

THE SUNDAY TIMES



The wild life of Carrie Fisher

Magazine
by the flatmate who saw it all



News, Page 5
Channel hoppers

MEP helped the Russians contact Omagh bomber

Clare Daly passed details of Liam Campbell to known spy

John Mooney

Clare Daly, the independent Dublin MEP, gave a Russian spy contact details for a paramilitary held liable for the Omagh bombing and facing extradition on terrorism charges. The Sunday Times can reveal.

Daly facilitated communication between Liam Campbell and Algirdas Paleckis, a Russian agent who was prosecuted by the Lithuanian security services for passing information to the Kremlin.

An investigation by The Sunday Times and the Dossier Centre, an investigative project which has been tracking the Paleckis case for several years, has confirmed Daly provided the spy with an email address on which Campbell could be reached in November 2021 after the agent suggested he was open to helping the republican dissident.

Paleckis later corresponded directly with Campbell, offering to put him in touch with friends who could help, should he be imprisoned. Paleckis was at the time under house arrest pending an appeal, while Campbell was fighting extradition to Lithuania, where he was wanted on terrorism charges that were ultimately dropped.

The communications took place when Russia's intelligence services were trying to forge links to republican paramilitary organisations as part of wider efforts to destabilise the European Union.

Daly refused to comment when approached in Dublin city last

FROM ATROCITY TO SPY GAMES

FULL STORY, PAGE 6

week, having failed to respond to emails, texts and calls for months. When approached, she declined to accept a letter setting out questions and repeatedly refused to answer queries put directly to her.

Today's disclosure is likely to put Daly under intense pressure to explain her involvement in facilitating contacts between a mass killer and a Russian agent convicted for espionage. Polls suggest the MEP for Dublin will struggle to retain her seat at the European parliament, despite her toning down her position on Russia and Iran and being more vocal in condemning Israel's war on Gaza.

Kevin Skelton, whose wife, Philomena, was killed in the bombing, described the MEP's involvement with Campbell as an "insult" to the memories of those who died at Omagh, an atrocity aimed at collapsing the peace process.

"Liam Campbell was held responsible for the murder of 29 people and unborn babies. Clare Daly needs to stand up and explain her position, but let's face it, she's answerable to no one," Skelton said. "I cannot believe any politician would facilitate communications between Liam Campbell and

a Russian spy given what Moscow is up to these days."

Victor Barker, who lost his 12-year old son, James, in Omagh, said he could only describe Daly's involvement with Campbell and a Russian agent as "unbelievable".

The Sunday Times has previously revealed Daly's role in the campaign to free Paleckis, who gave Moscow information on Lithuanian officers and judges linked to the January 13 case, when Russian officials were tried for involvement in a Soviet military crackdown in Vilnius, Lithuania's capital, in January 1991.

Daly, her political ally Mick Wallace and Tatjana Zdanoka, a Latvian MEP accused of collaborating with Russia, all helped to highlight the Paleckis case between 2021 and 2022 by organising protests, social media campaigns and issuing public statements.

Daly told the European parliament that Paleckis was prosecuted without a "shred of evidence" in a speech later posted on her official social media channels. She and Wallace travelled twice to Lithuania with Zdanoka, who is alleged to have worked with Russia's FSB since 2005, which she denies.

Until now, Daly's involvement in helping Campbell was not publicly known but the MEP has previously campaigned for dissident republicans who she claimed were victims of injustice. She once offered to stand bail for a dissident accused of plotting a bombing during a visit to Ireland by Prince Charles.

BLUE DAY IN LONDON

HARRY MURPHY/SPORTSILE



Leinster coach Leo Cullen consoles centre Ciarán Frawley while scrum-half Luke McGrath, right, shows his dismay after the province lost to French opposition for the third year in a row in the Champions Cup final, falling 31-22 to Toulouse in London after extra time. Match report, Sport; We go again, page 3

Martin: We do not want to cut ties with Israel

Claire Scott and Hugh O'Connell

Micheál Martin, the tanaiste, has said he has "no issue" with Dana Erlich, the Israeli ambassador, returning to her role in Ireland.

Erlich was summoned back to Jerusalem last week for discussions on how to respond to Ireland's decision to recognise the state of Palestine. In retaliation, Israel summoned the Irish ambassador, Sonya McGuinness, to show her videos of hostages held by Hamas as part of a diplomatic reprimand.

Canvassing in Wexford yesterday, Martin said that the government was "not going to be sucked into any sort of escalation of this", adding: "We do not want to sever in any shape or form diplomatic relations with Israel."

Martin said he had "no issue" with Erlich returning to Dublin as ambassador, noting diplomatic ties had not been cut with Russia or Iran.

Separately, the Fianna Fail leader criticised Twitter/X after it refused to remove a post by the US-based organisation Stop Anti-Semitism, which included a picture of Martin with his family and made false claims about his daughter. The social media company said the post did not violate its rules. The tanaiste called it "completely unacceptable", and said: "It is time legislators tackle these issues."

The office of Simon Harris, the taoiseach, also contacted X about a similar post made about his daughter. A government source said they had received no response from X.

Ireland's long road to recognising Palestine, page 10



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From atrocity in Omagh to a tangle with a Russian spy

Real IRA man Liam Campbell had dealings with a Lithuanian controlled by the Kremlin. Now questions are being asked over the part played by Dublin MEP Clare Daly, writes *John Mooney*

When a 135kg car bomb exploded on Market Street in Omagh town, Co Tyrone, killing 29 people and unborn twin girls on a Saturday afternoon in August 1998, Liam Campbell instantly became an enemy of the state.

The republican dissident had overseen the making of the bomb in a yard in Co Monaghan but also helped to issue warnings that wrongly suggested the device was near the town's courthouse.

"Martha Pope. Fifteen Minutes. Bomb. Omagh Town," said Campbell, who spoke in his distinctive northern country accent as he made the last call from a coin-operated phone box in Newtownhamilton, Co Armagh.

Campbell's warnings about the bomb were deliberately vague to ensure that the police would not find the vehicle. Tragically this caused the emergency services to shepherd shoppers in the busy market town towards the device, which exploded at 3.10pm, wiping out all life nearby.

When the emergency services arrived at the site of the blast ten minutes later, arms, legs, hands and torsos were strewn everywhere. Those standing closest to the explosion had been hit with glass, rocks and metal shards, which punctured their bodies, inflicting multiple fatal injuries on some of them.

Now, 26 years on from that horror, the

“Russia will do all it can to weaken the West, funding far-right and left groups

terrorist is part of today's front-page revelation in The Sunday Times that Clare Daly, the independent MEP for Dublin, facilitated communication between him and Algirdas Paleckis, a Lithuanian who was a Russian spy. Paleckis later corresponded directly with the Real IRA man in one small part of Russia's efforts to destabilise the EU.

Daly is likely to be under intense pressure to explain her involvement.

Back to Omagh in 1998. The bomb killed people of all ages and beliefs, including Catholics, Protestants and non-believers. Three generations of one family died as they stood outside SD Kells, a local shop. Avril Monaghan was pregnant with unborn twin girls when she and her 18-month-old daughter, Maura, were killed alongside Mary Grimes, Avril's mother-in-law.

Some 259 people were injured. Many carry the scars to this day.

"Despite what people say, Omagh didn't really stop violent republicanism," said Stanley McComb, whose wife Ann was killed.

"The dissidents are still trying to kill people. I'm still fighting to this day for justice because no one was convicted," McComb added, still angry and upset that no one was jailed for the atrocity.

The Real IRA is a republican faction that emerged from the ranks of the Provisionals in 1997 when the latter abandoned its terrorist campaign. Campbell became the new group's director of operations, promising to detonate a bomb every week. As a consequence, he became a priority target for the security services. He was twice convicted of IRA membership.

At his first trial, he claimed to be a struggling farmer from Co Louth and he went so far as to denounce republican murderousness. "I don't agree with violence," he told the Special Criminal Court in Dublin. The court rejected his evidence in its entirety.

He was implicated in the Omagh massacre along with three other dissidents

through analysis of the mobile phones used by the bombers and information provided by informers. Campbell is often described by gardai as a committed IRA volunteer. When Real IRA leaders gathered to organise a ceasefire after Omagh, he suggested another attack to divert police resources. He also helped the organisation to plan more attacks, including the infamous rocket assault on MI6 headquarters in London.

"Liam is a warlord. He knows nothing else but bombings and murder," one associate said. Campbell was also heavily involved in crime and smuggling. The Criminal Assets Bureau once registered a judgment against him for €820,000.

When the gardai and the Police Service of Northern Ireland failed to prosecute him over Omagh, the relatives of those who died began a legal action against him and three other suspects, Seamus Daly, Michael McKeivitt and Colm Murphy.

The families were awarded £1.6 million

damages against the four in a landmark action in 2009. The Belfast High Court found there was "cogent" evidence that Campbell was on the Real IRA army council at the time of the bombing and that he made the botched warning calls. Ten years later, in 2019, he was judged to be bankrupt when he failed to pay his share of the damages.

In the midst of the Omagh civil action, Lithuania sought his arrest on charges of plotting to acquire weapons and explosives for the Real IRA.

Daly will not say how, why or when she became involved with Campbell's efforts to fight extradition on these charges. She monitored the treatment of Campbell's younger brother Michael, who was jailed for 12 years for the same plot but was freed on appeal in 2013 and returned to Ireland.

Lithuania's highest court has now overruled the appeal court and said he can be retried. Daly had once travelled to Vilnius to view the conditions where he was held.

Liam Campbell was fighting extradition to Vilnius on the same charges in 2021 when Daly facilitated communications between him and Paleckis, a Lithuanian who was caught spying for Russia and was facing jail. Paleckis had been convicted of espionage but placed under house arrest pending an appeal, which allowed Lithuanian intelligence to monitor him.

Daly and her fellow MEP Mick Wallace had previously held court with dissidents accused of serious crimes. For example, she lent her name to the campaign to free Brendan McConville and John Paul Wootton, two men convicted for the murder of Stephen Carroll, a PSNI officer who was shot dead in Craigavon in 2009.

"I am glad to lend my support to the campaign and certainly to do what I can to secure justice for the Craigavon Two," she said.

In 2016, she and Wallace offered to stand bail for Donal O Coisdealbha, a third-level graduate who plotted to set off a bomb when Prince Charles, then heir to the throne, visited Mullaghmore, Co Sligo, where his great-uncle Earl Mountbatten was killed by an IRA bomb in 1979. Daly and Wallace were both present in court when gardai opposed bail being granted to O Coisdealbha on the grounds they had recordings that indicated he was an expert bombmaker.

Daly and Wallace supported him regardless. Daly later insisted that her support was purely on human rights grounds as O Coisdealbha had been held in custody for too long without a trial. Daly also hosted a group of republican former prisoners at an event in the European parliament in April, insisting it was non-political, but her support for one of the Omagh bombers and Russia has shocked victims' relatives.

"Liam Campbell is hated by the decent people of this country. And Putin's Russia is hated by most of the rest of them. I can't understand how any politician could get involved with them. My goodness, I'm just lost for words," said McComb yesterday, who like the other relatives is preparing to participate in a public inquiry into the atrocity.

Daly's interest in the Paleckis case forms part of a much wider set of political activities that have resulted in her being accused of promoting the agenda of authoritarian regimes such as Russia, China and Iran, however. These have brought her into direct contact with people accused of working for the Kremlin and its intelligence services.

Daly and Wallace appear to have become involved in the campaign to defend Paleckis while campaigning with Tatjana Zdanoka, a Latvian European parliamentary colleague who stands accused of collaborating with the FSB, the successor agency to the Soviet-era KGB.

There is no suggestion that Daly or

Clare Daly declined to answer questions from Sunday Times reporter John Mooney

“They're still trying to kill people. I've been fighting to this day for justice

Wreckage is strewn across Market Street, Omagh. Bombmaker Liam Campbell, below right, had deliberately given the 999 operator the wrong directions. A Lithuanian journalist and politician, Algirdas Paleckis, below left, was put in touch with Campbell by Clare Daly



Wallace knew of Zdanoka's alleged role as a spy, something she denies, but they did take part in a webinar set up by her to highlight the Paleckis case in late 2021, around the time she helped put him in touch with Campbell. In a recording of the event, Daly described the spy's conviction as a "tragedy", likening it to internment but offering no evidence to support her claims.

In this case Daly's public statements mirror those prepared by Paleckis, who provided her with briefing documents on points she should raise when speaking publicly. At one stage, he suggested she point out what he described as an absence of evidence produced in open court to prove that he passed information to Russian spy agencies. Paleckis believed he should be portrayed instead as a journalist and politician who was targeted because he was a critic of the Lithuanian government.

Daly has insisted Paleckis was the victim of a conspiracy and his trial was an example of how espionage laws are misused to stifle dissent.

When questioned about her relationship with Zdanoka, she said: "We broke up years ago - she never did the washing up."

Russian agents such as Paleckis, whose family were part of elite Soviet society, have always sought out foreign politicians willing to listen to their arguments.

"They try to get them to create the impression there are forces out there who support the Russian view of the world," said Neil Robinson, an expert on Russia at the University of Limerick.

"It's a tried and tested technique that's been used by Russia's security services for a very long time. They find people who are willing to cite their cases to a wider audience, usually targeting people who are considered to be independent thinkers in prominent positions," he said.

Paleckis's interest in Campbell is easier to explain. "Paleckis would not have been interested in Campbell per se but would have been interested in creating pathways to people like him further down the line," Robinson added.

Since their election to the European parliament, Daly and Wallace have been criticised for promoting Russian propaganda. Ukraine's Centre for Countering Disinformation placed her on a list of public figures who "promote narratives consonant with Russian propaganda".

The list includes people who share what Ukraine considers to be disinformation like the Ukrainian government is dominated by fascists.

As a consequence, both regularly feature on pro-Kremlin broadcasts where they are portrayed as respected political figures in Brussels, although they have been penalised for undermining its work to promote democracy by travelling to Venezuela and Ecuador as unofficial election observers.

Both were banned from taking part in official parliament election missions at one stage, and were warned that further breaches could lead to exclusion until the end of their terms in June 2024.

Their record on opposing sanctions and motions against Russia speaks for itself. Daly has voted against resolutions calling for the establishment of a special international tribunal to prosecute Russia's leadership for the crime of aggression against Ukraine.

In a speech to the parliament, Daly once asked why MEPs were so worked up about the arrest of Alexei Navalny, the Russian opposition figure who was found dead in an Arctic prison. She described Navalny as a "vicious anti-immigrant racist" in a speech that was covered by Russian state media.

The discovery that Campbell engaged with a Russian intelligence agent presents challenges for both the Irish and British security services, as the Kremlin has been trying to engage with violent dissidents since 2020 as part of efforts to undermine Europe.

There is also a long, murky and ugly history of hostile foreign powers supporting Irish terrorism against the British government, dating from at least the Second World War.

"The Russian government will do anything and everything it can to undermine its western adversaries - from funding far-right and far-left political groups, to supporting paramilitary activities in Europe," said Calder Walton, director of research at the Belfer Centre intelligence project at Harvard University.

"Britain's support for Ukraine makes it a prime target for such Russian activities which the Kremlin terms 'active measures'.

"Russia uses both witting recruits and unwitting useful idiots, to use the KGB's old term."

Walton, author of the book *Spies: The Epic Intelligence War Between East and West*, added: "The danger to western national security with the latter group is that, by definition, they do not know they are being used."

"They will also be discarded once the Russian government has got what it wants from them."

