

July 27, 1988

Dear Comrade,

Many thanks for your letter of July 20. Your goods are parcelled up and I am hoping we can save postage and possible loss in transit if I can find a friend who is coming across the water to bring them to you.

Thank you for explaining my difficulty about "documents 6 - 9". Please forgive me: I did not want to blame you for the "confusion". Anyway, I don't know how they came to be so numbered, but the explanation occurs to me that they may have been letters read to the national committee of the WIL, and the secretary (Jock Haston, perhaps) put them in a numbered order. I don't know anything about any others numbered 1 - 5 or 9 onwards.

I could not be more in agreement with your approach to historical work. One has to put up with a lot of nonsense in this connection. Anyway, all that one can do is to develop hypotheses about what one thinks may have happened and then test them against the evidence. One gets sick and tired of people to confidently assert that what happened is what they happen to think happened, or what someone told them happened. In particular, our job is not merely to seek statements of what people remember from the past, but find some means of evaluating their reliability. I have seen reliance placed on statements by people whom I would not believe if they told me the date!

Your friend will have told you that we have here a collection of the most important political statements by the Labour Party in Britain about the Irish question, as well as extensive press cutting from the press of the Healy-ites, the SWP and other London-based "authorities" on the question. Paddy Healy has a collection of the duplicated bulletins of the Irish Workers' Group (I believe I have a set which I photocopied from them here)

A comrade here tells me, by the way, that Jackie Vance, who was involved in the "entry" work of the Young Socialists into the Northern Ireland LPYS in the early ~~seventies~~ sixties and Freddy Campbell are still around somewhere in your fair city.

Now - as to "The Fourth International at the End of the War". This involves a bit of my personal history: My wife Mary and I joined the movement for the Fourth International in the latter part of 1934 and "turned", as Trotsky advised us, in 1936 to an "entry" operation in the Labour Party here. After being excluded, we continued to take the position that the construction of a Trotskyist Group cannot succeed in Britain if it does not attempt to intervene in a principled way in the conflicts inside the Labour Party, because we see in these conflicts the place of the Labour Party as the arena in which, in Britain at least, the forces of the bourgeoisie come into conflict with those expressing the interests of the working class. Of course, we could never have imagined anything so naive as that the Labour Party could ever be transformed into the instrument by which the working-class could carry through the seizure of power or inaugurate the dictatorship of the proletariat. But if we ever had to make concessions in order to avoid premature exclusion, we always admitted that they were concessions and did not pretend otherwise, for instance, when we were in Healy's group in 1954, we had to give up our paper under threat of exclusion. But we have always held the position that the class struggle would one day ferment the Labour Party and that it was our job to prepare to win for the world party of socialist revolution all those elements which we could hope to win round us by proving ourselves to be the best fighters for internal democracy, for socialist ideas and against bureaucracy in the Labour Party.

We came to the conclusion in 1964 that Healy was no longer to be trusted. He had done many very effective things in the 1950's, especially through our intervention in the Liverpool Dock Strike of 1955 and in the crisis of the Communist Party in 1956, and then establishing us as a group possessing some prestige as an opposition to the trade union bosses in industry at the end of the 1950's. However, he was a man of violent mood-swings between opportunism and sectarianism. As long as our organisation had reasonable internal democracy we could exercise some check on him, but when we began to grow and get more money he surrounded himself with an apparatus of people who were there to do the hack work round the centre and the main task of protecting him from criticism. This led him, in 1964, to pull out of the LPYS and abandon the field, under the slogans of "independence" and "impending revolution".

After having nowhere to go for some years, we discovered that there were, in France, quite a large number of people in an organisation called the "Organisation Communiste Internationaliste". This group had developed from the French comrades who had broken from Pablo in 1953 and formed the "International Committee", with the Healy-ites and the SWP of USA. In 1970



Healy found their company embarrassing, because they asked questions which queried his ultra-left tendencies: they did not approve of an arrangement which left him "in control" of Britain and Ireland, while France, Latin America and Eastern Europe were to be their "hunting ground": they wanted a unified international leadership to grow up. So in 1969 - 70 he staged a violent altercation with them, accusing them of having abandoned dialectical materialism and the dialectical method, accusation which they could easily enough rebutt, but since their arguments never reached the rank & file of Healy's group that did not do them much good at the time. The International Committee broke up, the central issue being whether Healy was right in his claim that it "was" the "reconstructed" Fourth International, or whether, as the OCI said, it was their job to carry through a long-term operation of drawing together round them the many revolutionary tendencies in the world which cannot fully realise their aims except from within a world party of socialist revolution, but which have to be won to that point of view by years of common activity and discussion, before anyone can claim to be "the" Fourth International.

So in 1974 Mary and I found a home in the international grouping of which the OCI was the centre, along with Paddy Healy, Carol Coulter and the LWR. Here we learned a lot, many things that we had not known before. For instance I met Pierre Broue and could tap into a lot of important history that I had never know before - the fruits of which you see beginning to appear in English in my publications.

The OCI published in the 1970's a monthly theoretical journal, entitled "La Verite". In September 1978 they produced a special issue to commemorate the foundation of the Fourth International. This set out to present a comprehensible history of the whole struggle for a world party of socialist revolution, from the Communist League of Marx and Engels in 1847 - 1851, through the First, Second and Third International to the Fourth, its break-up in 1953, the work of the "Pablo-ites" ("Mandel-ites") and of the International Committee ("Healy-ites and Lambertistes").

I was so impressed by the quality of this material, after having had so much rubbish passed off as history, (if only because I had lived through the period 1934 onwards in the movement and therefore had some idea what the evidence of the documents would be if only any of these people would go and look at them, and refrain from just picking out the bits to suit their own pre-conceived ideas), that I set about "un-locking" what I thought was the best of it out of French, so that comrades generally in Britain could read it, and form their own conclusions

Jean-Jacques Marie, who wrote the piece about the Trotskyists immediately after the war, and in particular about the difficulties of the French comrades at that time and how the split of 1953 was unconsciously prepared in the preceding years, is no un-important figure. He has been a Trotskyist militant in the teachers' union for many years and, in addition, made contact with "dissidents" in Eastern Europe, evaluated them and gave them political and material help long before they became generally acceptable in the West.

All I asked myself was: is this an honest piece of work? Is it a well-informed piece of work? Should we take notice of it, or is it just flannel or abuse? It abuses none of the tendencies among Trotskyists, but tries to explain politically what they thought they were doing and why. It is not the answer to all our prayers, but it is a contribution.

I hope you will have had a good holiday by the time you get this. The piece about "Entrism" which I wrote is now a bit out of date. I hope to have a rather longer piece finished soon about our problems in the 1930's, and hope that comrades like yourself will read and criticise it.

Best wishes,

*John Archer*

P. S. It is only fair to conclude this autobiographical note by telling you that I decided last year that I could not accept political responsibility for certain activities by the leadership of the French PCI (into which the OCI had grown), and that I must break with them, along with comrades in several other countries. Today I belong to the Socialist Labour Group in Britain, which collaborates in a Liaison Committee in which a number of Trotskyist groups around the world are in process of working out their tactics in their own countries and trying again to lay the foundations of an international leadership which can contribute to the future construction of the world party of socialist revolution.