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Dear Comrade,

I was delighted to have your letter of July 12. Remember - my memory is that of a man of 78. Mostly, I can express to you only opinions, which, at best, you could regard as hypotheses to be tested rather than as solid fact. The Bornstein-Richardson books, I regret to say, contain a good deal of opinion presented as established fact, in the absence of the conclusive evidence one would prefer - though when this is realised, it does not detract from their positive aspects, the collection of information. Proceeding as you are, I have no doubt that your work will be welcomed internationally. In recent years, especially round a French comrade called Pierre Broue, there has been a great deal of collaboration between serious investigators who have come from different strands of our movement, but who aim at writing according to the rules rather than ensuring that those whom they regard as the "right guys" shall "win".

Congratulations on getting into the Sean Murry papers. Of course, I don't know what is in them, but three problems suggest themselves: first, there is the general question of the way in which connections between the Kremlin and the Irish Communists was maintained, and the role of the Communist Party of Great Britain. This is important, because one of the problems which you raise in your letter seems, in my opinion, to be a problem which faced the WIL during the war: the problem is that of an "independent", Irish section. The same problem arose, by the way, in the Comintern about the relations between the CPGB and the Indian Communist Party - and I don't need to remind you of the way that, decades later, Gerry Healy tried to have "his" outfit in Ireland run from London. You may have seen on this subject the devastating article which Dermott Whelan wrote and I have recently re-published: "The SLL and Irish Marxism", where he reveals the consequences of trying to dominate a section in an oppressed, semi-colonial country and how this not only robs the local comrades of the right to make their own experiences, but also feeds attitudes of "domination" in the comrades who live in the imperialist country.

My second thought, which naturally might have to be revised when the papers are seen, would be that I would like to get some light to settle the argument about why the Irish Communist Party in 1934 opposed the slogan of the "Workers' Republic" in the Republican Congress. I know it all happened 54 years ago, but like the point in the last para. it remains an un-settled problem: how best can the proletarian tendency relate to the Republican militants? Paddy Healy thinks that Sean Murry was expressing a certain traditional attitude in the Comintern - expressed for example among the lefts in the KPD, that transitional formations such as the Republican Congress have to be prevented from presenting themselves as an "alternative" and, therefore, as an "obstacle" to the construction of the party. You may think, as I do, that there is much substance in this, because one of the characteristic "left" faces which Stalinism adopts is the old business about slagging off Labour "lefts" or radical Republicans rather than trying to exploit the possibilities which their movements offer for applying a united front tactic to sort out how far different people are prepared to go and separate the ones who are prepared to go two steps from those only prepared to go one or even ~~the~~ none.

At the same time, I have suggested to Paddy that this may not in itself be a complete explanation. If you read Milotte's book, one important feature of it is that he seems to be unaware that there was, in the Comintern, from 1925 to the early part of 1928, a dominantly rightist period, ruthlessly enforced by the apparatchiks. As far as Ireland was concerned, the influence of this period was conveyed through Peadar O'Donoghue who was a leading figure in a thing called the "League against Imperialism", which, in turn, served the Stalin-Bukharin group-alliance which dominated the Comintern as a cover for the un-principled relations between the Comintern and the Kuomintang in China and led to the destruction of the Chinese CP in 1927. ~~Is it possible that - because~~ The Republican Congress was taking place months before anybody had ever thought of or heard of the Popular Front - which we know was not invented until the autumn of 1934 and that in the special conditions in France, where a military alliance with the USSR was on the cards... Milotte says that there was an "anticipation" of the Popular Front in Ireland? I think this is not very probable: it seems too easy: but anyway, what can Sean Murry tell us?

Thirdly, is there any indication - or do you know any other source - on diplomatic

relations between the Free State Government and the USSR, at government level?

Just a small point: please can you let me know if you come across any mention of a man called Eric Starkey Jackson. He was a very valued comrade of ours in the thirties and the early part of the war, and taught us a great deal. He had been a close personal friend of Sean Murry, but he broke with the CPGB about 1934 and was won to Trotskyism.

Your second main point: Sorry, I don't know anything about the comrades who made up the "Friends of the Irish Republic", whose material we published, and don't know anyone who does! It is possible that they came out of the milieu in London around the Connolly Association, which attracted many workers who had left the South to seek work, especially in building, in the 1930's. I don't know, at this stage of the game, how to find out about the "Connolly Association".

Your third point: I didn't know that there had ever been any suggestion of a connection between Ireland and the recruitment of the Zionist comrades. To be quite frank, there was some tendency among certain comrades to exaggeration: they were highly optimistic at the time because they had managed to achieve a few successes - for a change! - and one has always to be a bit sceptical about such claims. I know that in England in the early part of the war the RSL attracted a small group of Left Zionists, John Lawrence, the Finch family and Rose Zelner and that with the break-up of the leading cadre of the RSL in 1941 these people came under the influence of the WIL, acting, indeed, as its agents (as far as we allowed them) in the RSL. But a connection with Bob Armstrong and Ireland? I do not know anything about that.

Your fourth point: it is possible that somewhere in Britain someone can lead us to the secretarial documents of the WIL in 1941. It may be that the work of the magazine "Revolutionary History" is leading us in that direction. I don't think they are in the library at Hull University in Huston's archives, and they certainly would not be in the Harber papers, because the material for that period was dealt with by my wife, who was secretary of the RSL until the fusion of 1944. But today I can't even guess where we might find the ~~Tommy Rilly~~ and the ~~Armstrong~~ documents.

Your fifth point: I can't help you here. It may be that Carol Coulter, who went through all the bloody battles in the later sixties round the Civil Rights Movement and the Irish Workers' Group, may have heard about this. But there is another point. In 1962 the Young Socialists in Britain had not yet run into the witch-hunt which just preceded the election to office of Harold Wilson's Government and Healy's people were still inside. So it may be that there were individuals connected with the SLL "entering" the NILPYS, not, of course, with much clear idea of what they were supposed to be doing there!

I don't know anything about Brian Dunlop or the "Irish Group", but I know someone who might, and will enquire.

Here we come to your sixth point, to which I refer in my second paragraph on the preceding page. E. C. Clapper was the pseudonym of one of the American comrades from the SWP who managed to get here; I don't know which, but Bornstein would probably know. Van Heijenoort was a very important political figure in our movement. He was a French comrade of Dutch ancestry, who joined our French section very early, about 1930, and whose capacities enabled him for many years to work in very close personal relations with Trotsky in exile. He is the "Marc Loris" who wrote the articles about the perspectives of the war in the "New International", and, until he died, he was a valued collaborator with every serious researcher who tried to work in the Trotsky archives, though he actually left our movement in 1946. Any time we meet - or Glenn comes here again, where he will be very welcome - I can say more about him, and shall be very interested in anything he may have had to say about Ireland. He was in fact the secretary of the International Secretariat, with a very clear conception of the limited role he could hope to play in war-time.

Again as to what the WIL called "the Irish Group", I do know, from a passing reference in one of the letters in the Deane archive, which I expect you have, that the WIL did not like the idea - pressed by the American comrades and supported by myself and others -

of fusing with the RSL, because it would mean putting the RSL comrades in contact with the WIL's Irish contacts! In the even when we actually did fuse, this did not matter much, because the differences between the WIL and the RSL were - as far as Ireland was concerned - were about how to maintain the independence of the working-class of the war aims of British capitalism while, at the same time, we expressed the desire of the masse in Britain not to be conquered by the Nazi-led armies of German imperialism (and this difference led to ferocious struggles between the WIL and the RSL, as the record shows), but by 1943 the question was largely out-dated, because, after the victories of Stalin-grad and El Alamein, the possibility of a defeat of Britain (and an invasion of Ireland) had become remote.

I don't follow your last point about "International material" 6 - 9, but Glenn can explain this when I next see him.

The RSL did produce a number of bulletins during the period 1940 - 1943, but as far as I remember nothing about Ireland appeared in them. This is what makes the stuff in Socialist Appeal so valuable. The RSL didn't have any comrades in Ireland.

"Starkey", I believe, was the Eric Starkey Jackson about whom I wrote above. He had nothing to do with the Revolutionary Workers' League (whom he heartily hated after they split from the RSL!); there can be no doubt that in 1940 the correspondence between London and New York would have been handled either by him or by Margaret Johns.

As to the file of "Workers' Fight" - you are in luck! I have a spare copy of the Volume 2, No. 3 issue, and enclose it herewith.

Finally, as to the Sean Murry papers, another thought has entered my head. Should you by any chance come across the names of "George Weston" or of "H. Morris", please will you let me know. I will tell you or Glenn sometime why.

Now, comrade Crossy, I have done my best for you. But who are you? Why do you want to know all this? What experience have you? Fifty-seven years as a Trotskyist have formed certain ideas in my mind about how we should combine the work of constructing a Marxist party with that of striking roots in the mass movements of the workers and the Republicans, as part of the over-riding task of constructing the world party of socialist revolution. What are your opinions on these matters? Is no political collaboration possible between us in relation to the problems of 1988?

In comradeship,

John Archer