

Basement, 69 Bromfelde Road, London, SW4

February 27, 1990

Dear Jim,

Many thanks for your letter (undated) which reached me this morning. The enclosures are particularly interesting. I met Rayner Lysacht when I was in Dublin in 1981 and he came to see me once here. But at those times, I was highly suspect, because I was in Lambert's international outfit, so we didn't get very far. I shall read both documents with care and expect I shall have to ask you questions arising from them. I have been for over a decade a member of the Socialist Labour Group, which began life as a supporter of Lambert; we broke with him some three years back, and now we have all joined the International Socialist Group, so now I am a member of the United Secretariat, and back on the Fourth International which I left with Healy in 1953 with the International Committee. I knew some of the comrades in the LWR, but apart from publishing the bulletin attacking Healy with Dermott Whelan wrote, I don't claim to know much about Irish politics!

I did find some mention of a second Irish Citizens' Army in the latter half of the 1930's that Norah Commolly, Michael Price were involved in - this was in materials in your National Library. Do you have the actual details of its dissolution? I know more than one comrade this side of the water that would like to know. What is your source for the business about the meeting chaired by O'Brien? All I know is that I find Price involved in producing "The Torch" later. I did rather venture to doubt whether the ICA (Mark 2) ever existed at all outside the hopes and the imagination of a few: have you solid confirmation that it actually did exist and do things?

Your points about the Republican Congress are well taken. My own hypothesis has always been (though, until someone gets into Sean Murry's papers which are the the Public Record Office in ~~Gleng~~ Belfast we shan't know definitely) that the official leadership of the CPI didn't like the idea of the Republican Congress because, typically Third Period Stalinists, they regarded it, not as a means to win people to Communism (which it could have been, I think), but as an obstacle and a competitor with the Party. But I also think (again, no more than a hypothesis) that there was no lack of opportunism in the Third Period, and that, provided they could silence the people who were setting themselves up too loud, like Price and others, they didn't mind doing even De Valera the little serviceman as well as others whom the early energy of the Congress Movement had mobilised. There have been groups which claimed to be Trotskyists, too, which refused to seize hold of movements like that, because they knew they would have to fight for leadership among them and lacked the confidence to do so.

I think you are right to distrust Milotte's stuff about the attitude of the CPI to the Congress being an early, even a premature, anticipation of Popular Frontism. The evidence is against it. That doesn't mean that we ignore the plentiful signs of opportunism in the Party line during the Third Period. But the People's front didn't see the light until the autumn of 1934, and then in France, and I venture to doubt whether the people in the Kremlin, who sanctioned the "turn" of the PCF to the "united front" with the French Socialist Party in June 1934, and then the "turn" to include the Radicals in the "United Front" ever knew anything about what had happened in Ireland. I may be wrong, but I suspect that Milotte, being a "state-cap" and bred in the English SWP, doesn't understand the difference between Trotsky and Bukharin and therefore cannot understand the essential continuity of Soviet foreign policy since 1928, with the Third Period seeking to maintain relations with Germany and to regard France and Britain as the "main enemy", and then fumbling around after Hitler came to power until they had to come down on the side of an agreement, if they could get it, with France and Britain.

I also think you are right to hypothesis that Price and the others were themselves caught totally by surprise. I would like to know whether there are any surviving documents about what the bosses of the CPI in the London office of the CPGB thought - if anything! - about what was going on.

Will write again when I have read your documents;

Best wishes,

John.