

Dear Jim,

You don't date your letters! I got your last on February 26, and must make time to sit down to it.

Many thanks, first, for Rayner Lysaght's piece. I had the pleasure of meeting him in Dublin in 1981 and, more recently, in London, and am sure that, if we were not separated by so many miles of sea and land we could have done some useful work together. When I have read it, I will let you know whether there is anything I can add.

I take the liberty of beginning with a little homily, if you will forgive me. As you say, the point of our work is to help, if we can, to solve today's problems, however absorbing history may be in itself. I believe that there are certain rules (which the academic historians do not always observe!) but which we have to do our best to keep, before we start pontificating about what we think happened. (Moreover, I believe that these rules, about how research should be carried on, are a conquest of the bourgeois revolution, of the struggle for democracy and for victory over the theologians, the fruits of which we have still to defend and extend.)

Before we start publishing, let us be sure that we have surveyed the existing work in the field and know what our predecessors have done. Let us ensure that we are not just defending our prejudices, and ensuring that "the right guys" win, and make clear the hypothesis that we are testing. Let us read the documents of the people we disagree with more carefully than those of "our side". Let us tell the reader, honestly, what our own standpoint is. Let us not quote what individuals may have said in support of our opinions, without telling the reader what reliance we think can be placed on the individuals, who they are at what their words are worth as evidence. Let us consult people we know will disagree with our point of view as well as those we hope may reinforce it.

It is never easy, in this work, to locate our studies in their international setting, that of the struggle of the working class to construct the world leadership party which it needs if its efforts in the class struggle are to bear fruit in their logical outcome, the fundamental change of society. We are not "national Trotskyists" in history any more than in politics.

On the above grounds I am not madly enthusiastic about the Bornstein-Richardson books, despite the immense industry of their authors and Richardson's gifts. I don't think the books succeed in explaining what our problems really were and what we could have done better. Consequently, I think they will feed pessimism and a tendency to observe and comment on the class struggle from outside.

I am not likely to be publishing anything. No doubt TCD can get my thesis: "Trotskyism in Britain (1931 - 1937)", for which the Council for National Academic Awards gave me a Ph.D. in 1979. However, my comrades of the PCI in France have produced a mass of studies in our general field. In addition, one of the leading comrades, Pierre Broue, who teaches in the University at Grenoble, has been responsible for establishing a magazine that come out three times a year, entitled "Cahiers Leon Trotsky", i.e. Leon Trotsky Notebooks. Apart from performing as best I can in the class struggle, my job in recent years, and especially since I retired, has been translated the best of this material (much of which is based on documents from the Trotsky Archives), so as to unlock it out of French and make it available to the English-using world.

In the archives I have a load of odd materials about Ireland. It would be no good just sending you a bundle of photocopies ranging over about fifty years (up to an including the intervention of Gerry Healy in Irish affairs!), when you have a lot of the original in Dublin, and will find it when you need it.

At this moment, I suggest that you need to decide just where you want to break in, and

avert your eyes from the maze of contradictions and problems which a general over-view of the subject presents today. Start trying to investigate some small but relevant piece. For instance, you should soon learn whether anything exists to explain James' visit, or satisfy yourself that there is nothing to be found.

May I suggest one or two other points at which one might break in? When you decide on the topic that you find most attractive, let me know and I will hunt out of the cupboard what I may have about it.

What about Michael Price? A very interesting man. One of the few who developed politically beyond the Army Council. You find some of his work in "The Torch" and, probably, in the Dublin newspapers in the later 1930's. But the best source, if one could get into it, would be the police files. He died in 1944, over forty years ago. I expect the files about him are hanging about somewhere to this day, and a bit of academic leverage might let you in. I don't expect they will have been carefully stored, but may simply have been thrown into a cellar somewhere in the Castle.

Michael Price touches our story at two vital points. First, there is the question of the Republican Congress and the volte face by the Stalinists which appears to have been a bitter blow to Nora and Roddy Connolly and to Michael Price in 1934.

Secondly, there are letters in the Trotsky Archives about a new "Citizen Army" being brought into existence in Dublin in 1936. I see that Raynor mentions this in his article. When you get there I will send you copies of the stuff from Harvard in which it is mentioned.

But, thirdly, while it is fashionable today to denounce Gerry Healy as the primeval devil from the beginning of time, let us not forget that Michael Price was editing the Torch when the WIL comrades came to Dublin at the beginning of the war, and that Price gave Healy space develop a point of view on the place of Ireland in the world war and the responsibilities of the workers' movement. The "Cahiers Leon Trotsky" has recently published articles on the general political problems which we faced during the war, based on the documentation, and a contribution based on the discussion that faced the Irish working class would be a valuable contribution. What is more, a comrade in London is doing a fairly large scale work on these problems, and a correspondence with him might help to locate the discussion in the "Torch" in its international setting. You will also find Bob Armstrong writing, in opposition to Healy, in the "Torch".

There are three sources where you might find materials about the "Second World Congress". Try "The Library of Social History", which is located on the sixth floor of the SWP building in 14 Charles Street in New York. Secondly, you might write to the Labour History Library on the 10th floor of the Library of New York City University, in Washington Square, New York. Thirdly, try Michel Dreyfus at Bibliotheque Internationale de Documentation Contemporaine, at the University of Paris, Nanterre. (I do. ' have the full addresses in New York and Paris, but the standard works of reference will give you them.)

To conclude: what were the influences that led the CP to oppose the line of the "Workers' Republic" in the founding of the "Republican Congress" in 1934? Was it, as Milodte and others have speculated, an anticipation of the Popular Front? This is doubtful, in my opinion. First, the idea of unity with the Socialist Party was barely occurring to the CP in France in the summer of 1934. Had it occurred to the CP in London? I doubt it. Price was speaking at an "anti-war" meeting in Sheffield in the July and the report gives a powerful "Third Period" odour still. Secondly, O'Donnell had been at the top of the League against Imperialism from the mid-1920's onwards, and had got soaked there with alliances with the bourgeoisie of colonial countries. Could it have been just the emergence from isolation that faced the CP hacks with what looked like a chance of making a killing out of the national movement? After all, at the very height of the "Third Period" in Germany the KPD was counter-posing approaches to the nationalist right for a "People's Revolution" to "break the chains of Versailles" to the idea of a united front with the Social-Democracy. I think the question is a bit more complex than it has seemed.

Best wishes,

John Archer.