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Where are we  
on this?  
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# THE SUNDAY TIMES

1 Pennington Street, London E1 9XW Telephone: 01-782 5000 Telex: 262139

The Right Hon Margaret Thatcher  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1

17th October

Dear Prime Minister

You may recall I wrote to you some time ago regarding a number of libel actions being brought by Thomas 'Slab' Murphy against myself, my publishers and The Sunday Times. At the time, I mentioned that Murphy is a well known IRA supporter, organiser and fund-raiser who runs terrorists in South Armagh and has been responsible for the deaths of over 100 members of the security forces.

After investigation, it proved impossible to provide anybody who could testify against Murphy in court. Recently my publishers paid him and his brother Patrick £120,000 in settlement of a single libel action.

Shortly after the settlement, Murphy is believed to have organised the killings of two senior RUC officers who had just returned north after a visit to Dundalk in the Republic.

A number of other libel actions by the Murphys are now pending in Dublin against The Sunday Times. I am advised that the newspaper will be forced to settle the case and the sums of between £300,000 and £500,000 will be paid to the Murphys. It is likely that further writs will then be issued.

I also understand that Patrick Ryan will shortly be issuing writs for libel in Dublin against a number of British newspapers. The lawyer acting for him in these cases is the same one who defended me against the Murphys so he is completely familiar with the weakness of the defendants' case.

The advice which I have received is that all the newspapers will be forced to settle in the Ryan case as well. Estimates of the damages he will receive are difficult to make but he is likely to end up with at least one million pounds.

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The sums themselves matter little to the newspapers concerned, who are all insured. But, every pound paid goes to finance terrorism and will result in more lives being lost in Northern Ireland and Europe.

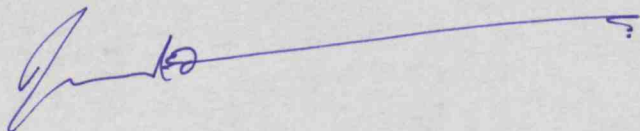
It seems more likely that unless something is done, the biggest single source of income to the IRA in the financial year 1989/90 will be libel actions against the British media who have published accurate accounts about the activities of terrorists.

It is ironic that in the same year the government have introduced legislation to prevent the IRA using the media for propaganda, the terrorists have learned how to silence the press using the libel laws. Such is the climate among newspaper lawyers that it is now very difficult to write anything about the IRA.

I am aware that this issue has been looked at before and the answer has been that it is too difficult to take any measures to stop the IRA gaining finances and propaganda benefits in this way. I cannot believe that this is so. The problems are difficult to address, but if there was sufficient political will then I believe creative minds could come up with a solution.

So much has been achieved to combat terrorism in the past few years, particularly to restrict the flow of money to the IRA. The existing libel laws are one of the last major loopholes which the terrorists are exploiting to great effect. I hope that here, too, you will be able to find a way forward.

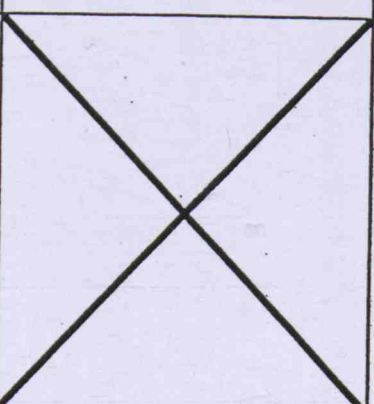
Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Adams', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

James Adams  
Defence Correspondent

Ireland Pt 27  
internal situation

# A The National Archives

DEPARTMENT/SERIES <p style="text-align: center;">..... <i>PREM 19</i> .....</p> PIECE/ITEM ..... <i>3408</i> ..... (one piece/item number)	Date and sign
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