 1979 of solidarity groups from Norway, France, Holland and Germany, but, even during the 1980 and 1981 hunger strikes, failed to make any real impact. A number of unimpressive local Irish solidarity groups were formed as a result of a tour in October 1981 organised by the Anti-H-Block Committee in Frankfurt. Although a conference of solidarity groups was held in Munster in December 1981 to improve their links with Sinn Fein, tours by members of Sinn Fein and the IRSP in 1982 and 1983 were largely ineffectual. Danny Morrison visited Germany in May-June 1986 and addressed audiences of between 70-200 on a tour jointly organised by the Sinn Fein Foreign Affairs Bureau and the German-based solidarity committee Irland-Informationen.

Other pro-IRA incidents in West Germany seem to have had no direct connexion with the support groups. The stolen car containing the bomb which exploded at a British officers' mess in Rheindahlen in March 1987 was Dutch-registered. And the 16 extremists who fired flares and displayed pro-IRA banners during the visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales to Hamburg in November 1987 apparently belonged to an anarchist group, the Autonomists.

#### Netherlands

The Netherlands has some small but active support groups. A leading one is the Ierland Komitee Nederland (IKN), founded in May-June 1975 in Breda. Several of its supporters have been arrested on explosives and similar charges, including Els (Elizabeth) Van Hout who, while visiting Ireland with a group of radical feminists in July 1980, was detained on suspicion of having links with INLA (she was subsequently served with an exclusion order banning her from the United Kingdom).

In January 1986 two Maze escapees, Kelly and McFarlane, both serving life sentences, were detained with a third man in Amsterdam. A cache of arms was found in a container parked a short distance away. Britain applied for the extradition of the escapees whose supporters undertook a major campaign on their behalf: in May 1986 for example, the "Ireland Information Centre" in Amsterdam held a seminar on the premises of the University of Amsterdam, at which speakers included Gerry Adams, Bernadette McAliskey, former Westminster MP and IRSP member, and Liz Curtis, of the British Troops Out Movement. The Dutch Supreme Court decided on 21 October that both men could be extradited. The men were returned to Northern Ireland on 3 December. Other wanted IRA men are said to have taken refuge in the Netherlands and, despite the decision over McFarlane and Kelly, the activities of groups such as the Ireland Information Centre have continued. The Centre is run by Michael Quilligan, who admits working for Sinn Fein though denying any connexion with the IRA. In October 1987, the Netherlands were included in a tour by the

Provisional-dominated United Campaign Against Plastic Bullets, of which Quilligan was a member.

### France

In France, Irish support groups have also been active partly because it is a convenient meeting place for Irish terrorists. The largest of the French groups is the Comité Irlande, based in Paris but with branches in several towns. It was established in 1975 and publishes *Irlande en Lutte*. Its leading members included the journalists, Roger Faligot and Alain Frilet. Faligot helped in 1977 to found a monthly journal, *Irlande Libre*, to "deepen understanding in France of Irish politics, culture and social life and the Irish people's struggle for self-determination". He is the author of several books "exposing" Western intelligence services. Frilet, while a correspondent in Belfast in August 1978, was arrested on IRA membership charges but absconded while on bail. In August 1983 he was arrested for his part in a Provisionals' plan to ship weapons by lorry from France to Ireland. The lorry was seized at Le Havre and the weapons recovered; Frilet had acted as a middle-man in the arms deal and was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment.

During the 1980-81 hunger strikes, new support committees emerged in France and played host to visiting Irish extremists. Michèle Bonnèchère claimed in the Provisional quarterly *IRIS* (March 1983) that "a broad movement of popular support has blossomed" in France, but she admitted that it had not reached fruition and that there was "widespread disapproval of any action which causes injuries to civilians".

Nevertheless, there have been several arrests in France of Irish individuals and supporters in connexion with arms offences. Many have been associated with INLA rather than with the Provisional IRA. However, in August 1982 Sinn Fein was represented at an international gathering in Corte organised by the Conseil des Comités Nationalistes or Consulta di i Cumitati Nazionalisti (CCN), the Corsican nationalist political movement whose relationship with the Front de la Libération Nationale de la Corse (FLNC - declared illegal by the French Government in January 1983) is similar to that between Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA. A fortnight later a Frenchman associated with Corsican nationalism was arrested at Cherbourg on his way to Ireland and charged with illegally possessing and transporting explosives.

### Spain (the Basques)

Contacts with the Basque ETA are also of long standing. Members of Herri Bakasuna, the political wing of ETA, have been present at every Sinn Fein annual conference in the period 1981-86 and were represented by Jose Maria Montero at the November 1987 meeting. Similarly Sinn Fein officials are regular visitors to the Basque region of Spain. In December 1985, Sinn Fein councillor Pat Rice attended the Conference of Western European Stateless Nations in Barcelona, and in April 1987 he returned to Spain for an international Convention for Peace and Sovereignty held in Guernica and attended by Herri Batasuna and many other "national liberation" movements from Europe and the rest of the world. In between these visits, Anne Murphy, a member of the Sinn Fein ard comhairle (ruling council), went to Barcelona for the second international congress of the Catalan language. Meanwhile in Dublin Sinn Fein marked the visit of the Spanish King and Queen to Ireland in July 1986 by laying a wreath in tribute to those ETA members killed in their struggle in Spain.

### Scandinavia

Irish support groups are small, of minimal political importance and generally radical and left-wing, though they have recently received increasing coverage in An Phoblacht/Republican News. In Norway the United Committee for Ireland - believed to centre on 10-20 students in Oslo - generated some publicity in September 1986 when it organised a demonstration, resulting in violence, during the British Prime Minister's visit to Norway. The group had joined the South African Support Group and acid rain protesters. The Norwegian Press stressed that the demonstrators represented a tiny minority of Norwegians and expressed shame at what had occurred.

Danny Morrison, who addressed the demonstration, also had meetings with members of Socialistisk Venstreparti (SV - the Socialist Left Party, a Eurocommunist group) and the Workers Communist Party (an independent Maoist group). The Ireland Committee had recently sent £2,500 to An Cumman Cabhrach, a republican support fund, and in October a Norwegian newspaper reported that, in a lengthy statement, the Irish government press secretary had attacked the Committee saying "we believe that all moneys going to such organisations end up with the IRA". Nevertheless, at a debate at Trondheim University Students Union the following month, Sinn Fein councillor Hugh Brady compared the IRA to the Norwegian Resistance Movement during the Second World War and claimed that the IRA's fight "has inspired freedom-loving nations throughout the World. South Africans, Palestinians, Nicaraguans and Filipinos know all about Bobby Sands and IRA operations such as the Brighton bombing".

Similar contacts exist in other Scandinavian countries. At the 1986 Sinn Fein ard fheis, Ted Howell, the current director of the Sinn Fein Foreign Affairs Bureau, referred to attendance at conferences in the preceding year including an extraordinary conference organised by the Venstresocialisterne (VS - Left Socialist Party) of Denmark (a broadly Eurocommunist group), which was also attended by the PFLP, the SV of Norway and the Socialist Party (a Trotskyist group) of Sweden.

In Sweden, in July 1986, an exhibition and "freedom counter" were organised by Irland-Solidaritet (IS) at a folkfest (people's festival) in Malmo. An Phoblacht/Republican News (24 July 1986) reported that IS was "greatly encouraged by the solidarity expressed and links established with other groups, especially those from Latin America".

In April 1987, Gerry Adams, who is banned from entering the United States and effectively Canada, toured Norway, Sweden and Denmark as part of an attempt to create international pressure in favour of the MacBride Principles, proposals to limit United States' investment in Northern Ireland. In Denmark he was the guest of the Ireland Committee, the Communists, VS and the Socialist Workers Party (Socialistisk Arbejderparti - SAP, a Trotskyist group). Information, an independent Copenhagen daily (20 May 1987), commented that the Ireland Committee, "which seems to be strongly dominated by VS, has as a condition for admission that the person concerned supports the IRA's armed struggle". It added that Adams had been called "an Irish Castro".

### USSR and Eastern Europe

In October 1971 weapons and ammunition manufactured in Czechoslovakia for Ominipol were intercepted at Amsterdam en route to the Provisionals. A large consignment of arms of East European origin, including Kalashnikov

rifles, supplied by Palestinians in Lebanon and bound for Dublin, was discovered in November 1977 in Antwerp. Other arms of East European origin, including RPG7 rocket launchers (a Soviet-designed weapon made in Bulgaria) have from time to time been discovered in Northern Ireland, possibly as a result of arms deals negotiated in the Middle East in the early 1970s.

Most East European political contacts have been with the Workers Party of Ireland or the CPI. A member of the Soviet Communist Party's International Department visited Belfast in October 1987 at the invitation of the Workers Party, whose representatives have on many occasions visited Moscow for talks. The Soviet party was also represented at the 1987 Workers' Party annual conference in Dublin.

Soviet comment on Northern Ireland embraces both exploitation of the anti-colonial theme - with the Catholic community there portrayed as an "oppressed" group struggling against British "imperialism" - and criticism of IRA terrorist activity, particularly after devastating bomb attacks by the Provisional IRA. To obscure the inconsistency of their reporting, Soviet sources try to blame British activity in the North for all the deaths, injuries and destruction, and always ignore the fact that the majority of people in Northern Ireland have voted to remain part of the United Kingdom. In addition, Soviet reports, for instance one by Tass in May 1987, are at pains to distance the "progressive forces" of Northern Ireland, notably the Communists, from any involvement in the violence.

#### The Middle East

The Provisionals like to depict themselves as a "national liberation movement" enjoying strong support in the developing world. They have warmly espoused the Palestinian cause. Ruairi O Bradaigh, in his presidential address to the Sinn Fein annual conference in October 1982, recorded Sinn Fein's "solidarity with the gallant Palestinian people and their Lebanese allies". After the Israeli forces entered Lebanon in 1982, the Provisionals directed their criticism at the United States, accusing it of having "blocked nearly every move by the United Nations to remove the Zionists from Lebanon .... This latest onslaught against the Palestinians will neither be forgotten nor forgiven" (An Phoblacht, 23 September 1982).

In June 1985 when the Israeli President, Chaim Herzog, visited the Republic of Ireland a protest march in Dublin organised by Friends of Palestine to demonstrate their "solidarity with the Palestinian people and their opposition to Zionist racism" was addressed by Jim McAllister of Sinn Fein, who said that the Palestinians "have resisted in every way they could and have armed themselves into effective organisations such as the PLO and the PFLP. Sinn Fein salutes these people, their courage and their determination" (An Phoblacht/Republican News, 20 June 1985). But the Provisional's support for the PLO is not reciprocated. When a Palestinian woman attended a Belfast Republican rally as a "PLO representative" in August 1982, the PLO representative in London emphasised that there has been no Palestinian with official status in Belfast: "The PLO has no links with the IRA". The woman was not in fact a Palestinian and belonged to a London-based Trotskyist-influenced "Palestinian Solidarity Organisation".

Provisional links with radical Palestinian groups in the arms procurement context have diminished since the 1970s. In August 1981, when two Provisionals were detained in France on passport charges after arriving from

Beirut, the IRA's Republican Press Centre maintained that both men were members of the Sinn Fein Foreign Affairs Bureau who had been "campaigning on behalf of the Maze Prison hunger strikers".

The Iranians have also been opportunistic in their dealings with Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA. Immediately after the Shah's overthrow, both pro and anti-Khomeini groups sent messages of support for the Provisionals without probably fully grasping the complex internal situation in Northern Ireland. Support appears to have been confined to messages.

After the death of the Provisional IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands in May 1981, the Iranian Chargé d'Affaires in London visited Belfast for the funeral, and the Republican newspaper An Phoblacht reported that messages had been received from the then President of Iran, his Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. A street next to the British Embassy was renamed Bobby Sands Street. In August 1981, two members of the Iranian Majles (parliament) visited Belfast to attend the funeral of another hunger striker, Kieran Doherty, and then met Provisional Sinn Fein leaders.

In October 1986, an official at the Iranian Embassy in The Hague told the Dutch Press that his government had offered political asylum on humanitarian grounds to two "freedom fighters" (the two convicted IRA terrorists, Gerard Kelly and Brendan McFarlane). They were eventually extradited to Northern Ireland.

#### Latin America

The Provisionals have frequently shown an interest in South and Central America. On US television in March 1983, Martin McGuinness said that "our heroes are all the people who fight for national liberation" - rather oddly citing those of El Salvador, Nicaragua, Vietnam and Cuba. In 1981, the extremist Chilean MIR sent a message of support to the Provisional Sinn Fein conference and in September 1982, An Phoblacht reported that Sinn Fein's Foreign Affairs Bureau had sent "revolutionary and solidarity greetings to our struggling Chilean brothers".

In January 1982, Provisional Sinn Fein issued a statement condemning United States support for the "genocidal military junta" in El Salvador and pledging support for the "struggling people" there. Although there is no evidence of operational links with them, Sinn Fein also continues to express support for the Nicaraguans. On 1 May 1986, An Phoblacht/Republican News reported "a clear demonstration of Irish solidarity with the Nicaraguan people" at a meeting in Dublin addressed by Nicaragua's Foreign Minister, Fr Miguel D'Escoto, which established a new Irish-based solidarity campaign, "Nicaragua Must Survive". In June 1987 An Phoblacht/Republican News gave publicity to an Irish group preparing to send a 30-strong work brigade to help with the Nicaraguan coffee harvest.