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Translation

ON A MEETING WITH G. HEALY

On April 28, I received the following letter on a "Workers Press" letterhead:

Dear Comrade Frank,

I will be in Paris on Wednesday 6th May and would very much like to see you for an informal talk over matters of mutual interest. Would this be possible?

Yours fraternally,

G. Healy.

I quickly called E. and L. for their opinions on the one hand, and Peterson on the other, and I replied as follows:

Comrade G. Healy,

I have received your letter of April 27. I would very much appreciate to know beforehand what are these matters of mutual interest which are mentioned in your letter. In any case, I am ready to meet you next week. You can ring me up....

Communist greetings,

P. Frank

On May 5, I received the following reply:

Dear Comrade Frank,

Thank you for your letter of April 29. The discussion would be an informal one ranging mainly over general issues concerning the present political situation in Western Europe.

I shall telephone...

Fraternally,

G. Healy.

I then met G.H. on May 6. The talk lasted about two hours. It was always quite formal. Here is a summary of the gist of the points that were discussed.

G.H. began with a rather long presentation on the new situation in Europe, the new problems, the possibilities for the Trotskyist movement in relation to the old workers leaderships. He said that he was following our discussions, our recent documents on entryism, Algeria, etc. The youth joining our movements posed problems of assimilation, etc. All this to conclude finally by saying that the situation was no longer the same as in 1963--he alluded to the reunification to which he had refused to associate himself--that it was necessary to examine this new situation in another way, that he thought that joint discussion, perhaps a conference, would be useful. This was rather vague, he presented things moreover as not being worked out, but still as not being a move on his own initiative. In other words, he came to see me in agreement with his comrades (that is with the French, too).

I likewise began by stating generalities about the situation, the progress made by the movement, our responsibilities in following up, etc. Then I touched on the question of the joint discussion which he had suggested. We are now conducting, I told him, discussions in the form of polemics in our publications, each doing whatever he estimated to suit him best. If he proposed organized discussions, it would be necessary to know what the object of such discussions would be, no one wanting to discuss for the sake of discussing. It would also have to be seen under what conditions it could be held. I then asked him what he had in mind. He really beat around the bush, not wanting to state anything too clearly. In the course of the discussion, he mentioned the difficulty faced by the youth on finding two Trotskyist organizations. I told him then that in France we even have three. I utilized the opening to mention our discussions with L.O. to see if a unification is possible. Could our discussions have such an objective? He remained vague, declaring that very big differences separated us, etc., but the situation being new, nothing could be excluded. I attempted to see how he would react on the question of again discussing the past, he did not seem to want to do this, declaring only that if his proposals on a discussion had been accepted in 1963, we would not be where we are now.

Then we came to concrete possibilities on joint discussions. He still confined himself to generalities on

the demands of the objective situation. I thought that it would be useful to let him know a certain number of things, while saying them in a way not to wound him. I said that the bad relations between us were also an element in the objective situation, that it seemed to me difficult to have serious discussions on an international scale when publicly, the polemics were unbridled, when a leader of the International was branded as an agent of a bourgeois government, when one talked not of differences or of errors but of betrayals. How could one envisage joint discussions when, in every country, the leaders do not talk with each other and when no joint action is possible, including questions as elementary as the struggle against the repression?

I deliberately dwelt a number of times on these points, adding that there could be a danger of wanting to rush things, that a change in climate was necessary, if only for the education of the youth.

He told me that he agreed that it would take time. On the repression, he saw the interest of the question and would talk about it with Lambert. On the Bolivian business, he tried to brush aside the question, saying that they had never written that. I told him that neither of us were grammarians: that if they had proofs, that they should submit them to a commission, if not they should retract what they had said. He was embarrassed, but promised nothing.

I asked him what he envisaged by way of following up this talk, outside of the report each of us would make. He told me that they were going to have an international meeting at the end of June where the question of relations with us would be discussed. He asked if I didn't think it would be useful meanwhile if we were to meet again. I proposed that these meetings should not be limited to the two of us, and he agreed.

In relation to this, he asked me if, in my opinion, objections would not be raised by the Americans. I told him that I did not think so, the question of relations with him and those with him being a political question that the comrades would handle in a political way, not by refusing exchanges of views.

In conclusion, he is to get in touch with me again for the purpose of holding another meeting.

After this, I asked him for his opinion on the situation in England. He boasted a lot about his organization.

He believes that he is able to knock out the British CP (he told me in passing that our comrades are not sufficiently vigorous with regard to the CP--I will discuss this with them). But, in addition, he is ready to undertake fraction work in the LP. He talked about entryism as a normal thing in certain cases. If what he said on work in the unions and the LP seemed to me rather correct, the policy he proposes to follow there appeared to me to be opportunist. He aims at the working class in bulk and does not seem to understand the significance of the vanguard youth. He talked of them as "cowboys," not wishing so far as he was concerned to engage with them in conflicts with the police. He said that his daily is doing well and that they are going to expand it in the coming summer.

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What was my impression of this talk?

I do not at all exclude an attempt at a maneuver, of banking, at least in England, on his material means. Nor did I see any change in political orientation. For example, he rehashed his old spite over the VSC. All this was there. Nevertheless I do not believe it can be doubted that they are under the pressure of the current situation, the pressure of the youth they have recruited, the consciousness of present possibilities (certainly it is something they have discussed among themselves for some time, because he told me he had wanted to see me for several months). And in my opinion this is pressing them toward beginning a turn. They are doing this with many contradictions, resulting from a past for which they have not made and are not ready to make any self-criticism even to themselves.

Thus I think that for our part we ought to take up the question as if they were beginning a turn, without however forgetting that it could also have another aim. In other words, we should not brush aside the problem but deal with it, without any undue haste. All of us are aware of the consequences such a turn could have if it would end up in a positive conclusion. We should not hide from ourselves that the difficulties are very great, that there is no solution in sight in the immediate future, that it is necessary to test things out very cautiously. However, it must not be forgotten either that the situation is working to a large measure toward the regroupment of the Trotskyists in the International and on the basis of its program.

Pierre Frank

May 6, 1970