

Why I resigned from the IPSC

by David Morrison

Since 2003, I have written extensively about political developments in Palestine and in the Middle East in general (see my website [\[1\]](#)). Because of this, in March 2008, I was invited by Marie Crawley, the then Chair of the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC), to be a Political Officer on the National Committee (NC) of the IPSC. My brief was to undertake a systematic campaign of lobbying the Government and opposition parties in the Oireachtas on behalf of the IPSC.

Attempting to change Irish policy towards Palestine/Israel must be a major aspect of the work of a Palestine solidarity organisation in Ireland. For example, one objective of the IPSC is to bring about the suspension of the Euro-Med agreement, which gives Israel privileged access to the EU market. The only way we in Ireland can help bring this about is by persuading the Irish Government (a) to support suspension and (b) to attempt to persuade the EU to do likewise. So, we have to try. That's why I think political lobbying with the objective of effecting change in Irish Government policy is essential – and why I was happy to help with the IPSC's campaign.

Inexplicably, the IPSC had never undertaken such a campaign in the past, even though as early as 2001, shortly after the IPSC's foundation, a Working Group was set up to develop strategies for political lobbying.

For eighteen months, along with Marie Crawley, Philip O'Connor and others, I attempted to establish the IPSC's credibility as a serious organisation that made a calm and rational case for Palestinians to politicians in the Oireachtas, a case specifically designed to appeal across the political spectrum. In my view, there is no a priori reason why politicians from all parties cannot be persuaded that Palestinians have suffered an historic wrong at the hands of Zionism in the 20th century, and continue to suffer today, and that steps must be taken to remedy that wrong.

The ultimate objective was to establish a reputation for the IPSC amongst politicians as a source of reliable information and cogent arguments on Palestine relevant to the issues of the day. To do that, one needs an organisation that, over a period of years, appears stable and takes a steady and coherent political line.

The campaign had a measure of success: representatives of all political parties in the Oireachtas were prepared to meet the IPSC, as was the Minister of Foreign Affairs. In addition, the IPSC was invited to make presentations to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs last February and then in June to the equivalent committee on European Affairs (see transcripts at [\[2\]](#) and [\[3\]](#)).

I compiled a variety of documents for the Campaign, including

(a) *The European Union's Blind Eye: How the EU ignores Israel's failure to fulfil its obligations under EU agreements* [\[4\]](#).

(b) *How Israel torpedoed its ceasefire with Hamas to produce a casus belli* [\[5\]](#), and

(c) *Questions on Palestine for European candidates* [\[6\]](#)

Broadly speaking, my colleagues and I found politicians in all parties, and the Government itself, to be sympathetic to the plight of Palestinians, unlike politicians in other EU states, many of whom are supporters of Israel. While we didn't think we had changed minds significantly, we believed that the groundwork had been laid for fruitful engagement by the IPSC with politicians across the political spectrum.

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That was the situation as of last June. I was hoping to continue this work for the IPSC over the next few years. However, developments within the IPSC since then (which I outline below) made me increasingly doubtful that the IPSC would continue to be an effective body for lobbying politicians on behalf of Palestinians.

These doubts increased exponentially with the publication of an article, entitled *IRISH PALESTINIAN GROUP SPLIT*, in the 14 August issue of the *Phoenix* magazine. This is reproduced in Appendix A below. It told a tale of faction fighting within the IPSC and of a "communist" takeover, which had led to the resignation of the chair, Marie Crawley, and of "the most prominent and articulate member of the IPSC, composer Raymond Deane" at odds with the "communist" leadership, who were, in his view, insufficiently "radical".

It is difficult to conceive of a portrayal of the IPSC that is more likely to destroy its credibility in the eyes of political parties in the Oireachtas and to render it useless as an instrument for lobbying these parties in the cause of Palestine.

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Shortly after the publication of the *Phoenix* article, a Facebook conversation from 3 August (see Appendix B) came into the public domain. This conversation, in which leading members of the IPSC took part, contained the substance of the "communist" takeover fantasy that ended up in *Phoenix*. In this conversation, Raymond Deane asserted that the IPSC had been infiltrated by "Trojans", whom he described in the following terms:

"The Trojans are the 3 ex-Maoists, Stalinists, or whatever, who have acquired powerful positions on the National Committee. ... One of them, now IPSC Secretary, is a former (?) devotee of the enlightened Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha (RIP). The other two are from the B&ICO Their aim, paradoxically, is to make the IPSC so 'mainstream', so well-loved by the Irish and Egyptian governments and the PA, that it will drown in its own useless respectability."

There you have Raymond Deane, a leading member, and former chair, of the IPSC, asserting that three NC members are "Trojans", that is, individuals who joined the IPSC under false pretences for the purpose of destroying it. Their objective, according to him, was to make it "mainstream", that is, to engage with mainstream politicians in the Oireachtas, who can conceivably make a difference for Palestinians.

Earlier, writing in the IPSC's Dublin Yahoo Groups forum on 8 August, Raymond Deane had made his opposition to lobbying mainstream politicians abundantly clear. There, he described the Irish government and the EU as "actual co-belligerents on the side of Israel" and said that lobbying politicians had damaged the IPSC, since it "consisted in

perpetual courting of the government, and avoidance of any form of activism that might have alienated us from the government". He offered no evidence to justify this.

As you can see from the transcript in Appendix B, Raymond Deane was reluctant to name the "Trojans". However, Freda Hughes, then IPSC vice-Chair, supported Deane's accusations of "communist" infiltration by naming me and Philip O'Connor as two of the "Trojans":

"David and Philip were both members of B&ICO and it is true that that organisation was once pro-Israeli among other things. The paper they both write for now, The Irish Political Review, appears to be a spin off from B&ICO (British and Irish Communist Organisation). Just the facts as I know them, no opinion, innuendo or sarcasm."

The tumult which this witch-hunting created on the NC led to seven members resigning in the following weeks. Five of these jointly signed a letter explaining the reasons for their resignation [7], which was circulated to the membership on 9 October. The NC's reply (10 October) to that letter states:

"It is a guiding principle of the IPSC that an individual's previous or current political affiliations are of no consequence, provided they agree to work within the IPSC's guiding principles and to support the people of Palestine." [8]

This "guiding principle" was clearly inoperative during the Facebook conversation. Had it been operative, one would have expected the vice-Chair to remonstrate with Raymond Deane for having abrogated the principle. Instead, she abrogated the principle herself. Nor did she deny that I was a "Trojan" that had rendered the IPSC "useless" by engaging in the political lobbying.

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The "information" on which the Phoenix article was based clearly came from sources within the IPSC and, in all probability, had been supplied with the objective of undermining the lobbying work of the IPSC, for which I was responsible. Certainly, that was a foreseeable consequence of the Phoenix article.

(It should be emphasised that neither Raymond Deane, nor any other IPSC member, took the many opportunities available to them to question the value of political lobbying at the AGM or in the NC, the policy-making fora of the IPSC.)

At this point, I was far from certain that the credibility of the IPSC could be rebuilt as an instrument for political lobbying. I was even less certain that its credibility could be maintained over the extended period necessary to have any hope of success. A wrecking ball had descended once in the shape of the Phoenix article. Since there were individuals within the IPSC, who were dogmatically opposed to political lobbying, and were unscrupulous about how they went about opposing it, wasn't it likely that another wrecking ball would descend at some time in the future?

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Unfortunately, the omens weren't good. In the previous few months, an alarming lack of solidarity had developed within the IPSC, a lack of solidarity which should have been checked by the NC, but wasn't. On the contrary, it was encouraged by NC members.

Two issues illustrate this point:-

(1) The formation of Irish Friends of Palestine Against Lisbon (IFPAL)

At the IPSC AGM last May, Raymond Deane proposed a motion that the IPSC take a public stand against the Lisbon Treaty. I opposed this motion on the grounds that doing so would inevitably make it more difficult for the IPSC to appeal to those people and politicians who take the opposite view – and there was no compensating advantage. The AGM rejected the motion.

However, Raymond Deane and other members of the IPSC NC refused to accept the AGM's decision that the Palestinian cause should not be identified with opposition to the Lisbon Treaty and formed Irish Friends of Palestine Against Lisbon (IFPAL). They did so without consulting the IPSC NC. Since individuals publicly identified with the IPSC had a leading role in IFPAL, it was naturally assumed – by *The Irish Times* and others – that the IFPAL and the IPSC were effectively the same organisation. And, as a result, the decision of the AGM was effectively subverted.

On IFPAL, the NC's reply of 10 October, states:

“With regard to Irish Friends of Palestine Against Lisbon (IFPAL), this group was an entirely separate organisation which was set up by a Limerick based IPSC member who is not on the NC.” [\[8\]](#)

That statement is highly misleading. It omits the significant fact that, when he was a member of the NC, Raymond Deane was a co-founder of IFPAL (with Seán Clinton, the person referred to above as “a Limerick based IPSC member who is not on the NC”). It says so on IFPAL's website here [\[9\]](#), where reference is made to “a letter signed by IFPAL founders Seán Clinton and Raymond Deane”. Also, he is referred to as an IFPAL spokesperson on 18 June [\[10\]](#), while he was still a member of the NC.

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(2) The contravention of established IPSC policy by NC members in public

Some IPSC policy positions are more important than others and therefore their contravention in public is more serious than others. I regard the IPSC's longstanding commitment not to take sides in Palestinian politics as extremely important, particularly at this time when, regrettably, the division between Fatah and Hamas is so deeply entrenched.

Attacking one side or another invites people to conclude that the problem in Palestine is that the Palestinians can't agree with one another and takes the focus away from Israel's responsibility for the problem.

More important, the logical outcome of taking sides is that the divisions in Palestinian politics will be replicated in the solidarity movement in Ireland, that we end up with a Fatah-supporting IPSC and a Hamas-supporting IPSC, and perhaps a few more. That would be a disaster which would make the Palestinian solidarity campaign in Ireland a laughing stock and the task of winning support for the Palestinian cause impossible.

For these reasons, I thought that it was absolutely essential that the IPSC stick firmly to the principle of not taking sides in Palestinian politics.

Unfortunately, that policy position was publicly contravened by Raymond Deane in a letter to the Israeli embassy, which he published on *Indymedia* on 1 July [11]. There, he described the Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority (PA) as a “Quisling or Vichy regime”. In other words, in a letter to Israel, he described a Palestinian entity as akin to Nazi collaborators. It is difficult to imagine a more deeply insulting remark or a less appropriate letter in which to apply the term to a Palestinian entity.

Understandably, his remark provoked a letter of protest to the IPSC from the General Delegation of Palestine in Ireland and a threat to break off relations with the IPSC. As a result, at its 11 July meeting, the NC felt obliged to write a letter of apology to the Delegation and to reassure the Delegation that it remained IPSC policy not to take sides in internal Palestinian politics.

At this meeting, the NC also established a rule that NC members should not contravene established IPSC policy positions in public. The text of the rule was as follows:

“Members of the IPSC National Committee when issuing public statements in writing, in the print media or online and/or speaking in a public forum should not contravene IPSC policy positions.”

Elaine Murtagh, the acting Chair at the time, defended this rule in an e-mail to NC members on 13 July in the following terms:

“Members develop policy and it follows that NC members have a responsibility to respect and follow that policy. IPSC members expended time and energy in drafting and debating motions for the AGM. This process would be totally undermined if NC members issue public statements which disregard those democratic decisions. ... This policy is simply a way of ensuring that NC members act in accordance with the responsibility of their elected positions.”

I thought the rule was reasonable. Conceivably, its application would have occasionally restricted NC members from expressing their own opinion, but that was a small price to pay for a more coherent, and therefore more effective, IPSC.

(Prior to becoming an IPSC Political Officer, my writing on Palestine [12] included criticism of Fatah. I was conscious that such criticism after I became IPSC Political Officer, might be interpreted as criticism by the IPSC, contrary to the established principle that IPSC doesn't take sides in internal Palestinian politics. So I stopped making criticisms of Fatah in my writing.)

Because of the introduction of this rule, the next day Raymond Deane resigned from the NC, and briefly from IPSC itself, because of the suppression of his “personal freedom of speech”, to quote from his resignation e-mail. In it, he also made it clear that he had no intention of refraining from contravening established IPSC policy positions in public.

However, there was opposition, particularly in Dublin Branch, to the rule, which was said to constitute suppression of NC members' “freedom of speech”. Prompted by a motion from Dublin Branch, the NC overturned the rule on 15 August and passed a resolution that licenced NC members, and by extension all IPSC members, to contravene established IPSC policy positions in public, as and when they like, as long as they said they were speaking in a personal capacity.

On the passing of this resolution, the NC's reply on 10 October states:

"This resolution was passed due to [the] fact that there are a number of academics and writers on the NC who professionally write about Palestinian issues and who would not be able to continue to do so without this resolution, and to ensure other such academics and writers were not prevented from joining the NC in the future."

That is simply untrue: the resolution was passed on the back of an outcry that the rule established a month earlier suppressed NC members' "freedom of speech".

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In my view, the principle that NC members should not contravene established policy positions was not just a matter of implementing policy as determined by members. It was also essential in order to maintain an effective organisation for political lobbying. An organisation will not be taken seriously if leading members speak with contradictory voices. And it matters little if they qualify their statements by saying that they are speaking in a personal capacity. An organisation that speaks with contradictory voices soon comes to be regarded as incoherent and not worth talking to.

In the name of "freedom of speech" for NC members, the NC's action on 15 August allowing NC members to express any views they wished in public encouraged incoherence in the IPSC, the exact opposite of what is required for an effective lobbying organisation. This attitude left me with little hope that the NC would take action in the aftermath of the Phoenix article, and the Facebook conversation that gave rise to it, to re-establish a unity of purpose in the IPSC.

At that point, I wrote a document [\[13\]](#) summarising what I saw as an endemic lack of solidarity within the IPSC, which manifested itself in the various ways I have mentioned above and needed to be addressed.

If, in response, the NC had made it clear that it disagreed fundamentally with Raymond Deane's characterisation of me and two other NC members as "Trojans"; if it had made it clear that, unlike him, it fully supported political lobbying and wholeheartedly approved of what had been achieved so far; if it had dissociated itself from his view that so far political lobbying had "consisted in perpetual courting of the government, and avoidance of any form of activism that might have alienated us from the government", I would have been prepared to attempt to rebuild the IPSC's credibility in the aftermath of the publication of the Phoenix article.

But the NC did none of these things. As a result, I came reluctantly to the conclusion that it would be impossible to re-establish and maintain the credibility of the IPSC as an effective political lobbying organisation for Palestine. That is why I resigned from the IPSC.

David Morrison
17 October 2009

References

[\[1\] www.david-morrison.org.uk](http://www.david-morrison.org.uk)

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- [11] www.indymedia.ie/article/92971
- [12] www.david-morrison.org.uk/palestine/index.html
- [13] www.david-morrison.org.uk/ipsc/problems-20090918.pdf

Appendix A Phoenix article (14 August)

IRISH PALESTINIAN GROUP SPLIT

THE most prominent and articulate member of the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC), composer Raymond Deane, has resigned from the group's national committee and the mother of an internal Intifada is now likely at an extraordinary general meeting in the Autumn.

The battle lines are between a group of hard line, old fashioned Stalinists and/or Maoists that has come to dominate the the IPSC leadership and others like Deane who belong to no political group. The Stalinists, whose political origins are in the British and Irish Communist Organisation — they were the intellectual shock troops of the pro-Unionist, Two Nations theory in Ireland — upbraided Deane for some of his recent writings. Deane had criticised the Fatah dominated Palestinian Authority, accusing it of collaborating with the Israelis, a radical but not uncommon view amongst Palestinians and their supporters.

Deane agreed to a demand from the comrades that a letter be sent to the Fatah delegate in Dublin explaining that his statement was a personal one but was then faced with a surprise motion demanding that NC members desist from any public comment even in their personal capacity that might conflict with the IPSC line. Deane then resigned from the NC, although not from IPSC membership, in exasperation.

The irony of the political split is that it is the doctrinaire Stalinists who want to maintain a group that brooks no criticism of the Palestinian Authority. This is, in turn, because it wishes to enjoy cordial relations with Fianna Fáil Arabists and even government members who insist on relating to the Palestinian authority and not the elected government in Gaza which is led by Hamas. Deane's supporters do not want to confine themselves to this political strait jacket, even if it does curry favour with the government.

The IPSC chairperson, Marie Crawley, has also resigned her position but her reasons appear to be more related to disillusionment with the constant faction fighting on the NC.



Appendix B Facebook conversation (3 August)

Raymond Deane:

The IPSC is not the only solidarity campaign experiencing "Trojans": Tony Greenstein's Blog: Palestine Solidarity Campaign Belongs to its Members Source: azvsas.blogspot.com: Dear Friend, At the last AGM of Palestine Solidarity Campaign in January 2009, it became apparent that PSC has effectively been subject to a 'take-over...' by a tiny political group Socialist Action and its supporters. ...Read More August 3 at 2:27pm · Comment · Like / Unlike · View Feedback (25) Hide Feedback (25) · Share Partridge Over Ireland and 2 others like this.

Redjade In Hungary:

please Raymond, do tell more :-) August 3 at 3:34pm

Rónan Nolan

Who are the trojans ? Evidence is better than innuendo. August 3 at 3:52pm · Delete

Cogsy M-L

Have you been living under a rock for the past year? Or are you one of the "useful idiots"? August 3 at 3:56pm

John Humphreys:

Very interesting article Raymo, its worryingly similar to our experiences here except on a much larger scale. Thanks for the heads up. August 3 at 4:28pm

Cogsy M-L:

I think there's a political explanation for the schism in solidarity campaigns. Tony pointed to it in his open letter, and its the demoralising effect the PA's capitulation has had on the international solidarity movement. The leaderships of the IPSC and PSC are on the retreat, taking their cue from the PA. Imitating the PA, the leaderships of these groups are clamping down on criticism and debate. Bad organisational practices flow from bad politics. August 3 at 5:12pm

Raymond Deane:

Part of the problem is the definition of criticism of the PA as "interference in internal Palestinian politics", as if criticism (to put it mildly) of the Contras had been interference in "internal Nicaraguan politics". Now that the PA is fully a pawn of the US, EU and Israel - the worst enemies of the Palestinian people - collaboration with the PA, on the grounds that "they're the people the Irish government negotiates with", is itself a form of "interference in internal Palestinian politics". August 3 at 5:26pm

Rónan Nolan:

You haven't answered my question. I asked a specific question, I wasn't looking for external commentary, innuendo or sarcasm. I'll ask it again. Who are the 'trojans' in the IPSC that you're concerned about ? And what is your evidence ? August 3 at 5:58pm · Delete

Raymond Deane:

The Trojans are the 3 ex-Maoists, Stalinists, or whatever, who have acquired powerful positions on the NC. This is no secret (except, apparently, to you, Ronan), so there is no innuendo. One of them, now IPSC Secretary, is a former (?) devotee of the enlightened Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha (RIP). The other two are from the B&ICO (... Read More in a number of its most recent avatars), an organisation that since its foundation has specialised in "entryism", and that at one point was fiercely pro-Israel. Its current position is pro-Palestinian, but tomorrow is another day. Their aim, paradoxically, is to make the IPSC so "mainstream", so well-loved by the Irish and Egyptian governments and the PA, that it will drown in its own useless respectability. August 3 at 6:46pm

Anne Key:

Worrying. Let's hope UK PSC doesn't go the same way... August 3 at 6:56pm

Rónan Nolan:

I don't know what you're basing your information on, and from your unwillingness to go public and call a spade a spade (or more correctly name a spade - I can only identify the national secretary), and back it up, your argument is still your opinion rather than hard fact. You're not convincing me by repeating the same line over and over with more volume. August 3 at 11:15pm · Delete

Freda Mullin Hughes:

David and Philip were both members of B&ICO and it is true that that organisation was once pro-Israeli among other things. The paper they both write for now, The Irish Political Review, appears to be a spin off from B&ICO (British and Irish Communist Organisation). Just the facts as I know them, no opinion, innuendo or sarcasm. August 3 at 11:38pm

Raymond Deane:

The increase in volume is from you, Ronan. Clearly you don't pay a lot of attention to the Yahoo mailing lists, where these issues have already been bandied about. Freda has named these people, you can find their links to the BICO cited on the internet, and the nature of their contribution to the IPSC has already been quite manifest. August 3 at 11:42pm

Raymond Deane:

B&ICO has dissolved into a number of "publishing companies", "historical societies" and "reviews", thus dissimulating its identity - but it remains the B&ICO, so Freda's past tense isn't appropriate. August 3 at 11:47pm