

**Of "Alien Influences": Accounting and Discounting
for the International Contacts of the
Provisional Irish Republican Army**

by
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NATURE OF INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

In a world where nation states are unanimous in their disavowal of terrorism — even if they are incapable of unanimously agreeing on a definition of what it is they are disavowing — and in a Western Europe which regards separatist and irredentist claims as anathema, there is a natural tendency for those who are so excluded to make common cause where they might. Disparate as these groups are, they really have only themselves to meet as equals; though they might wish to be nation states or represent nation states in the fullness of time, they exist until then as interlopers in the relations between states: seldom invited and then almost always disappointed by their reception. It is a world with which the Provisional Irish Republican Army and its more political expression, Sinn Fein, are entirely familiar and also one in which, given their history, political complexion, strategy and objectives, it would be extraordinarily strange for them not to have a wide range of international *contacts*. But potent as the reflex of commonality by exclusion is, it does not completely determine these linkages because to argue this is to argue on the basis of default rather than purpose. For the Provisionals there is a utility not only of making such contacts but also in formalizing them where possible within the movements' organizational structure. Thus, in 1976 the Sinn Fein *Ard Fheis* moved to establish, under the directorship of Risteard Behal, a Foreign Affairs Bureau, with Behal as its first "sort of roving European ambassador . . . based in Brussels." As Behal explained:

We have got, whether we like it or not, to be linked with international struggles. The Irish struggle on its own cannot, and will never, succeed in isolation because we are no longer just fighting Britain but fighting an international conspiracy of old colonial powers who are hand in glove with Britain in trying to impose a solution upon us, which would be suitable in maintaining us in the Western imperialist camp.¹

For all of the rhetoric, though, there is a curious dualism in the fraternal relations Provisional Sinn Fein maintains with movements such as the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, SWAPO in Namibia, the FMLN in El Salvador, Polisario in the Western Sahara and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Their liberation struggles are seen as parallels to the IRA's own yet, beyond this perceived similarity as aspects of "a world-wide revolutionary quest for national independence and socialist development," there is a reluctance to discriminate. As Kevin Kelley observes, the Provisionals "are very reluctant

to take sides in disputes between rival liberation groups, just as they have no firm ideological position on the nature of the USSR or of Chinese Communism."²

The rhetoric of Behal and others, therefore, introduce an element of caution into any consideration of the international linkages, per se, of the Provisional movement. If they possess any significance at all it is what might be termed an arguable significance, the extent of which is best regarded as a derivation from two levels of contact. At the higher level, by which is meant *substantial* or *material*, are the contacts from which are derived the international political, financial and other material support of the Provisionals. But these, as is argued elsewhere, are few in number, and in any case are deserving of a description stronger than "contact" — perhaps "relationship."³ On the other hand, the many, but at the same time, the lower or lesser important of these are thoroughly deserving of the term if for no other reason than that it denotes a proliferation of non-essential junctions or acquaintances — in so many cases no more than a loose association, or close proximity, which occasionally and temporarily matured into an actual meeting. It was as though the various organizations were agitated, as in Brownian motion, and that they were, therefore, subject to the probability of contact by virtue of existing as somewhat like particles in a common and restricted universe. When their paths, which seldom if ever obeyed the same compass, coincided, there was generally cause for concern among interested state actors as though it signified the conjunction of evil.

In reflection upon such events former Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave, was of the opinion that "alien influences" had been at work in the North-South border region.⁴ Exactly what he meant by "alien" was unclear, but he nevertheless could have pointed to a curious assortment of parties interested in the conflict as either participants, or analysts and commentators, in support of his view. The latter deserves a brief mention in an article such as this. Their work, generally, is located within the study of "terrorism" — a term this writer regards as entirely problematic — which is both voluminous and of varying quality and accuracy, even within the works by the same author. Perhaps this should not be surprising: the activities of the IRA are inevitably shrouded from scrutiny, the commentators in question are no more free from some form of engulfment, which is to say partiality towards the events being observed, and consequently, even with the best of intentions it is difficult to achieve comprehensiveness and factuality. In the final analysis, however, and in good faith, judgments as to the reliability of sources at a specific time and place have to be made and some accounts by a particular author are accepted on one occasion (but not on another) for the simple reason that his or her version accords best with the unfolding of events as this writer understands them.

And as regards the former, the participants, it seems that once the situation in Northern Ireland had established its credentials as a conflict — i.e. as a shooting match — it attracted the attention and, it is alleged, the attendance of the acolytes of war. The appeal of some of these rested upon their past exploits, as with Otto Skorzeny, a former Nazi SS Colonel who was wanted for war crimes in his native Austria, and whose principal claim to notoriety

was his leadership of the raid to rescue Mussolini after the fall of the Fascist Government in 1943. Twenty-eight years later he was linked with Ruairi O'Bradaigh of Provisional Sinn Fein. Despite Skorzeny's apparent sympathy, however, the significance of his interest in the Northern conflict existed very largely in the collective imagination of the editorial staff of the *Sunday Telegraph*. All that that publication could muster to justify its article on him was an unconfirmed report of a meeting with O'Bradaigh in Spain.⁵

According to Father O'Neill of St Eugene's Roman Catholic Cathedral in Derry, two North Koreans and an Algerian (not to mention a number of Englishmen) were present among the Provisional gunmen of Creggan and the Bogside in 1972.⁶ In 1977 a further measure of notoriety was added to the Republican cause with evidence produced in the Old Bailey of approaches made by a former member of the Parachute Regiment and Angolan mercenary recruiter, John Banks, for the supply of arms. As with so many of the instances cited in this article it was, for the IRA, an indiscriminate move. Everybody and everything ended up in the wrong place: Banks in the service of the Special Branch; British Provisionals in the Old Bailey, and later, jail; and the arms in (probably) Antwerp.⁷ Nevertheless, these incidents are instructive of the fact that accounts of the IRA's contacts sometimes have very much less to them than meets the eye at first glance.

However, the IRA has not been without its more tangible "successes." According to David Barzilay, it was "known" that the organization had attracted two "foreign" electronic experts to work upon sophisticated trigger mechanisms for a bombing campaign to be conducted in Northern Ireland. He also claimed that these experts were not to be found in the North but "in the South," an allegation which appeared to be based on unspecified information provided to him by the British Army. Nevertheless, for those who were convinced that the Republic was a "haven for terrorists" one subsequent allegation put the matter beyond doubt and confirmed Barzilay's cryptic reference to such people being "very well protected."⁸

In his machinations to avoid a United States deportation order, a former Provo "active," Peter McMullen, stated to the *Boston Globe* that the IRA had received training and encouragement from a regular Irish Army colonel in precisely the same type (photo-cell and radio controlled) of explosive devices which Barzilay referred to the previous year. He also claimed that some of the electronic components were provided by an Irish television manufacturer sympathetic to the cause. Naturally, the Irish Army rejected these allegations out of hand, while McMullen, for his part, denied knowledge of the officer's identity.⁹ It is difficult, therefore to draw from the evidence a conclusion of any strength.¹⁰ Hence the most balanced view which could be stated, of the period 1969-74 anyway, may be that of Lieutenant-Colonel George Styles, the commander of the British Army bomb disposal teams in Northern Ireland in that period.

... really we never could prove or disprove the rumours about foreign mercenaries. But, pressed to an opinion, I'd say it's more than likely they existed . . .¹¹

Notwithstanding this, one conclusion which may be drawn is that it is not always helpful to look beyond the borders of the United Kingdom, nor even the island of Ireland, for instances of external links to the "troubles." Strictly speaking, of course, the Republic is a foreign country in relation to the United Kingdom, but given the unique relationship which exists between it, Great Britain, and Northern Ireland, it may seem a contrivance to classify as international or external, linkages from the Republic and Great Britain into Northern Ireland. Also, it might be argued that, in this instance, North-South distinctions are meaningless. Provisionals on either side of the border may belong to the same organization, and both the British and Irish Governments have recognized this. Further, that it would involve an unnecessary and meaningless division of labor to impose a North-South framework upon an analysis of the contacts between both wings of the IRA and various organizations in Britain. Yet such an approach (which regards Irish and British contacts as external) does serve one very useful purpose: it goes some little distance towards disposing of the notion that the linkages to the conflict were all to Irish or alien influences; that there were not also British influences at work. This view, it will be argued, can only be sustained if Britons who took their political inspiration say from Marx or Mao were held to have forfeited their nationality. This is not to claim that the role of such local groups as will be considered was significant, rather that they existed, and that to exclude them would result in a distortion of the analysis herein undertaken.

BRITISH CONTACTS

About one million people of Irish birth, and many more of Irish extraction, live in Britain. Among them both factions of the IRA have attempted to establish political organizations to arrange fund-raising, social events, demonstrations and propaganda, but without notable success. Some of these activities have been restricted by the Prevention of Terrorism legislation under which support for, or soliciting of proscribed organizations is illegal. However, a number of organizations sympathetic to the IRA have managed to exist — such as Provisional Sinn Fein, *Clann na hEireann* (Family of Ireland) which was loyal to the Officials, and the Prisoners' Aid Committee, established in 1971 by the Official IRA to look after the welfare and to press for the release of Irish Republicans imprisoned in Britain for illegal activities. The effectiveness of each of these organizations, and the splinter groups which their internal tensions occasionally generated, was nevertheless limited. Disunity and a revulsion against the violence in both Northern Ireland and on the mainland ensured their rejection by the majority of the Irish community in Britain, who felt that its standing was endangered.

Over the years the Prisoners' Aid Committee (PAC) broke away from the Officials (1974) and, under the dominant leadership of Jacqueline Kaye has aligned itself with the Provisionals. Among its endeavors on behalf of the Republican movement are the publications *PAC News* and the *Irish Prisoner*, and the 1978 sponsorship of a film, *Prisoners of War*, made by the Workers' Revolutionary Party.

Partly as a consequence of this and partly as a matter of strategy, Provisional IRA supporters also attempted to find common cause with small non-Irish groups in Britain which shared its basic aim of securing the withdrawal of the British Army from Northern Ireland. Although they failed in their attempts to get support from the British Withdrawal from Northern Ireland Campaign, which argued against a military presence in the province from a radical pacifist position, some was given by the Troops Out Movement (TOM). Formed in September 1973, it campaigned mainly within the trade union movement to make withdrawal a demand of the British working people.

Throughout 1976, however, internal problems in the mainly Trotskyist TOM resulted in a split in mid 1977 and the establishment of a breakaway United Troops Out Movement (UTOM). Within the next three years UTOM had secured its Provisional credentials with a pamphlet, *British Soldiers Speak Out On Ireland*; a film, *Home Soldier Home*; and the attendance of a delegate at the 1978 Sinn Fein *Ard Fheis*. In later years, 1980-81, TOM was rejuvenated and supported the blanket protest and hunger strikes of the Republican prisoners in Northern Ireland.¹² Evidently, though these measures and its on-going co-ordination of the opposition to the Prevention of Terrorism Act, did not satisfy certain elements within the extreme left in Britain. Accordingly, it is now facing a determined effort by both the Revolutionary Communist Party and the Revolutionary Communist Group to build an Irish solidarity movement to outflank it on the grounds of excessive moderation in support of the Republican cause.

In addition, the International Marxist Group (IMG), the International Socialists, and other small Trotskyist and ultra-left groups which formed the hard-core support for the Troops Out Movement, generally supported the Provisionals as a supposedly "anti-imperialist" force, but in practice they also criticized the IRA's more indiscriminate acts of violence, particularly those committed in Britain. So far as the IRA has been concerned the value of their support was, in any event, questionable. At best it was lent by groups whose fissile tendencies were frequently in evidence and whose efforts in support of the Republican cause consisted of single-issue campaigns which exhibited no great staying power.¹³

Two reasons were primarily responsible for this state of affairs. The first stemmed from the British revolutionary-left conviction, reinforced by successive collapses of authority, that Northern Ireland was Britain's Achilles heel and that it must fall to revolutionary forces before the same process could succeed on the mainland. Thus there was less interest in the revolutionary merits of the Northern Ireland situation than in the instructions it provided for future British revolutionaries when the time came for them to act. And the second reason even questioned that likelihood, as Peter Shipley observed in 1976:

British revolutionaries seem little inclined at the present time to engage seriously in that most characteristic form of modern city-based revolutionism, urban guerilla warfare. There is much discussion of terrorism in other parts of the world, mainly to

learn from its mistakes as a part of revolutionary strategy; there has also been a reaction against the horrific campaigns of terror carried out by Irish extremists . . .¹⁴

Of course, it was frequently suggested that these groups were in league with the established Communist parties in Ireland and Britain, and hence that the sinister hand of the Kremlin guided their activities. Certainly Irish and British Communists saw Ireland as a classic victim of British Imperialism, no different in essence from British colonies in other continents, but their assessments of the troubles in the North met with problems. In particular, Communists and Marxists had the difficulty of reconciling their "imperialist" interpretation (implying a continuing struggle between British "imperialists" and "oppressed" Irish) with the conflict between two separate local communities. Their objective therefore was to replace sectarian with class conflict, although the results were often the opposite of what was intended, as Conor Cruise O'Brien has pointed out:

The effect of their efforts, gestures and language . . . has been to raise the level of sectarian consciousness. They have encouraged the Catholics and helped them to win important and long-overdue reforms. They have frightened and angered Protestants and if their efforts could be continued on the same lines and with the same kind of success, they would bring to the people of the province and the island, not class-revolution but sectarian civil war. And in fact, even at present, language and gestures which are subjectively revolutionary but have appeal only within one sectarian community, are objectively language and gestures of sectarian civil war.¹⁵

The outbreak of the current disturbances which have split the IRA did, however, have the opposite effect on Irish Communists.¹⁶ In March 1970, the old Communist Party of Northern Ireland merged with the Irish Worker's Party in the Republic to form the Communist Party of Ireland, (CPI). Although it favors an eventually united Ireland, the CPI took a cautious line on partition in deference to the predominantly Protestant complexion of its Northern Irish membership. It criticized the Provisional IRA's campaign for destroying any immediate hope of a united, non-sectarian, working-class movement, and by implication recognized the importance of British troops in combating terrorism by calling for their withdrawal to barracks only, not their immediate withdrawal from the Province as a whole. (Individual Irish Communists accepted the protection of the troops while participating in "back to work" marches during the Ulster Workers' Council strike of May 1974). On most issues, including opposition to emergency legislation and advocacy of a Northern Ireland "Bill of Rights", its policy was identical to that of Official Sinn Fein and both organizations used the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association as a conduit, some would say a "front," organization to promote their views.¹⁷

In relation to its objectives, the CPI has adopted a phased approach: it

advocates the “unity of the working people,” economic autonomy for Northern Ireland and economic co-operation between north and south in Ireland as well as a prelude to unification, seeing a united and independent Ireland as a prerequisite for the “establishment of Socialism.” The CPI also claims to have advocated political status for all “political prisoners,” sentenced on the basis of the emergency legislation, long before the Provisional IRA began its campaign. In principle, it was opposed to the hunger strike, believing it would be counter-productive, but supported the hunger strikers during their protest. James Stewart, the Deputy General Secretary of the CPI, said in an interview in February 1982 that the IRA “have forgotten a basic military stratagem, namely that it is incorrect to fight an enemy who is himself in the process of self-destruction.”¹⁸

The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the Communist Party of Ireland have hitherto had similar views on Northern Ireland, reinforced by frequent meetings between the leaders of the two parties and the issuing of joint communiques. The CPGB, in common with the CPI, resisted calls for the immediate withdrawal of British troops but unlike the CPI experience, it led to an open disagreement with one of its most senior “front” organizations — the British Peace Committee (BPC) — which, ignoring the party line, joined with the Trotskyist-inclined Troops Out Movement to stage a major demonstration in London on 27 October 1974.¹⁹ The subsequent debate (between October and December 1974) in the pages of the CPGB newspaper *Morning Star* again emphasized the tendency for the Communists to succumb to “paralysis by analysis.”

The anti-withdrawal theme has nevertheless been a constant theme. At the CPGB’s 37th National Congress in November 1981, a branch resolution on Ireland was remitted to the Executive Committee for further study. It called upon the congress unreservedly to condemn the military campaign of the provisional IRA in Britain and Ireland, and reaffirmed that the key to the solution of the crisis remained the jointly declared policy of the CPGB and the CPI that “direct rule must be replaced by an Assembly which is controlled by provisions of a Bill of Rights and elected proportional representation . . . and must have control over fiscal powers as well as powers to legislate.” It suggested that “the questions of the withdrawal of British troops cannot be dealt with apart from the need to build democracy and working class unity in Northern Ireland.”

For the Provisionals, then, there has been little in the offing from the CPI and the CPGB. Indeed, the “paralysis by analysis” syndrome has also had the effect of proliferating and weakening the left which might otherwise have supported them with a united front. According to Shipley, so much was this the case that the existence of those British revolutionary groups previously mentioned was an indication of a general dissatisfaction with the lack of activist fervor on the part of the Communists.

For many the deftness of improvisation has itself become a test of revolutionary purpose and the group least prepared to adjust its methods, invariably the Communist Party, had been the one

least regarded on the left as revolutionary. Throughout the period . . . the Communist Party has remained the largest single organization on the far left and has also been the reluctant progenitor of so many other enterprises.²⁰

And as for external control of these "other enterprises," the same writer found:

The British movement . . . is fervently internationalist in outlook; indeed obsessively so, to balance its otherwise parochial domestic roots and the introspective intensity of so many of its members. There is however very little evidence to support any notion of centralized conspiracy organized by foreign powers to sanction activities of any British revolutionary groups, or that revolutionaries are responsive to such wishes.

Thus there was no reason to doubt, nor correspondingly, little reason to be alarmed at Airey Neave's claimed possession of the names of some twenty organizations active in Northern Ireland which had its links with the Communist Party.²¹ Neither the IRA, nor the British and Irish Communists, nor the British revolutionaries have been able to successfully exploit the opportunity for association which had been theirs for more than a decade.

WESTERN EUROPEAN CONTACTS

Further afield, in Western Europe, the IRA has associated with various ultra-left groups to the point where most Western European countries now have (or had) one or more "Irish Solidarity" groups of similar characteristics. They tend to be small, anarchistic or extremist (or both), and on the fringes of international Trotskyism. Most, in terms of this pedigree, originally supported the Official movement, but, with its eclipse in the early 1970s, transferred their allegiance to the Provisional or, in some cases, to the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP), and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) or in a very few cases to both. At best, the liaison between the parties concerned is fragile. Nevertheless, the Provos' record of contacts includes links with Red Aid and the Fourth International in Brussels. In the spirit of fitting reciprocity a Fourth International connection was established in 1972 in the form of the Revolutionary Marxist Group (RMG), a new affiliate. Its principal activities appear to have been the despatch of Gerry Lawless, the IMG's Irish export to Trotskyist groups on the continent, and a visit to Dublin by Ernest Mandel, the Fourth International leader.²²

On a national basis, the West German pattern is the most typical in as much as pro-IRA publicity was generally handled by local left-wing groups or by the Ireland Solidarity Committees which they established. In this instance, the West German Ireland Solidarity Committee (WISK), based at Oberursel near Frankfurt-am-Main, was founded in 1972, linked to the Official movement until its break with the IRSP, but now with Sinn Fein and the IRSP. It also has a relationship with the Ireland Committee West Berlin (IKW). Down the years WISK has been responsible for organizing conferences, forming new Solidarity Committees and hosting speakers on various aspects of the Provisional movement's campaigns but none have been accused of

contributing to a major impact on the political consciousness of the Federal Republic.²³

The "French Connection," by way of comparison, is more substantial. France itself is easily accessible from Ireland (a direct ferry connection from two Irish Ports, Rosslare and Cork) and the Irish support groups there are among the most active in Europe, organizing pro-Republican information tours, demonstrations and leaflets. During the 1980-81 hunger strikes their activities were supplemented by the activities of the French Communist Party (for its own internal purposes) and by the *Communist Confederation Generale du Travail* (CGT), the largest French trade union.²⁴

A Committee for the liberation of the Irish People was set up in early 1972. At its first public demonstration in Paris on 10 February 1972, there were strong contingents from the Trotskyist *Ligue Communiste* and from the unorthodox Communist Party of Brittany. The committee operated from the Paris address of *Temoignage Chretien*, an organization which has arranged conference and propaganda activities in favor of the Palestine cause and against the Vietnam War, and which later, in 1980-82, also took part in activities on behalf of the Irish hunger strikers.²⁵

The best known support group, however, is the *Comite Irlande* (based in Paris but with branches in several towns). It was formed in 1975 and publishes *Irlande en Lutte*, but has proved unable to maintain the degree of support which it attained during the hunger strikes. Its leading members include Bernard Spiteri (arrested in April 1980 with an Irish Republican, George Quigley, for attempting to rob a bank messenger) and the journalists Roger Faligot and Alain Frilet. Faligot helped to found, in late 1977, a monthly newspaper, *Irlande Libre*, "to deepen understanding in France of Irish politics, culture and social life and the Irish people's struggle for self-determination." It ceased publication after nine issues but was revived in 1980. Others associated with it include David Sharp and Francois Lelievre. Faligot, the author of several books "exposing" Western intelligence services, also contributes to the French left-wing publication, *Liberation*. Frilet, while *Liberation* correspondent in Belfast in August 1978, was arrested on IRA membership charges. He was bailed but returned to Paris without standing trial.²⁶

New groups were established both nationally and locally during the Maze Prison hunger strikes, 1980-81. Virtually all the support groups, together with the PCF and the CGT, co-operated in the formation of the *Comite de Defense des Prisonniers Irlandais* in Paris in October 1980. An allegedly broadly based *Comite Solidarite-Irlande* to "support young Irish patriots dying in Long Kesh prison" was formed in August 1981, but PCF and CGT members were predominant on the committee. Other organizations then active included the *Comite International Contre la Repression*, originally founded in 1976 to marshal support for dissidents in Eastern Europe and run by Jacques Marie, a leading member of the Trotskyist *Organization Communiste Internationaliste* (OCI), and the *Centre d'Initiative pour de Nouveaux Espaces de Liberte*, founded in July 1981.²⁷

In September 1981, Bernadette McAliskey (formerly, Bernadette Devlin, a Westminster MP) went to France after she had been refused permission to enter Spain. During her visit, which was organized by the Communist Revolutionary League, she called on dockers to refuse to unload British goods. In the same month Owen Carron, the pro-IRA MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, attended the annual Communist *Fete de l'Humanite*, organized by the French Communist daily newspaper, *l'Humanite*, which claimed that during 1981, 25,000 anti-H-Block leaflets in English and French were distributed to tourists in Paris. In December 1981 a tour by Aidan McAteer of Provisional Sinn Fein and Barbara Brown of the National H-Block/Armagh Committee, organized by *Irlande Libre*, included an official reception by the Communist-controlled municipality of Rennes.²⁸

France remains important for both the Provisionals (and IRSP/INLA), but neither has been able fully to turn to its advantage the support connected with the hunger strike campaign. Michele Bonnechere, writing in the Provisionals' magazine *Iris*, claimed that "a broad movement of popular support has blossomed", but admitted that it "has yet to be brought to fruition" and that there exists "widespread disapproval of any action which causes injuries to civilians."²⁹

Elsewhere in Western Europe, the Provos' associations have been with small, energetic groups which serve basically to publicize the Republican cause without ever really penetrating the formal power structures of their respective countries. The Netherlands, thus, has a number of small but vociferous pro-IRA groups. The most active, the *Ierland Komitee Nederland* (IKN), based in Breda was founded in May-June 1975. One founder, Evert von den Berg, who was also associated with a Dutch terrorist support group, *Rode Hulp* (Red Aid), was arrested in 1977 on bombing charges. Another leading member, Els (Elizabeth) van Hout, was convicted for her part in the attempted bombing of the Allianz Bank in Amsterdam. A frequent visitor to Ireland, she was a member in 1980 of an "international tribunal" held in Belfast to inquire into conditions in Armagh women's prison. In July 1980, while in Ireland with a group of Dutch feminists, Els van Hout was detained on suspicion of having links with INLA and served with an exclusion order banning her from the United Kingdom. IKN was active during the 1980-81 hunger strikes and was involved in the H-Block *Komitee Nederland*. Also involved in this committee was the *Ploitiëke Partij Radikalen* (PPR), which helped to arrange a tour by Kieran Nugent, the first prisoner to go "on the blanket."³⁰

In Belgium, similarly, the Irish Republican support groups are small but active. Among their successes is the publication of material sympathetic to the Provisionals in the Belgium media. Such Belgian support goes back to 1970 with the establishment of the Ireland Information Group (or Info-Centrum) in Willbroek but its efforts since then have been supplemented by the Flemish-Ireland Solidarity Group (also known as the Flanders Ireland Committee). The sponsors of the French *Irlande Libre* also set up an Ireland Committee, named after their paper in Brussels. Its stated objectives were to "inform" the Belgian

people about Ireland and to assist the Irish "resistance." In recent years a Flemish group, *Werkgroep Ireland*, has been particularly active, sometimes in co-operation with the *Irlande Libre Collective*.³¹

Finally, in Italy, during the 1970s, the most active group was the anarchist *Lotta Continua* (Continuing Struggle), which used a film (made jointly with PD), a photographic exhibition and other publicity devices to draw attention to "repression" in Northern Ireland.³² Fulvio Grimaldi, a journalist and leading member of *Lotta Continua*, addressed meetings in the province and was present during the Bloody Sunday demonstration of January 1972.³³ Later that year a Provisional IRA party which included Dolours Price (currently serving life imprisonment for her part in the London bombings of March 1973) visited Italy under *Lotta Continua* auspices, but was then expelled by the Italian Government. Both PD and the Provisional IRA were represented at *Lotta Continua*'s first national congress in Italy in January 1975, and four months later two Provisional functionaries, Risteard Behal and Sean Keenan, were in contact with *Lotta Continua*, the Maoist *Il Manifesto* group and others in the course of a further visit. Since then, however, even this relatively low level of contact has faded.

As was noted earlier, for the most part these liaisons were established between the Provisional movement and Trotskyist groups — but it must be emphasized that, *originally*, the widest network of external contacts was between the Official movement and such groups. More importantly, the Officials were linked with organizations whose concept of action exceeded the type of metaphysical onanism so prevalent among the middle-class left who have elevated the intellectual delinquency of Trotskyism, with its humbug of imminent revolution, to a rationale for stasis. And it was from this context that many observers derived their suspicions, fears and anxieties regarding the existence of an international terrorist conspiracy. Thus, in the early 1970s they were alarmed at the Officials' claim that they had the support of fourteen self-styled national liberation movements, among them the Front for the Liberation of Quebec and the Republican Army of Brittany. Later, Provisionals were reported to have attended demonstrations in Brittany alongside local groups, and in 1971 a special committee, *Secours Populaire Interceltique*, was established to collect contributions for "distress relief" in Ireland. Representatives from both groups (and the Basque ETA) are also known to have met in Belgium.³⁴

As the Provisionals developed their own network in the same period two differences became clear, both of which extended from the general Marxist principles proclaimed by the Officials at the time.³⁵ The first was their sympathy for more orthodox, pro-Soviet Communism, but this did not preclude their willingness to identify with a wide range of revolutionary causes. The second, which was not altogether consistent with such associations, was the Officials' 29 May 1972 unilateral declaration of a cease-fire (excluding "defence and retaliation") to which they still adhere. At best this second measure, and their avoidance of "anyone . . . having sympathy with the Provisionals," was a partial recognition of the dangers warned by Mairin de

Burca, Joint Secretary of Official Sinn Fein, of "becoming identified with international affairs with small groups of people with handfuls of gelignite."³⁶

In the subsequent hiatus of "military" operations the Officials contented themselves with attempts to maintain and develop the links which they had earlier established. Chief of Staff, Cathal Goulding, had interviews printed in Trotskyist publications in Britain and overseas, and Seamus Costello (since murdered), during this period as Adjutant-General, had extensive links with ultra-left revolutionaries arising from his attendance at an international meeting organized by the Italian "Workers' Power," in Florence in 1971.³⁷

Thus encouraged, in July and August 1974, Sean O'Cionnaith (Sean Kenny), Director of International Affairs, staged a widely advertised "International Anti-Imperialist Festival" in Dublin and Belfast which was intended, in part, to win over some of the Provisionals' left-wing supporters abroad. In the event the only foreign organizations to send delegates were the Republican Clubs of the United States and Canada, *Clann na hEireann* from Britain, a handful of left-wing extremists and separatist groups from Western Europe, and "liberation movements" from Puerto Rico and Rhodesia. Total attendance fell far short of the 200 expected by the organizers, which tended to support Frederick Hacker's view that it "simply fizzled out."³⁸

Undaunted, O'Cionnaith scheduled a further Festival at the same venues for 1976, and claimed early in that year that 1700 invitations had been sent out.³⁹ However, a lack of subsequent references to this proposed event suggest that, if anything, the success enjoyed by it, if indeed it was held, was even less than its predecessor.⁴⁰

But by 1976, the Officials had long ceased to be a force in the conflict. By then they had, in Bell's description, "moved on into discourse and ideological orthodoxy" according to Marxism-Leninism. While this is not to deny that they could once more become a violent force in Northern Ireland, it is to accept Bell's view that the Officials were, as early as the end of 1974, "getting out of the secret army business."⁴¹ For the purposes of this article, therefore, their prominence diminishes sharply in the categories which will be examined in the following pages.⁴²

From the outset of this analysis it was emphasized that the focus was to be on the lower or less important level of contacts and the evidence considered to this point cannot really support any other categorization. As one "insider," Maria McGuire, observed in 1973 (and there has been nothing since to challenge her assessment):

. . . they were mostly rather unconvincing people . . . all they seemed to want was to express their solidarity with us. We didn't want their sympathy — we were only interested in concrete help. ⁴³

"Concrete help," of course, was simply not within the ambit of these groups; they were effectively only forums for propaganda and speculation and, in their own way, as opposed to revolution as most conservatives. Nevertheless, there

were contacts and, almost exclusively contacts alone, with groups who were qualitatively different and the difference was drawn principally from their capabilities, and sometimes their intentions. This is to say that linkages established (or reported) particularly in 1972 and 1973, assumed a great significance because the IRA was seen to be in contact with groups which had demonstrated their ability to engage in sustained campaigns of violence similar in many respects to those of the former. As with the groups mentioned earlier, however, there was one element of striking similarity: they comprised an almost kaleidoscopic selection of the terrorist spectrum. West German "freelancers," the (Italian) *Podere Operai*, Japanese radicals (including the Japanese United Revolutionary Army and the Japanese Red Army), the Turkish People's Liberation Army, the Iranian Liberation Front, the Tupamaros, and of course the mandatory influence of the Baader-Meinhof gang and their West German successors were all reported as somehow involved or interested in the Northern conflict through the IRA. There was also mention of a meeting at San Sebastian, Spain, in February 1979, between the Provisionals and members of OUT, the Portuguese Workers' unitary organization.

While such close proximity would have strained the credibility of any ideologically rigorous organization the Provisionals were able to tolerate it without difficulty. Just as they take no sides in disputes between rival liberation groups, they neither condemn what Kelley refers to as the "middle-class, neo-anarchist desperados" of international terrorism (such as the Red Brigades and the Baader-Meinhof Group and its successors), nor do they have any known connections with them.⁴⁴ In any case, and in practical terms, the benefits were probably no different from occasional links with this class of organization than it was with those considered at the first level.

The complete certainty which eludes this judgement is occasioned by the presence at San Sebastian of *Euskal Izaultzarako Alderia* (EIA) — the Basque Revolutionary Party which highlighted the common cause made by the Provisionals (and for a while the Officials) with several Western European separatist groups which claimed to represent minority nationalities suffering from repression. Their association, therefore, was that much more coherent and as a consequence provided more credible grounds for the suggestion that, at this level, there was a distinct possibility of material exchanges.

It is noteworthy, then, that a 1974 Provisional publication identified "30 nations" in Western Europe in addition to the "four nations of these islands" which were struggling for a "new set of equalised relationships."⁴⁵ In April 1972, the IRA, the Basque *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA) — Basque People and Liberty — and the *Front de liberation de la Bretagne* (FLB) were reported to have signed a political agreement which was followed some two years later by a statement that embraced other, small national minorities such as the Piedmontese.⁴⁶ Via the auspices of the appropriate Sinn Fein, the Officials and various ethnic groupings followed suit with the socialist equivalent in September 1974, known to initiates as "The Brest Charter." What this brief catalogue of IRA-Basque contacts foreshadowed was confirmed by a deeper study: the Officials lined up with a "socialist revolutionary party" in

which the operative term was "socialist," while the Provisionals found common ground with a "socialist revolutionary party" which supported "armed actions" and "refuses reformism."⁴⁷

Although there were further similarities in their respective stands on national sovereignty and independence, and other areas besides, it was the willingness of both the IRA and the (then) ETA to reciprocate with firearms and technical (explosives) expertise that placed this link in an altogether different category from those discussed previously. Contact between the two organizations dates back at least to 1972 when Jose Echebarrieta, one of ETA's most influential members, was reported to have made two secret visits to Dublin to seek contact with both the Officials and the Provisionals. According to Maria McGuire, Basque leaders met Sean MacStiofain and in exchange for training in the use of explosives, provided 50 revolvers.⁴⁸ For years, however, this was the sole item of substance upon which wild speculations were made of an IRA-ETA network. Yet the resemblance in the technical field, between the assassination of the Spanish Prime Minister, Admiral Luis Carrera Blanco, in December 1973, and that of British Ambassador in Dublin, Christopher Ewart-Biggs, three years later, gave further credence to the Spanish Police's 1974 claim of the existence of a secret pact between the two. Both were killed by the detonation of an under-the-road explosive device as their respective motor vehicles passed over it.

Whether, as was alleged (but denied by the ETA), the IRA supplied the explosives used in the former, or as Albert Parry implies,⁴⁹ the IRA trained the ETA on a continuing basis is, like so many questions in this area, undetermined. Both were possible but neither necessarily followed. As to the former, explosives appear not to have been an overly difficult material for terrorists to obtain in the last two decades, and with regard to the latter, a training in explosives was surely within the range of competence of the ETA once they had learned the first lessons. Besides, there is no record of further "quid pro quo" exchanges after that mentioned by McGuire. Since the time of Ewart-Biggs' death, the IRA-ETA/EIA link has been somewhat less substantial and confined to the frequent exchange of visits by high ranking officials in both organizations and statements of solidarity and congratulations.

The character of this relationship has also been mediated by the 1974 split of ETA into two major factions: ETA-militar (ETA-m), which advocates terrorist action; and ETA-politico-militar (ETA-pm), which combines terrorist and political activity (and is itself now split). As noted, Sinn Fein has its ties with EIA, which in effect is the political wing of what is now known as ETA-pm (VII) Assembly.

As intensive as the IRA-ETA relationship has become at the contact level, it has not as yet been duplicated with any of the other "30 nations" in Western Europe. Indeed, apart from the Breton FLB, the only other active link between the Provisionals and a separatist movement worth noting is that with Corsican nationalists, including the *Front de la Liberation Nationale de la Corse* (FLNC), which was declared illegal by the French Government in January 1983, and its political wing, the *Conseil des Comites Nationalistes* or

Consulta di i Cumitati Nazionalisti (CCN). But despite the fact that both FLB and FLNC favor violence to achieve their objectives there is scarcely a suggestion that material co-operation has resulted from their contacts. This is a marked contrast to the rhetoric which such instances have often attracted, but is, perhaps, to be expected. As Peter Janke concluded of them:

The point about these links and one could go on adducing evidence of contacts, is that it is not at all an international revolutionary conspiracy, but rather a network of tiny groups acting illegally that comes across one another in their search for arms and are prepared to help when called upon for a meal, a night's shelter, an overcoat, a hair dye or a railway ticket.⁵⁰

SOVIET AND EASTERN EUROPEAN CONTACTS

This conclusion is even more certain in respect of Eastern Europe and covers the rather erratic ventures made by the Soviet Union into the "troubles." To say that Soviet propaganda organs have consistently distorted events of a popular uprising by an oppressed community against "British imperialism," is an understatement. Indeed they so grossly misrepresented the situation that their pronouncements were ludicrous.⁵¹ (Similarly, the Soviet Government's attempts to provide support for stands taken by the Irish Government, have been clumsy and quite inimical to the interests of those they sought to assist.)⁵² Notwithstanding this, and the need to develop friendly relations with Ireland (with which it established diplomatic relations in 1974), Moscow has maintained a cautious public attitude towards the Official IRA and its descendants, and a critical and denunciatory one in respect of the Provisionals' violence.

To Constantine Fitzgibbon the rough similarity in ideological inspiration between Soviet Communism and Official socialism betokened but one conclusion: ". . . the Red IRA . . . [is] now under the control of international Communism as directed from Moscow."⁵³ This must have seemed even more so when Moscow's approval of the Officials was manifest in two lengthy interviews with Chief of Staff, Cathal Goulding, in *Pravda*, in April 1972; and when, in return, the Officials' journal, *United Irishman*, identified itself with Soviet policies which included the treatment of dissidents and, retrospectively the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. It must also have been buttressed by reports that the KGB had established links with the Official IRA through the British and Irish Communist Parties.⁵⁴ From such indications quite alarming claims were advanced. Parry, for example, not only adhered to the position taken by Fitzgibbon, but also maintained that the Officials, and by extension, Moscow, "had their tabs and even controls on the Provisionals."⁵⁵

Despite the fact that bedfellowship between them and the Soviets was unlikely, the temptation to speculate upon its existence proved irresistible to many. First, *Foreign Report*, in January 1973, propagated the line that the Russians "seemed willing to help,"⁵⁶ and in the following month, two British journalists discovered the workings of the KGB in an IRA bombing campaign.⁵⁷ And much later, one historian of the IRA, Tim Pat Coogan, wrote of this aspect:

At Russian Embassy parties in Dublin one notices the respect accorded to figures on the revolutionary left, not the revolutionary illegal who is not invited. Thomas MacGiolla, President of Sinn Fein, the Workers' Party (the old official wing) for instance, is usually to be seen encircled by Russian 'diplomats' . . .

One also learns that the Russians, who are supposed to account for their movements when going outside Dublin, do not always do so, and Russian Embassy personnel have been observed crossing the border at unguarded points.⁵⁸

Parry, however, based his observations on the "voices of informed suspicion" and appeared, therefore, to exclude the rigorous examination which his conclusions demanded.⁵⁹ *Foreign Report* and the *Daily Telegraph* were even less forthcoming, but whereas the former's assessment was expressed as speculation, the latter's claim rested on alleged intelligence passed from London to Dublin. The absence of subsequent disclosures which would confirm either or both may be taken as an indication of just how accurate these two sources were on this particular aspect of the Northern Ireland conflict.⁶⁰

What they, Parry and Fitzgibbon, disregarded was a knowledge of conditions in Northern Ireland. As Conor Cruise O'Brien wrote:

In fact it does not appear that either the "Green" or the "Red" IRA is under the control of anything — certainly not of anything so remote and exotic as "International Communism . . . directed from Moscow". This is the equivalent of the theory that men of 1916 were in the pay of Berlin. In reality, Irish rebels have responded to Irish situations in their own way, sometimes borrowing rhetoric and ideology from abroad, and often looking there for weapons and other aid, but seldom amenable to outside advice. In any case, Moscow, like Rome (or even Dublin), would find it difficult to assess each crisis arising in Ardoyne or Andersontown in time for its advice to have much relevance. Things move quickly under the pressure of local competition.⁶¹

In an indirect way the thrust of the above argument was confirmed by Coogan, who admitted that the main thrust of Russian influence "would appear to be education and propagandist . . . directed at the Official IRA, the Irish Republican Socialist Party and its military offshoot the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) . . ."⁶² And since the official IRA ceased operations in May 1972, and since it was, by the end of 1974, "getting out of the secret army business," there were further cautions against imputing too extensive an involvement with the Soviets.

Perhaps against many expectations, the Soviet line on Northern Ireland has found only an incomplete echo among countries of Eastern Europe. Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic remained in concert with the Soviet Union but the press in Poland, Hungary and Romania exer-

cized what may be justifiably termed objectivity. Of this second group a representative example of reporting would be that found in a Polish commentary on the Constitutional Convention which credited the British Government with,

. . . the position that the Catholic population have a right to power-sharing in Northern Ireland and [not sanctioning] Protestant monopoly of power because that would involve intensification of the civil war.⁶³

It was hardly a revolutionary approach to the conflict but it was nevertheless a welcome appraisal and a criterion against which an understanding of the Ulster Question in Eastern Europe could be measured.

In sharp relief to the differing approaches which the Soviet bloc adopted on this issue, that presented by Yugoslavia is deserving of special mention. In 1972 Radio Belgrade paid a startling tribute to the British Army for its "patience, constraint and self-discipline" in Northern Ireland. Moreover, it condemned the IRA as a "purely terrorist formation" and laid at its door the blame for Bloody Sunday.⁶⁴ But the surprising Yugoslav attitude was not really to be explained in terms of support for the Governments of Britain and Northern Ireland.⁶⁵ It was more likely a justification and a warning intended for internal consumption, directed toward dissident Croatian nationalists and separatists, against whom Tito had moved in December 1971.⁶⁶ It should not be surprising, then, that Northern Ireland has failed since that time to occupy the same prominence in official Yugoslav pronouncements.

Just as the change of focus from the Soviet Union to the countries of the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe involved a diminution of significance and involvement in the conflict, so too did this apply in the shift from those countries to what may be called international "front" organizations, dominated by the Soviets. In 1972 a number of these, such as the World Federation of Trade Unions, the International Union of Students (IUS), and the World Federation of Democratic Youth, began to take a more than passing interest in Northern Ireland.

Of these the IUS appears to have been the most active, no doubt a reflection of the fact that the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), which maintained a permanent representative at the Prague headquarters, was one of its few affiliates outside the Communist world.⁶⁷ In January 1975, Jurij Sayamov, the Soviet Vice-President of the IUS, visited London to plan a campaign on Northern Ireland with representatives of the USI and the (British) National Union of Students,⁶⁸ but the subsequent International Student Week of Solidarity with Ireland aroused little interest in the West.

In Ireland, however, it was the Official IRA which played a greater role through its contacts with another front organization, the World Peace Council (WPC), a delegation from which, led by India's former Defence Minister, Krishna Menon, visited the province in May 1972. Subsequently, WPC declared an international day of solidarity, and despatched its Secretary, James W. Forrest, an American Communist, to Belfast to attend a tribunal to

mobilize public opinion against the British Army. Contacts were also developed with the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), which in turn resulted in overseas tours by both that organization's functionaries and those of Official Sinn Fein. Within the scope of the latter, Republican literature was distributed at the WPC conference in Moscow "through the good offices of the Soviet representatives," and the delegation made useful contacts which it hoped to develop.⁶⁹

The record shows that such promise was still-born. Although the WPC was active its attempts, and the attempts of affiliated and associated groups resulted in little more than the repetition of a familiar pattern. The operations of these groups, such as they were, took place at a low level until energized by a particular event — internment, Bloody Sunday, torture, hunger strike(s) — when their members engaged in an inevitable cycle of arranging visits, publishing pamphlets, giving briefings and otherwise demonstrating. As the surfeit of outrage subsided so, too, did the level of activity which was at best the flatulent child of a shotgun marriage between opportunity and the general political irrelevance of the Officials and those they became. Quite clearly the international "front" organizations were also capable of offering only as much as the principals for whom they covered had a mind to give, which, in terms of being able to mobilize and direct public opinion in any sustained fashion, was severely limited.

The notion that the IRA is, somehow-or-other, a component in the international Marxist vanguard persists nevertheless. For the most part it is a recurrent rather than a continuous characterization of the IRA on the grounds that, essentially, its esoteric appeal is via the intellectual foundations of communism. This claim, moreover, is made in the face of a recent history which suggests that it is singularly improbable: after all, the Provisionals broke away from a Marxist organization — the official IRA — in 1969 in large part because of the latter's strongly socialist ideological complexion. Notwithstanding this, and the related facts that a vulgar anti-communism was a feature of the early Provisionals who were, in any case, bound by IRA orders prohibiting membership in any communist party, a body of suspicion remained. In support of it much was made of the 1971 publication of *Eire Nua* (*New Ireland*), the Provisionals' first major political manifesto. It was populist and co-operativist in tenor, but significantly it attempted to strike a balance between Western capitalism (with its economic inequalities), and Eastern Soviet state capitalism (with its denial of freedom and human rights). *Eire Nua*, therefore, implied that the Provisionals were on the left rather than on the right, but not necessarily Marxist. And even this open assessment needs to be qualified by the judgement that this was a period in which the Provisionals were less interested in precise formulations of their political programmes and theoretical disputations than they were in the immediate appeal of the military struggle.⁷⁰

In 1977, this judgement was challenged with an IRA assassination campaign against leading business and corporate chiefs, a development which suggested a move towards the extreme left. And clearly it was, yet it was

discontinued: the reason seems to be that although the Provisionals regarded British economic interests in Northern Ireland as an integral part of British rule (and thereby legitimate targets), they also recognized that their campaign was costing them support among the workers. Thus the ideological complexion of the Provisional movement became somewhat difficult to define in the late 1970s and after.

The key to approaching the question is to examine the essential nature of the struggle itself, and this involves reference not just to Northern Ireland but the whole history of the Irish Question. From this perspective, the relevance of a class-based approach pales into insignificance in favor of the most obvious and supportable view that ultimately the "question" is about the vestiges of imperialism in conflict with a variant of national self-determination. In this light, arguments about the extent to which Provisionals are Marxist become almost — but not quite — theological.

The caution is determined by the steps which the IRA took to redress its lack of political astuteness after 1976 and it turns, as well, on the import of what many, including some within the Provisional movement, saw as a lurch to the left in the thinking of its leadership. In sum, this was accounted for by the generational transition that had swept the movement and brought a younger, more theoretically conscious group to direct its fortunes. As O'Malley writes of them in the contemporary period, "Many of the old Republican shibboleths have little meaning for them, and they are viscerally more radical ideologically."⁷¹ And to the extent that their analyses are couched in terms of "class," "economic and national exploitation" and a "strong identification" with "other liberation movements" throughout the world, Vincent Browne characterizes them as "Marxist."⁷²

For their part, the Provos reject all such attempts to portray them further to the left than "socialist," a complexion which they judge to be both tolerable to even their most conservative supporters outside of the Six Counties (for which read the United States) and eminently defensible in historical terms. It also has the advantage, as any undergraduate major in political science knows, of being a chameleon term, subject to almost infinite qualifications according to the prevailing circumstances. Which is to say that when the Provisionals elaborate on their philosophy there is about it the taint of apologetics. Thus Gerry Adams outlined the movements' radical, socialist programme at Bodenstown in 1979 as follows:

The task that we, as Republicans, have set ourselves, and the ills affecting our people and our country are too complex to be satisfied merely by a British withdrawal or by the establishment of a 32 county neo-colonial Free State. We are not, and never have been, merely a 'Brits Out' movement . . . We stand opposed to all forms and all manifestations of imperialism and capitalism. We stand for an Ireland free, united, socialist and Gaelic . . . Our movement needs constructive and thoughtful self-criticism. We also require links with those oppressed by

economic and social pressures. Today's circumstances and our objectives dictate the need for building an agitational struggle in the 26 Counties, an economic resistance movement, linking up republicans with other sections of the working class. It needs to be done now because to date our most glaring weakness lies in our failure to develop revolutionary politics and to build an alternative to so-called constitutional politics.⁷³

To the extent that this address reflected new modes of analysis it was a forthright statement, and to the extent that it became, ultimately, untenable, and required "clarification" it created the suspicion that the Provos were engaged in nothing so much as an exercise in dissembling. In the realization that the Dublin and London Governments could, and did, represent them as "Marxist-oriented," the Provisional leadership repudiated the suggestion that the movement was so aligned. As Adams told a Dublin interviewer:

There is no Marxist influence within the Sinn Fein. It simply isn't a Marxist organization. I know of no one in the Sinn Fein who is a Marxist or who would be influenced by Marxism.⁷⁴

But it was a case of excessive protestation, and as Kelley wrote of it, Adams' assertions were only half-true:

[Sinn Fein] clearly was not a Marxist organization. But the other part of Adams's reply was flatly false and is a mark of the Provos' continuing lack of a consistently principled stance. While there are very few people in the party who would describe themselves as Marxists, even a casual visitor to Belfast will come across several Sinn Feiners who have quite clearly been very strongly and deeply influenced by Marxism. Adams is one of them, and it did his cause no good to pretend otherwise.⁷⁵

Perhaps in recognition of this flawed position, but also out of the imperatives which attend any attempt at politicization of a mass movement, subsequent statements engaged the Provos' perceived need for more precise (and certainly less alarming) definitions of their position. Without removing all causes for concern subsequent statements possessed a positive and democratic formulation, as in this 1982 outline by Danny Morrison of the Sinn Fein's socialist objectives:

The aim, of the Republican movement, going back sixty years, has been to establish a socialist Republic based on the 1916 Proclamation. What we want to see is a fair and equal distribution of wealth throughout the country, an end to poverty, proper schools and hospitals, an end to exploitation, everyone having the right to a home.⁷⁶

Within this statement are the proximate factors which allow for the resolution of the conundrum presented by the Provisionals' ideological stances

between, on the one hand, a left-wing view of themselves and the New Ireland they would create, and on the other, an evident inability or unwillingness to accept that they are Marxists to the degree that their ideology is informed by Marxism. It emphasizes, therefore, the Provisionals' line of pedigree from 1916 and the Proclamation of the Irish Republic with, *inter alia*, its egalitarian and libertarian guarantees. And it is as well that it does so because, whatever Marxist views might be held by a minority of Provisionals, the majority of the membership still adhere to the more traditional belief in the private ownership of property and the necessity for small-scale private businesses, as sanctioned in *Eire Nua*. To this end it is relevant to recall that attacks on these provisions at the 1977 Sinn Fein *Ard Fheis* were rebuffed in the name of economic development.

If the above example suggests a milder adherence to left wing views than does outright Marxism, it is because Marxism is but part, and historically, a very recent part, of the intellectual spectrum which supports Irish nationalism. To be sure, there is a natural affinity between the Catholic population of the working class ghettos of Northern Ireland and left-wing political thought, but it is drawing an unreasonably long bow to then infer from it the pre-emption of traditional habits of mind. Rather, Sinn Fein's "democratic socialism" is to be seen as a variation of that much older and more dominant ideology.

Such a conclusion, furthermore is reinforced by accounting for the force of necessity in the choice of ideology. If it is accepted that Britain's sovereignty over Ireland (and latterly, Northern Ireland) was the result, first of imperial monarchs and then of essentially conservative governments in London, then surely a case is to be made that Irish nationalism was somehow bound to acquire elements of a philosophy which provided the necessary basis for militant opposition. Surely it defies the logic of politics to expect any nationalist or irredentist movement, and the IRA is both, to adopt the political values which are at once the root cause of its grievance? This is not to dismiss the very real appeal the Provisionals find in Marxist interpretations of the development of humankind, but it is an attempt to release them from a caricature which injures understanding.

THIRD WORLD CONTACTS

This same conclusion was no less appropriate when applied to the involvement of the majority of those states (extant and putative) whose international standing derived from their being in the "third world," and preferably possessed of a "revolutionary" regime. Thus, with regard to Africa and North Africa, the record showed occasional interest at the contact level. Joshua Nkomo sent a solidarity telegram on behalf of the Zimbabwe African People's Union to Provisional Sinn Fein's annual conference in 1978,⁷⁷ as did the Algiers headquarters of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman. There were tenuous links with Okhela in South Africa,⁷⁸ and in tribute to his catholic interests, Uganda's Idi Amin once demanded a briefing on Northern Ireland from the British High Commissioner in Kampala.⁷⁹

Throughout Asia, the response was very significant. If one report in the Hanoi publication *Nhan Dan* was an indication, North Viet Nam's interest was perfunctory, predictable and generally in conformity with the Soviet appreciation of the Northern Ireland situation.⁸⁰ In the mid 1980s Thailand, a country frequently at odds with Viet Nam over its invasion of neighbouring Kampuchea and frequent infringements of Thai sovereignty, came to the conclusion that its outlawed and almost defunct domestic communist party (CPT) had links with the IRA. According to Thai security officials, the reverses suffered by the CPT in the countryside had forced it to consider urban operations, in which it had no training and had therefore, approached the Soviet Union, Vietnam, Laos and the Provisionals. As of 1987 this report retains the same characteristics as it did when first announced — solitary and surprising.

Latin America's alleged contribution was provided from two quarters, the first, not surprisingly, by Cuba. According to the Monday Club's Biggs-Davison and Harwood, the Fidelist inspiration motivated People's Democracy even in its early days.⁸¹ Later, Biggs-Davison saw Communist designs in clearer and larger detail: the KGB, the Czechoslovakian Secret Service (STB), and the Cuban *Direccion General de Inteligencia* (DGI) were all involved, ultimately with "the aim of breaking through sectarian barriers to form an all-Ireland class war and socialist revolution."⁸² In the interim, the main voice of support for this proposition was provided by a former American intelligence operative. In 1974 John Barron claimed that a Cuban intelligence officer, Gerardo Perazo Amerchazurra, who had defected to the United States in 1971, revealed that, at the behest of the KGB, the DGI was conspiring with British communists to perpetuate the internecine strife in Northern Ireland. The same source, presumably, was responsible for Barron's elaboration upon this theme:

The DGI operational plan for 1972, drafted under KGB supervision, stipulated that the Cubans would train Irish Republican Army personnel in the tactics of terrorism and guerilla warfare. Liaison with the IRA is effected by DGI officers in London through British communists.⁸³

Unfortunately, no evidence has been offered by either the above claimants, or anyone else, which would confirm that the operational plan was effected. On the contrary, there is only an outright claim that the Provos were rebuffed by the Cubans.⁸⁴ Moreover, the clearest link between Cuba and Northern Ireland was to be found in the Official movement's attendance at Castro's World Festival of Youth in July-August 1978. And by the tenor of its feature report even the *Sunday Telegraph* failed to be convinced of the revolutionary threat posed by the gathering.⁸⁵

The second Latin American contribution has its origins in the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary ferment of Central America. Especially important here was the considerable mutual sympathy, experienced in nothing more than revolutionary solidarity, between the Provisionals and the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. Equally, they were opposed to the same regimes — such

as those in El Salvador, Chile and Guatemala. In the light of the perceived congruence in their respective views, and the views of each other, this particular linkage had the potential to lead to more substantial expressions of co-operation, but was disrupted by the change of regime in Managua.

The People's Republic of China also requires treatment and dismissal at this level. Despite claims being made in 1972 by a former Czech diplomat writing under the name of J. Bernard Hutton, and reputedly based on NATO sources, that IRA (unspecified) terrorist activity in the North was being financed and directed by subversion agents recruited and trained in China, there is virtually no indication that the Chinese Government was at all concerned with the conflict.⁸⁶ Apart from a pledge of support "for the just struggle of the Northern Irish People" in the period of international indignation following Bloody Sunday, there has been little since to challenge journalist Jonathan Steele's 1972 assessment that, "[t]he polite Chinese have said next to nothing."⁸⁷

In all, the record of the governments and organizations considered in this section is modest, no matter from what perspective of involvement it is regarded. The reasons for this appear to vary — from a basic disinterest in the affairs of Northern Ireland, to the political wisdom which Richard Rose saw as resulting from an "informed reconnaissance of the situation."⁸⁸ Conor Cruise O'Brien's dismissal of the suggestion that the Russians exerted a control over the conflict foreshadowed the latter, for, it is argued, Chinese, Cuban and Czech influence would be no more easily effected in the same circumstances, even if the will to intervene existed. Hence, it is at this point that a brief consideration should be given to the habit of "Irish rebels," noted by O'Brien, of "sometimes borrowing rhetoric and ideology from abroad."

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES ON THE PROVISIONAL IRA

To this end it should be understood that both the Officials and Provisional IRA claimed a lineal descendancy from an organization — the IRA of the Easter Rising — which pre-dates almost every other "terrorist" group in Europe, and certainly those of more recent notoriety, such as Baader-Meinhof, the Red Brigades, and the Red Army Faction, with whom they were allegedly linked. The IRA's tactical and strategic doctrines, therefore, tended to be of a type formulated prior to Partition and developed in succeeding campaigns.

Admittedly, there were indications that their early inspiration, particularly that of the Provisionals, was not drawn entirely from the Irish experience. In this regard former Chief of Staff, Sean MacStiofain, was illustrative of a most catholic taste. Lessons were taken from the Finnish defiance of the Soviet Union (at the start of World War II), the Warsaw rising of the underground army led by General Tadeusz Bor-Komorowski in 1944, and the success of Menachem Begin's Irgun in Israel as well as Ireland's Tom Barry in an attempt to compose an appropriate IRA strategy to achieve British withdrawal from the North. And sustaining all was a "belief in God and in the practice of religion."⁸⁹

But MacStiofain, like other IRA leaders, also made early contacts with members of EOKA, the Greek paramilitary on Cyprus, at the time of their unsuccessful campaign of 1956-62. Both he, and Cathal Goulding, later to be the Officials' Chief of Staff, were facilitated in this regard by being placed in the same prison (Wormwood Scrubs) as EOKA leaders such as Nicos Sampson. Evidently, it was an experience which proved durable: in the early months of the Provisional IRA's existence it was reported "[t]here was much reading of guerrilla manuals, notably the writings of General Grivas."⁹⁰ Confirmation that the anti-British campaign in Cyprus (and Aden) was an example for the Provisionals was also provided by Maria McGuire.⁹¹

Of some interest, in view of the way in which their campaigns were later waged, was McGuire's claim that the FLN's methods in Algeria were rejected "because of the indiscriminate casualties . . . caused."⁹² However, the strength to which this was adhered was questionable. Parry claims that the film, *The Battle of Algiers*, was vigorously approved by the Provos, and presumably he was referring to something other than an artistic appreciation.⁹³ More substantially, at the Provisional Sinn Fein Conference in 1977, Daithi O'Connell spoke with obvious approval of the "Algerian formula," but the precise cause of this development remains unclear.

If McGuire's account is accurate, the Provisionals had recourse to many other sources as well. She wrote that Ruairi O'Bradaigh at one time bought seven copies of the paperback edition of Robert Taber's *War of the Flea*, and gave one to each member of the Army council, who studied it closely.⁹⁴ Whether they were any the wiser for the effort is not reported. In any case they would still have needed to relate their studies to the peculiarities of Northern Ireland, in support of which there is no wealth of evidence.⁹⁵

Historically, it is no more easy to discern principles distilled from Begin, Grivas, or Guevara in the IRA campaign which commenced in 1970, than it was to identify the influence of foreign theorists in earlier instances. Indeed, the current conflict appears to be well within the tradition of those previous "troubles," the principal distinguishing characteristic being the weapons employed. As A.T.Q. Stewart observed:

Terrorism in the advancement of a political cause is at once part of, and a new pattern imposed upon, the tapestry of civil disorder. It first appeared in its familiar modern form during the troubles of 1919-23, but it is probably a mistake to distinguish too sharply between traditional violence and that motivated by contemporary politics. The distinction lies in the use of more deadly weapons; the bomb and the machine-gun have been added to the pistol and the pike.⁹⁶

And in a passage which threw further doubt in the way of those who saw external influences, he wrote:

The whole process of muted insurrection, so familiar in Irish history is an elaborately structured and everchanging development which obeys no laws except those intrinsic to it.⁹⁷

Stewart's comments are a necessary reminder. Although the conflict with which this work is concerned dates from 1968, in the light of Irish history it cannot be regarded as other than an ancient quarrel upon which certain contemporary influences have been ever so lightly superimposed. In general, the available evidence indicates that the force of these influences have been minimal, where they have not been absent, in relation to the international aspects of the conflict here considered.

Endnotes

1. *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 4 October 1980.
2. Kevin Kelley, *The Longest War: Northern Ireland and the IRA* (Dingle, Co. Kerry: Brandon, 1982), p. 272 (hereafter cited as Kelley, *The Longest War*).
3. For this writer's accounts of such relationships see "The Irish Republican Army and Terror International: An inquiry into the Material Aspects of the First Fifteen Years," in Paul Wilkinson and A.M. Stewart, eds., *Contemporary Research on Terrorism* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987); and "Lavish Generosity: The American Dimension of International Support for the Provisional Irish Republican Army 1968-1983," *Conflict Quarterly*, VII (Spring 1987) pp. 20-42.
4. Interview with Liam Cosgrave (Taoiseach, from 1973-77), Dublin, 8 June 1978.
5. *Sunday Telegraph*, 31 October 1971, pp. 1 and 3.
6. BBC Radio 4 Programme, "Today", as cited in Richard Clutterbuck, *Protest and the Urban Guerrilla* (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1973), p. 217-18.
7. *Daily Telegraph*, 7 April 1977, and *Guardian*, 7 April 1977.
8. *Irish Times*, 28 September 1978.
9. *Boston Globe*, 7 September 1979.
10. Doubts about the reliability of McMullen's revelations also contribute to this difficulty. This author has found several inconsistencies in McMullen's accounts, the most important of which will be noted wherever the latter's claims are referred to.
11. George Styles, *Bombs Have No Pity: My War against Terrorism* (London: William Luscombe, 1975), p. 111 (hereafter cited as Styles, *Bombs Have No Pity*).
12. For comprehensive accounts of these episodes see: Tim Pat Coogan, *On the Blanket: The H-Block Story* (Swords, Co. Dublin: Ward River, 1980), and Tom Collins, *The Irish Hunger Strike* (Dublin: White Island, 1986).
13. Examples: the Irish Civil Rights Solidarity Campaign (1969), the Irish Solidarity Campaign (1970), and the Anti-Internment League (1971).
14. Peter Shipley, *Revolutionaries in Modern Britain* (London: Bodley Head, 1976), p. 197 (hereafter cited as Shipley, *Revolutionaries in Modern Britain*).
15. Conor Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland* (Frogmore, St. Albans, Herts: Panther, 1974), p. 19. See also Richard Rose's comment on the role of Marxists and Communists in his *Northern Ireland: A Time of Choice* (London: MacMillan, 1976), p. 67 (hereafter cited as Rose, *A Time of Choice*).
16. Unless otherwise specified the source for the material covering the CPI, CPGB, various connections between Sinn Fein/IRA and organizations in Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands, and some of material covering Eastern Europe and "Front" organizations is a collection of briefing papers or notes generously provided to academics, journalists

and other interested parties down the years by the British Government's Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In many cases these are summarized accounts of media reports over time or digests of these reports of particular statements or events. To this writer's knowledge they have appeared under at least two descriptions: *The IRA and Northern Ireland: Aims, Policies, Tactics* (August 1976), and *The IRA: Its History, Aims and Activities* (September 1983). Several of these notes, have been incorporated in the analysis of the above areas, and by virtue of their style and content, in only a slightly abridged form. The writer acknowledges the assistance these papers and notes have provided; they are cited FCO, *The IRA* (where this refers to the 1983 version).

17. FCO, *The IRA*.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Shipley, *Revolutionaries In Modern Britain*, p. 24
21. *Daily Telegraph*, 16 September 1976.
22. FCO, *The IRA*.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. *Iris*, no. 5, March 1983.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. The title of the film was *Ireland: The Flashpoint of Europe*.
33. He also presented the Widgery Tribunal bullets allegedly fired by the security forces during the demonstration; forensic evidence later showed that markings on them "were consistent with having been fired into sand." (*Irish Times*, 15 March 1972).
34. Ibid.
35. For an outline of these principles see James Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: The IRA 1916-1979*, rev. and updated ed., (Dublin: Academy Press, 1979), pp. 337-72 (hereafter cited as Bell, *The Secret Army*); Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA*, rev. and expanded ed., (Glasgow: Fontana, 1980), pp. 419-30 (hereafter cited as Coogan, *The IRA*); and Kelley, *The Longest War*, pp. 84-167, and 176-78.
36. The first statement was made by Sean O'Cionnaith (Sean Kenny), Director of International Affairs for Official Sinn Fein, as reported in the *Irish Times*, 28 January 1976; de Burca's appears in the *Irish Times*, 2 December 1974.
37. Ibid.
38. Frederick J. Hacker, *Crusaders, Criminals And Crazyes: Terror and Terrorism In Our Time* (New York: Norton, 1976), p. 37 (hereafter cited as Hacker, *Crusaders, Criminals And Crazyes*)
39. According to Hacker, a secret convention was held in Trieste, Italy, in 1974, of "various ethnic groups, including Croats, Corsicans, Basques, Irish and Welsh," together with "representatives of terrorist organizations." (Ibid.) However, he does not distinguish between Official and Provisional Irish, and from published sources it has not been possible to accurately assess the importance of this gathering.

40. In May 1978, the Northern Ireland Secretary, Roy Mason, made a passing reference to an "anti-repression" conference having been held earlier that year. Like Hacker, he did not specify what arm of the IRA was responsible for it, and once again, the indications were that the event itself was not viewed, by the British Government at least, as being significant. Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), House of Commons, *Official Report*, vol. 949, 11 May 1978, col.1378 (hereafter cited as House of Commons, *Official Report*).
41. Bell, *The Secret Army*, pp. 413-14.
42. While Bell's claim that the Officials were "getting out of the secret army business" is generally true, it has to be seen against at least 7 major incidents from 1973 to as late as 1982 which contradict it. Six of these involved the loss of life, or of lives, in the course of punishment or disciplinary shootings and internecine feuds with the Irish Republican Socialist Party and the Provisionals. Other incidents related to robberies, beatings and intimidation. See the "Wigmore" column of *Magill*, (September 1982), p. 59.
43. Maria McGuire, *To Take Arms: A Year In The Provisional IRA* (London: MacMillan, 1973), p. 110 (hereafter cited as McGuire, *To Take Arms*).
44. Kelley, *The Longest War*, pp. 271-72.
45. *An Phoblacht*, 17 May 1974.
46. *Politique Hebdo*, (Paris), 17 May 1974.
47. Galican, Breton and Welsh groupings were represented in company with Official Sinn Fein and *Herriko Alderi Socialistas Iraultalea* (People's Revolutionary Socialist Party) during the signing of a "Declaration on the struggle against colonialism in Western Europe." Roger Faligot, "Basques, Sinn Fein and the Brest Charter," *Hibernia*, 20 January 1978, p. 12 (hereafter cited as Faligot, "Basques, Sinn Fein and the Brest Charter").
48. McGuire, *To Take Arms*, pp. 71 and 110.
49. Albert Parry, *Terrorism: From Robespierre to Arafat* (New York: Vanguard, 1976), pp. 171-72 (hereafter cited as Parry, *Terrorism*).
50. Peter Janke, "The Response to Terrorism," Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies (RUSI), *Ten Years Of Terrorism: Collected Views* (London: RUSI, 1979), p. 25.
51. See Dev Murarka, "Moscow Takes A New Look at Ulster," *The Observer* Foreign News Service, No. 30023, 24 March 1972; and "Soviet Distortion On Northern Ireland," (February 1977), a paper held by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, and noted "Source Not Known." In the writer's opinion, this second paper, which juxtaposes Soviet comment with verifiable fact was produced by British Government authorities for general distribution to offices and personnel who might have a need to refute Soviet allegations.
52. See United Nations Security Council, *Official Records*, 1503rd Meeting, 20 August 1969, paras 44-46; and United Nations General Assembly General Committee, *Official Records*, 180th Meeting, 17 September 1969, paras 48 and 52.
53. Constantine Fitzgibbon, *Red Hand: The Ulster Colony* (London: Michael Joseph, 1971), p. 319.
54. Ray S. Cline, "State Support for International Terrorism: The Strategic Framework," in Benjamin Netanyahu, ed., *International Terrorism: Challenge and Response* (Jerusalem: Jonathan Institute, 1980), p. 95.
55. Parry, *Terrorism*, p. 380. Papers taken by an Israeli commando team leader, Yoni Netanyahu, from the Beirut apartments of three assassinated Black September leaders in April 1973, also reportedly showed that the KGB, with the help of Cuban diplomats, recruited phony students to join terrorist organizations in several countries, including Ireland. *National Times On Sunday* (Sydney), 26 October 1986.
56. *Foreign Report*, No.1277, 3 January 1973, p. 5.
57. *Daily Telegraph*, 14 February 1973.

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58. Coogan, *The IRA*, pp. 542-43.
59. Parry, *Terrorism*, p. 380.
60. In 1983 the Irish Government for the first time expelled two Soviet diplomats and the wife of one of them for "inacceptable activities." The statement announcing this decision also described Dublin's reasons as "substantial, grave and certain" and indicated that travel restrictions had been infringed thus raising the possibility of activities in Northern Ireland (*Times*, 10 September 1983). Whether they in fact were so involved remains an open question in the absence of further statements.
61. Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Herod: Reflections On Political Violence* (London: Hutchinson, 1978), p. 98.
62. Coogan, *The IRA*, p. 543.
63. *Tribuna Ludu* (Warsaw), 13 May 1875.
64. *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 February 1972.
65. *Observer* 6 February 1972.
66. *Ibid.*
67. FCO, *The IRA*.
68. *Daily Express*, 17 January 1975.
69. *United Irishman*, December 1973; and *Morning Star*, 5 December 1973.
70. Kelley, *The Longest War*, p. 134
71. Padraig O'Malley, *The Uncivil Wars: Ireland Today* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1983), p. 279 (hereafter cited as O'Malley, *The Uncivil Wars*).
72. Vincent Browne, "The New Provo Strategy," *Magill*, (November 1981), pp. 4-5, as cited in O'Malley, *The Uncivil Wars*, p. 279.
73. As cited in Kelley, *The Longest War*, p. 303.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
75. *Ibid.*
76. As cited in O'Malley, *The Uncivil Wars*, p. 279.
77. *Times*, 23 October 1978.
78. *Foreign Report*, No. 1563, 6 December 1978, pp. 3-5. Okhela: a white support network for radical black movements in South Africa.
79. *Daily Telegraph*, 2 March 1973.
80. As reported in the *International Herald Tribune*, 27 July 1973.
81. John Biggs-Davison, "The Speech the People's Democracy tried to Drown," and Jeremy Harwood, "Ulster- a new departure," in Jeremy Harwood, Jonathan Guinness and John Biggs-Davison, *Ireland — Our Cuba?* (London: Monday Club, n.d.), pages not numbered.
82. John Biggs-Davison, *The Strategic Implications for the West of the International Links of the IRA in Ireland*, Foreign Affairs Research Institute Paper, no. 17 (1976), p. 5.
83. John Barron, *KGB: The Secret Work of Soviet Secret Agents* (New York: Reader's Digest, 1974), p. 22.
84. Desmond Hamill, *Pig in the Middle: The Army in Northern Ireland 1969-1984* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 235.
85. Andrew Stephen, "Castro's 50 Million (pound) Jamboree," *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 August 1978.
86. J. Bernard Hutton, *The Subverters of Liberty* (London: W.H. Allen, 1972), pp. 5-7, 93-94, 174-76 and 182-83. But then Hutton also wrote, "In Africa and Asia, Australia and New

Zealand, Canada and South America, terrorist violence is a carbon copy of what has happened in the USA” (emphasis added), p. 8. Apart from the dubious grounds for comparison which he claims, this author has been unable to trace any evidence of violence which would qualify as “terrorist” in either Australia or New Zealand prior to 1972.

87. *Guardian*, 9 February 1972 and 19 August 1971.
88. Rose, *A Time of Choice*, p. 67.
89. Sean MacStiofain, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (Edinburgh: Gordon Cremonesi, 1975), pp. 10, 17, 41, and 62; *Sunday Times* “Insight” Team, *Ulster* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1971), p. 196.
91. McGuire, *To Take Arms*, p. 74.
92. *Ibid.*
93. Parry, *Terrorism*, p. 451.
94. McGuire, *To Take Arms*, p. 74. See also Robert Taber, *War of the Flea: A Study of Guerrilla Warfare Theory and Practice* (St Albans, Herts: Paladin, 1970).
95. Actually McGuire cites Tauber as the author, which might give some indication as to how closely she attended to reading it.
96. A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster, 1609-1969* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 153.
97. *Ibid.*