

Patrick Trench, art, illness and socialism

Brian Trench

Patrick Trench lived a short life (1905-1948) marked by illness, personal turmoil, financial insecurity, sporadic employment, and socialist activism. On his death, aged 43, from tuberculosis he was remembered in an *Irish Times* notice (12 March, 1948), as ‘keenly interested in politics, particularly the Labour movement’ and for having ‘fought on the Republican side’ in the Spanish Civil War. Those with a commitment to revolutionary socialism have celebrated him as an early advocate for Trotskyism in Ireland.¹ Between 1939 and 1941, Trench was a very visible presence in political journalism, writing regularly for the Irish Labour Party paper, *Torch*. His political writings and his activity within the Irish Labour Party in that period make him a significant figure in the history of Irish socialism as seen by Trotskyists.² Rayner Lysaght has published Trench’s signed *Torch* articles along with reports of his speeches to Labour Party conferences and a sympathetic – though not unconditionally so – commentary on Trench as activist.³ Trench’s political reputation is strongly tied to his involvement with the radical socialist party, POUM, in defence of the Spanish Republic against Franco’s forces.⁴ It is known that he was in Barcelona in 1936-37 and that he was associated with people supporting POUM but, as we shall see, we do not know a great deal more. Even less do we have evidence to support the claims made on his behalf that he ‘fought’ in the Spanish civil war. The entry on Trench in the *Dictionary of Irish National Biography* is more likely to be accurate in stating that he ‘went to Barcelona as a non-combatant journalist’.⁵

Patrick Trench was born in 1905 in Galway, where his father was a professor at Queen’s College. He went to St Columba’s College, then to Trinity College Dublin in 1922, just as the Civil War was starting. He associated with anti-Treaty republicans at Trinity, among them Alec Newman, later editor of *The Irish Times*, and Bob Hilliard, later a Church of Ireland clergyman and a volunteer in the International Brigades supporting the Spanish Republic in the civil war, who died in February 1937 from wounds received at the Battle of Jarama. As a republican student and owner of a motor bike, Patrick Trench was assigned despatch duties, delivering messages from anti-Treaty leaders in Dublin to supporters in Munster.⁶ After unfinished studies in Trinity College and Oriel College, Oxford, Trench enrolled at the

Dublin Metropolitan School of Art in 1925. There he joined the Radical Club Painters' group along with other students and some of their teachers, including his own principal teacher, Patrick Tuohy, an Easter Rising veteran with the Irish Citizen Army. The Radical Club was formed in August 1925 to promote modern ideas in art and literature and met initially in the Metropolitan School of Art. The club adopted its constitution in October of that year, declaring as its objects, to provide a centre of intercourse for Irish intellectual workers; to encourage all forms of progressive cultural activity in Ireland; to fight for the freedom of cultural expression in Ireland; to promote solidarity among artists, writers, scientists, and all people engaged in intellectual pursuits in Ireland.⁷ I have described elsewhere the short but interesting life of this organisation for which the main mover was Liam O'Flaherty, who also contributed frequently to the talks and debates hosted by the club's literature section.⁸ These events featured other well-known writers of the day, including Brinsley McNamara, Harry (later, Francis) Stuart and F. R. Higgins, the poet and former Irish Clerical Union branch secretary who became the Radical Club's first president. The club's social activity section for a brief period ran cabarets that included dancing and revues, organised by Daisy Bannard-Cogley; these were later organised independently of the club. The diaries of writer and activist Rosamond Jacob, who was a member of the Radical Club committee through 1926, are among the very few sources we have for the club's activities.⁹ Jacob records details of Radical Club literary and social events, and committee meetings, but nothing about the Painters' Group exhibition held on 3-17 May, 1926 which was one of its higher-profile events. That exhibition included over 100 works, including by established artists such as Jack B. Yeats, Patrick Tuohy, Nano Reid, Cecil Salkeld, Mainie Jellett, Seán Keating and Harry Kernoff, many of whom were also represented in the Royal Hibernian Academy that same month; there was also a single piece, *Still Life*, by Trench.

The exhibition was formally opened by W. B. Yeats, who expressed mixed feelings about the 'Extreme Left' in art, which he exemplified as 'complete Cubism and Futurism'; those of the older generation did not care for it, Yeats said, but he could appreciate that 'they treat art freely' (*Irish Independent*, 4 May, 1926). Trench, as secretary of the Painters' Group, proposed the vote of thanks to Yeats saying that the exhibition was intended to be the first of a series aimed at 'awakening a new interest in art in Ireland, more particularly in the art of the younger people' (*Irish Times*, 4 May, 1926). The exhibition was sympathetically reviewed in the *Irish Independent* (4 May, 1926) but the review in the *Irish Statesman* (8 May, 1926) prompted a sharp letter to that publication (15 May, 1926) signed for the Radical Club by

Trench, H. A. Kenney and Maurice MacGonigal. The writers claimed that the reviewer Philip Deegan came 'to feed the spleens, the bitterness, the sense of defeat, which he has absorbed from Dublin like a sponge'. Trench and colleagues still thought Deegan to be in some way preferable to the 'tepid' Y.O., who was the long-standing art critic for the *Irish Statesman*, but they considered Deegan's 'vituperation' to be 'rather unprofitable'. In a brief reply the editor of the *Irish Statesman* rejected the artists' criticism of his choice of reviewer and said the publication would 'continue to be candid in future as in the past'. In the event, Deegan did only one further review before Y.O. resumed his regular position.¹⁰

DMSA student Hilda van Stockum, who was still in her teens when she exhibited with the Radical Club, recalled that period sixty years later in two articles for *The Irish Times* (16 and 23 March, 1985) She wrote how Tuohy introduced her to the Radical Club and MacGonigal was 'the senior student whom everyone looked up to', fond of expounding his theories but also recounting stories of his imprisonment during the War of Independence. Van Stockum remembered Patrick Trench as keeping apart from the other students, and 'rather literary' (*Irish Times*, 23 March, 1985).

Although no longer a DMSA student in 1927 Trench wrote as 'Student' to the *Irish Statesman* (23 April, 1927), denouncing the school as 'a pestilential place ... [where] the young uncertain roots of the new Irish art struggle for nourishment and find none'. His criticism was rejected by Seán O'Sullivan (*Irish Statesman*, 30 April, 1927) on the grounds of 'Student's' claim there were no travelling scholarships for students but he was supported on the same grounds by Hilda van Stockum (*Irish Statesman*, 7 May, 1927). Trench then revealed himself (*Irish Statesman*, 21 May, 1927) as the author of the original, pseudonymous letter and decried the conditions both of the teachers and of the students, contrasting his experience in Dublin with that he had in Vienna where he had also studied.

In September 1927 Egan's Salon hosted Trench's first solo show, billed as Paintings and Drawings from Ireland and Austria. The exhibition included a portrait, Francie, of Frances Baker, whom he married in 1926 and who travelled with him to Vienna when he studied there. Y.O. reviewed the exhibition for the *Irish Statesman* (17 September, 1927), commending this Francie as having 'charm'. Trench, he wrote, 'has plenty of talent, but he still in the experimental stage, dabbling in cubism and Cezannism and realism, in fact in all the fashionable styles. Because he has talent I am sure he will find a style of his own'.

Although the Radical Club had ceased to operate by this time, the alumni still met socially. Rosamond Jacob attended a ceilidh in November 1927 in Bannard-Cogley's Little Theatre, 'a

lovely hall and floor, with frightful futurist heads decorating it, & also clever caricatures of Liam O'F, Mrs Cogley, Kernoff, P. Trench etc. etc.'

In 1929 Trench moved to London and two years later the *Irish Times* reported (6 June, 1931) he had secured a commission for a mural with marine themes at Holborn Baths, which he was executing with Barbara Nicholson (with whom he later had a daughter, Jane). The impression given that Trench was asked to undertake this work was misleading. The minutes of Holborn Borough Council of 10 June, 1931 record in a report of the Baths and Washhouses Committee that it had 'received and considered an offer from Mr P.M. Trench asking to be permitted to paint the frieze of the Endell Street entrance hall' free of charge, though with the Council providing scaffolding and paying for paint and materials. This offer was accepted, as the Committee was 'of the opinion that the frieze, if painted in accordance with the design submitted, will greatly improve the appearance of the hall.'¹¹

In 1935, he was reported to have been asked by Holborn Council to provide a picture for hanging in the town hall (*Irish Times*, 18 January, 1935) but no record has been found in the council archives of that request or of the painting. Also in 1935 Trench had exhibitions in January at the Bloomsbury Gallery and in June at the Lombard in Chelsea, a café-gallery 'in the continental style, where coffee is provided' (*Irish Times*, 28 June, 1935). The Bloomsbury show included a painting reflecting his interest in workers and their conditions; this was a depiction of a large fire in a Hammersmith tyre factory that occurred in November 1934, 'a most realistic painting of a weird scene' (*Irish Times*, 30 January, 1935). The Lombard show was a two-hander with an artist identified in the *Irish Times* report only as Ziegler, 'one of the established younger men in London'. This may be Archibald Ziegler, born 1903, and an art teacher with the Workers' Educational Association. Later in 1935, Trench was reported to be working on murals for a 'well-known restaurant in Chelsea' (*Irish Times*, 16 November, 1935), possibly the Lombard.

At this time, Trench was living in Chelsea, where his Trinity College friend, Bob Hilliard, was also living; they either shared a residence for a time or followed one another immediately into it. Hilliard had left his position as a clergyman in Belfast, was working in London as a journalist and had joined the Communist Party. Their mutual friend, Samuel Beckett, was also living in the same locality, and wrote in September 1935 to Thomas McGreevy in Dublin: 'Hilliard is still about. I walked out of the door one morning and there he was playing cricket with the street-urchins. No doubt he is staying with Paddy Trench whom I see flying

about on an old motor-bike.’¹² Bob Hilliard left London for Spain in December 1936 and was killed in action in February 1937.

By the time they met up in London Trench’s and Hilliard’s political affiliations were quite different from each other, although in 1931 Trench was briefly a member of the Communist Party and expressed his sentiment with celebratory lithographs of Marx, Lenin and Stalin. However, he later joined the resolutely anti-Stalinist Independent Labour Party and the Marxist Group within it; this was formed in 1934 from other revolutionary groupings in the ILP, including the Bolshevik-Leninist faction. Some of the faction members identified themselves as Trotskyists, including one of the best-known figures in the Marxist Group, C. L. R. James, the Trinidadian journalist, cricket writer, historian and essayist. Trench was moving to a revolutionary socialist position, strongly critical both of international capitalism and of the Soviet Union, and by the late 1930s he was formally aligned with international Trotskyism, as represented by the Fourth International.

The ILP published a substantial and lively weekly paper, *New Leader*, which was edited in the mid-1930s by Fenner Brockway. He was later general secretary of the party and his secretary, Winifred Stidolph, was to become Patrick Trench’s long-time companion and later his third wife, marrying him on his death-bed. *New Leader* and the ILP took a keen interest in events in Spain in 1936 and soon after the rising against Franco’s offensive the party and newspaper had direct representatives in Barcelona and Madrid. Patrick Trench went to Barcelona in summer/autumn 1936 and was in contact with the ILP’s fraternal ally, POUM, and other visiting foreign supporters.

Trench was not formally part of the ILP contingents that came to Spain to work directly with POUM and its militia. He would not have been a suitable candidate to join the militia due to his long-standing poor health; he had TB since his teen years and first went to a Swiss sanatorium in the early 1920s. However, Trench painted a striking self-portrait in 1937 showing himself in POUM militia garb and with a gun. There may not have been any intention here to mislead, as many non-combatant POUM activists wore the militia ‘uniform’ and the gun can be seen as symbolising his solidarity with the military campaign. Paddy Trench, as he was becoming generally known, has been credited as having been a journalist with POUM and/or a correspondent in Barcelona for *New Leader* and/or for the Marxist Group publications, *Bulletin* and *Fight!*. He has been mentioned as associated with the English-language department of POUM, though there was no such unit, formally at least.¹³ There were visiting POUM supporters who contributed to the paper, *Spanish Revolution*

(1936-37), edited by Charles and Lois Orr, an American couple who certainly knew Trench. However, it has not proved possible to attribute any specific article to him in any of these publications. Articles tended to be credited to Our Own Correspondent, to pseudonymous writers, or – in the case of *New Leader* – to Fenner Brockway, John McNair and others writing extensive analyses from London, presumably with the help of political associates in Spain. All this makes the work of attribution difficult. Authors writing on Irish or ILP participants in the Spanish Civil War have mentioned Paddy Trench in these contexts but none has given verifiable information on his activity, such as it was.¹⁴

Trench did come to the notice of Comintern agents who were observing the revolutionaries and libertarians in Barcelona with more than a jaundiced eye, and who in 1937 directed the arrests of thousands of these. A note in the Comintern archives is a rare documentary proof of Trench's sojourn in Barcelona; it reads:

Perry Trench

Irländer, hat englische Staatsangehörigkeit.

Personenbeschreibung: 1 meter 80-85 cm. groß. Haar: Schwarz, lockig. Alter, 25-30 Jahre. Auffällig gekleidet, trägt durchweg Sammetjacken.

Er fuhr Ende April [1937] kurz vor dem Maiputsch, nach England.

Verbindungen: Thalmann (15), dessen Vertrauensmann er war.

Translation

Perry Trench

Irishman, with English citizenship

Personal description: 1.80-1.85 metres tall. Hair: Black, curly. Age, 25-30 years, Conspicuously dressed, constantly wears a velvet jacket.

He left for England in late April [1937] shortly before the May coup.

Connections: Thalmann (15), whose confidant he was.¹⁵

This record was found by historian Barry McLoughlin during research in Soviet Union archives for a book on 'Irish victims of Stalinist terror', in which he notes that Comintern agents in Spain 'observed anti-Stalinist socialists like George Orwell and his wife, Eileen, the young Willy Brandt or the Irish Trotskyist Paddy Trench, who put his journalistic expertise at the disposal of the POUM'.¹⁶ The agent's note reflects poorly on the quality of Comintern intelligence: Trench was Paddy, 190 cm and 32.

The Thalmann mentioned in the agent's note was Czech-born Pavel (Paul) Thalmann, a Swiss-based revolutionary socialist, who, with his wife, Clara, was in Barcelona, Madrid and elsewhere in Spain during 1936-7. They had correspondent credentials but mixed widely in POUM and related circles, joining the militias at the front, and meeting foreign visitors from many countries. In their vividly told memoir, *Revolution für die Freiheit*, they give detailed accounts of their Spanish travels and they name-check scores of people they met or observed, among them Arthur Koestler, André Malraux and Willy Brandt.¹⁷ Some English comrades are named, but there is no mention of the ILP, much less of Paddy Trench. Testifying to his presence in Spain are the 1937 self-portrait and a painting of a street scene in Barcelona when the city was under socialist-anarchist control; banners and flags are the dominant elements. When, years later, Trench's friend, Owen Sheehy-Skeffington, expressed his admiration for it, Trench gave it to him and it is still in the Sheehy-Skeffington family. Whatever activity Trench may have undertaken in Barcelona came to an end when he had a relapse of TB, and was admitted to hospital.¹⁸ He returned to England and to recuperation with his separated wife, Eve, in the Hampshire countryside.

Trench's part in the ILP and Marxist Group, his association with POUM in Spain and with the overtly Trotskyist Workers' International League in London in 1939, and his very wide reading in Marxist and other socialist literature stood to him in quickly assuming a local branch and factional-leadership role in the Irish Labour Party when he returned to Dublin after his father's death in July 1939. He became a prominent contributor to *Torch*, established on the initiative of Michael Price, then secretary of the Dublin Constituencies Council of the Labour Party, in May 1939. Trench hosted members of the Workers' International League at his house in Howth when they left England in anticipation of having their political activities suppressed in war-time. He also helped them continue publication of their paper, *Socialist Appeal*, during their short stay in Dublin. With a professional editor, initially Cathal O'Shannon, *Torch* provided lively, partisan coverage of events and issues in 'the Emergency' and was for a few years open to diverse views, and sometimes to heated argument, within and beyond the labour movement. A frequent contributor, John De Courcy Ireland, recalled many years later: 'What an inspiration it [Torch] was, how wide it cast its net, and how devotedly LP members went selling it, hail, rain, or snow!'¹⁹ The paper's changing character from 1941 mirrored changes within the Labour Party, as it moved to a 'national' position, and closer to Fianna Fáil. The party and its paper provided less and less room for radical opposition to war-

time restrictions on working conditions and democratic liberties. It ceased publication in 1944, by which time it was a faint shadow of its former self.

Paddy Trench wrote for *Torch* from strongly held political positions, but with journalist flair. He took a vigorously anti-imperialist view of the world war and of its likely repercussions in Europe, specifically in Britain and Ireland. He pointed out the contradictions of the Soviet Union's position at the start of the war, but later hailed the success of their troops in battles against Nazi forces. He reported on the inconsistencies of Irish policies on food and other supplies and denounced the profiteering of commercial interests arguing (*Torch*, 8 March, 1941) that 'private ownership of the grain and seed industries must go'. He made the case for better use of agricultural resources through co-operative farming. He insisted on the need for workers to continue fighting, despite war-time restrictions, for better wages and conditions, urging continuing support for the Labour Party's Constructive Programme for an Organised Nation of 1941, from which the party leadership was perceived to be deviating.

Trench saluted the memory of Trotsky, and specifically his internationalism, following his assassination in Mexico in September 1940. He feared possible consequences of the war for democracy, arguing that 'there may be a long and stern fight coming for the freedom of Ireland' (*Torch*, 16 November, 1940) and that 'drastic re-organisation of society must follow the war' (*Torch*, 2 November, 1940). For some others who also identified themselves as internationalist revolutionary socialists within the Labour Party, his stance was uncomfortably close to nationalism and *Torch* gave space in two editions in December 1940 to a Belfast-based Trotskyist, Bob Armstrong, to debate with Trench, who then accepted some of Armstrong's criticism.

Following Trench's later debate with the pseudonymous Rank-and-Filer (subsequently identified as Gearóid Ó Cuinnegáin, who became a leading figure in the ultra-nationalist right-wing grouping, Aiseirí), the editor commented, '*Torch* thinks discussion is all to the good. Some intolerant critics even want us not to publish Patrick Trench'. In the same spirit, the Dublin Constituencies Council later criticised *Torch* for failing 'to provide a forum for the open controversy which they believe is vital to the life of the movement'. But there were also readers and supporters of the paper who thought it should give less attention to polemics and theory, and more to the living and working conditions of working people (as was claimed, for example, in a contribution to the edition of 10 February, 1941). This view is also reflected in a history of the Labour Party which is rather dismissive of *Torch's* accommodation of the 'ideological musings' of Trench and other Trotskyists within the party.²⁰ *Torch*, like other

publications, had to deal with the war-time censors, who prohibited publication of any direct information about the conduct of the war either from the Allies' or Nazi Germany's perspective. Reports from the paper's Control Board²¹ give a flavour of the difficulties they faced, which included last-hour orders that certain articles not be published. For one edition in 1940 eight articles were disallowed, all questioning the National Defence Conference. Censorship regulations included a ban on any reporting of the Censor's actions and in December 1940 a letter from a reader, P. Staunton (pseudonym) about censorship was itself censored.

In July 1940, the Dublin Constituencies Council decided that, if the paper faced closure by the Censoring Authority, 'the final number would be a full revelation of what the Censor suppressed'. In his study of war-time censorship Ó Drisceoil lists among *Torch* items censored in 1941: criticism of the Unemployment Relief Works Bill; a reference to Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (banned in Ireland); an article, *Morals and the Class Struggle* (probably written by Trench); a copy of material from the Minneapolis Teamsters Union paper calling on workers to defend themselves.²² In June 1941 the office of the Controller of Censorship sent a notice to *Torch* stating that the article, *Brave Seamen run the Blockade*, had been stopped.²³ Owen Sheehy-Skeffington's carefully preserved papers in the National Library include the typescript of an intended – and presumably censored – *Torch* article by Trench, headlined *Petrol*, which argued for reducing dependence on imported fuel from US- or UK-controlled sources by increasing use of 'producer gas plants' to extract gas from turf and sewage, and offering 'the whole of the Irish petrol market [and] the use of all storage tanks' to the Soviet Russian oil exporter, ROP.

Torch faced more significant constraints on financial and political fronts than from censorship: sustaining the publication on weekly sales of 1,500-2,000 meant having to continually subsidise it and the paper's radical approach irked many within the Labour Party and its affiliated trade unions. The influence of the ITGWU, exercised by two union officials among three members of the editorial board, is credited with *Torch's* muted coverage of the Council of Action and of labour disputes, for example on Dublin trams. Cathal O'Shannon stepped aside after little more than a year as editor and the paper was in the hands of an acting editor, Joe McGlinchey, in 1940-41, as the crisis around the paper deepened.

By October 1941, when Desmond Ryan was *Torch* editor, the Dublin Constituencies Council of the Labour Party decided to suspend publication. The city branches recalled that the paper was founded 'to be an uncompromising Labour newspaper true to the principles of James

Connolly, and to be an ardent exponent of such principles'. They wanted a special 'suspensory' edition to be published, setting out in detail why publication was being stopped, principally due to the undue influence exerted on the paper by two or three individuals. Several statements and articles, including items on unemployment, Labour unity and the socialist republic, were prepared for this special edition; Paddy Trench is said to have been the main author of these.²⁴ Indeed, Trench contacted his brother, Terry, then working with Three Candles Press, seeking a quote for printing 1,400 copies.²⁵ But this special edition and the material prepared for it were never published as the two ITWGU members of the editorial board, Frank Robbins and Michael Mackin, wrested control of the paper and transferred responsibility for its publication to the party's Administrative Council.

Trench and Sheehy-Skeffington were close allies in these battles, though they were socialists of rather different colours. The two exchanged divergent views on many topics, with Skeffington holding to his pacifist and liberal-democratic principles and Trench arguing for revolutionary socialism. According to Owen's biographer, Andree Sheehy-Skeffington, her husband and Paddy Trench differed in many ways, though 'Skeff' appreciated Trench's 'philosophical turn of mind and his non-combative approach even to the idea of class war' (Sheehy-Skeffington 1991, pp74-75).²⁶ Trench recommending certain readings to Skeffington, including books on revolution and on history by C. L. R. James and by Trotsky, Felix Morrow on revolution and counter-revolution in Spain and John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World* on the Russian Revolution. It may have helped cement their friendship that both had experience of TB; Sheehy-Skeffington spent time in a sanatorium in Davos, Switzerland, in 1939, as Trench had done twice in the 1920s and was to do again in his last months in the 1940s.

Diarmuid Whelan, who catalogued the Sheehy-Skeffington papers for the National Library, wrote in this journal about the value of Owen Sheehy-Skeffington's papers as a source of information on many figures in the labour and socialist movement.²⁷ In Trench's case they are more especially valuable, as he left no papers of his own. The letters and other documents offer information and insight into Paddy Trench as a political activist and journalist, but also into his personal life and that of his wife Winifred, with whom Owen Sheehy-Skeffington continued to correspond after Paddy's death.

Trench's and Sheehy-Skeffington's joint involvement in the Labour Party ended in 1943 when, in January, Sheehy-Skeffington was expelled for his public criticism of the general elections nominations procedure and, a short time later, the Pearse Street Branch of the party,

of which he and Trench were founding members in late 1939, was 'dispersed'. In February 1943, Trench wrote to Sheehy-Skeffington that he did not wish to be a delegate to the Labour Party conference as it affected his health badly, and 'I want to get on with farming and study of everything politically and technically connected with the land'. By this time, however, he was contributing to US-based Trotskyist publications, writing often vividly descriptive accounts of life in war-time Ireland. He was directly in touch with the secretariat of the Fourth International and kept them informed on developments in Ireland. But when like-minded comrades came to form the Revolutionary Socialist Party as an Irish Trotskyist organisation in 1943-44, Trench was too ill to play an active part.

Trench had enrolled for science studies in Trinity College (his third enrolment in university, where he never finished a course) and worked as a technician in the college's zoology laboratory, preparing and analysing materials for the study of embryology. As part of this second phase of involvement in Trinity College, he took part in university debates, including one in 1941 on the motion, That this house approves of nationalism, with Cecil Lavery, later Attorney General, proposing, and Trench opposing (*Irish Times*, 6 March, 1941). He also set up a theory study group within Trinity College's Fabian Society in 1942-43. Production of food and use of land were abiding concerns for Trench, who set up as a market gardener first in Howth, specialising in lettuce, later in Strawberry Beds, Lucan, specialising in tomatoes. These priorities were, no doubt, much influenced by war-time conditions and the shortage of food. Trench wrote frequently for *Torch* on agriculture-related matters and later reviewed books on agriculture for *The Irish Times*. His contributions to *The Bell* in 1946, when Peadar O'Donnell was editor of the journal, included a defence of Darwinism as 'well rooted scientific theory' (April 1946) in response to a criticism published earlier, a review of a book on compost in agriculture (July 1946), and a review of a Fabian Society book on socialist agriculture (December 1946).

Advising Sheehy-Skeffington in February 1943 on vegetable gardening, he recommended John Innes compost to aid growth and added that he would have the formula for this compost, which gives 'spectacular results' in his garden notes in *The Irish Times* 'next week'. On the day in question (20 February, 1943), there is a gardening column in *The Irish Times* with the compost formula and signed by 'Solanum', a name referring to the genus of plants that includes potatoes, tomatoes and aubergine. Solanum signed over 160 gardening columns in the *Times Pictorial* over the period February 1942 to October 1947. Reflecting the war-time context but also Trench's personal interests, they included The Cabbage Tribe, Saving Seed,

Value of Compost, Grow More Onions, All About Tomatoes, Tomatoes Again, More About Tomatoes and Tips on Tomatoes. Many columns are very clearly attributable to Paddy Trench, and his first two columns (7 and 14 February, 1942) were illustrated with drawings signed 'PT'. There are also style elements – including the use of the first person – and references to specific places associated with Trench that characterise his columns. The column was sustained even when he was a patient in 1944-45 in the Richmond Hospital, Dublin. In December 1946 Paddy Trench left Ireland for the last time to go to a sanatorium in Davos. On 12 April, 1947, *Irish Times* editor R. M. (Bertie) Smyllie published a notice in his paper of the establishment of a fund to help pay Trench's medical expenses, describing him as 'well-known as a writer and as a painter'. Smyllie was chairman of the fund and Owen Sheehy-Skeffington was treasurer and clearly the most active participant. He maintained records of financial donations to the fund and of paintings and other items given to the Fund's auction held in April 1947 and conducted by the leading art-dealer, Victor Waddington.

Among the donors to the fund were Lord Killanin, solicitor Arthur Cox, restaurateur Louis Jammet, artists Harry Kernoff and Evie Hone, writers Samuel Beckett and Hubert Butler and historian P. S. O'Hegarty. The equal-largest single donation (£10, equivalent to a week's wages for a university lecturer) was sent to Smyllie on the same day the notice of the fund's establishment was published in *The Irish Times*, together with a note to say that the donor should not be named and the comment: 'I did not know "the boy" but knew his late father, "a decent man".' This came from Sean T. O Ceallaigh, President of Ireland. Soon after this appeal ran, Trench moved to a sanatorium in Agra, near Lugano in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, but catering mainly for German patients. There he was identified as suitable for treatment with streptomycin, becoming the first Irish person to have that treatment, he believed. The expensive drug was obtained for him and delivered to him with the help of an official in the Irish Department of External Affairs, a cousin of Sheehy-Skeffington, Conor O'Brien, later better-known as Conor Cruise O'Brien. It was also through O'Brien that Trench learned in Agra that he should not consider going to Britain because of his (incorrectly) presumed connections with the IRA. Trench condemned this as 'unjust' in a letter to Sheehy-Skeffington in December 1947 but he was by that time not fit to move anywhere. On 27 February, 1948, he died, aged 43.

TB was pervasive in Ireland at this time and a young doctor and former TB patient, Noel Browne, was appointed Minister for Health nine days before Trench's death, largely on the basis of his commitment to eradicate TB. Considering the presence of TB in so many

families it is remarkable that such individualised efforts were made to support Patrick Trench in his final illness. He appears to have been well-regarded by some in the cultural and political elite despite his revolutionary politics and his unorthodox personal and family life. He also had valuable connections and status that came with being the son of a Trinity College professor. He had a charm or charisma which his friends and political supporters particularly appreciated, though he was fairly quickly marginalised in the movement in which he most wanted to make a mark.

Notes

¹ Author's note: Patrick Trench was an uncle I never knew, as he died when I was two. My father, his younger brother, was distant from Patrick but found previously unknown details when he wrote his memoir in the 1990s. I knew little beyond a few, sometimes inaccurate, claims about Patrick Trench through my own involvement in socialist politics. Papers held in the National Library of Ireland, particularly those of Owen Sheehy-Skeffington, revealed many significant and unexpected elements. I made presentations on Patrick Trench to meetings of the Newspaper and Periodicals History Forum of Ireland (2016) and Irish Centre for Histories of Labour and Class (2018) and am grateful for responses and pointers from participants in those meetings.

² E.g. Crossey, C. & Monaghan, J., 1996. The Origins of Trotskyism in Ireland, *Revolutionary History*, vol. 6, no. 2/3, pp 4-48

³ Lysaght, D. R. O'C., (ed.) 2016. *Patrick Trench: Irish Socialist in the Second World War – Writings and speeches, 1939-1946*, Dublin: [no publisher named]

⁴ POUM was the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista). This particular link is very important to those of Trotskyist or libertarian orientation, as the memory and record of international pro-Republic participation in the Spanish war has been dominated by the pro-Soviet Union communist parties

⁵ White, L. 2009. Trench, Patrick McKenzie FitzJohn ('Paddy'), in J. McGuire & J. Quinn (eds.) *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, Dublin: Royal Irish Academy and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

⁶ Trench, C., 1996. *Nearly Ninety – Reminiscences*, Ballivor: The Hannon Press

⁷ From the Constitution of the Radical Club held in the National Library of Ireland

⁸ Trench, B., 2019. *Radical Club: a 1920s forum for 'progressive cultural activity'*. *History Ireland*, vol. 27, no. 5; pp43-46

⁹ Rosamond Jacob's diaries are in the National Library of Ireland, MS 32582; all quotes in this article attributed to Jacob are from these diaries

¹⁰ Y.O. can be fairly safely assumed to be a pseudonym for the editor of the *Irish Statesman*, 'AE', George Russell; he wrote for his publication under many pseudonyms

¹¹ Record kindly provided by Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre

¹² From Beckett letters at Trinity College Dublin library: MS 10402/81; I am grateful to Lin Clarke, grand-daughter of Bob Hilliard, for alerting me to this letter and to the London connection of Hilliard and Trench

¹³ Personal communication from Andrew Durgan

¹⁴ See Convery, D., 2014. *Brigadistas: the History and Memory of Irish Anti-Fascists in the Spanish Civil War*, PhD thesis, University College Cork; Durgan, A., 2004. *International Volunteers in the POUM Militias*, posted at <https://libcom.org/history/international-volunteers-poum-militias>;

Hall, C., 2009. 'Not Just Orwell' – the Independent Labour Party Volunteers and the Spanish Civil War, Warren & Pell; Høgsbjerg, C., 2016. 'The Fever and the Fret': C. L. R. James, the Spanish Civil War and the Writing of *The Black Jacobins*, *Critique – a Journal of Socialist Theory*, vol. 44, no. 1-2, pp 161-177

¹⁵ Translation by the present author

¹⁶ McLoughlin, B., 2007. *Left to the Wolves – Irish victims of Stalinist terror*, Dublin: Irish Academic Press, p 173; McLoughlin has also drawn on this research in Soviet Union archives for the 2020 book (co-author, Emmet O'Connor) *In Spanish Trenches – the minds and deeds of the Irish who fought for the Republic in the Spanish Civil War*, Dublin: UCD Press

¹⁷ Thalmann, C. and P., 1977. *Revolution für die Freiheit – Stationen eines Politischen Kampfes*, Moskau / Madrid / Paris, Association

¹⁸ He may have been in the Sanatorium Maurín where Orwell was a patient with battle wounds, along with other ILP people fighting in the POUM-led militia (see Orwell, G., 1938/1966. *Homage to Catalonia*, London: Penguin Books, p 190)

¹⁹ De Courcy Ireland, John, 1992. Correspondence: Reviewing Socialism in Derry and Dublin in the 1940s, *Saothar*, vol. 17, pp 11-3

²⁰ Púirséil, N., 2007. *The Irish Labour Party, 1922-73*, Dublin: UCD Press

²¹ Contained in Sheehy-Skeffington Papers at National Library of Ireland (SSP, NLI); see MS 40,507/4; 40,507/9; 40,502/2-5; 40,550/7; 40,512/1. All references in this article to exchanges between Trench and Sheehy-Skeffington, and mentions of Trench by Sheehy-Skeffington are taken from these papers.

²² O Drisceoil, D., 1996. *Censorship in Ireland, 1939-1945 – Neutrality, Politics and Society*, Cork: Cork University Press, p 251

²³ Censor's notice in SSP, NLI

²⁴ Note by Owen Sheehy-Skeffington in SSP, NLI

²⁵ From correspondence in Chalmers (Terry) Trench's personal papers

²⁶ Sheehy-Skeffington, A., 1991. *Skeff – a Life of Owen Sheehy-Skeffington, 1909-1970*, Dublin: Lilliput Press, pp 74-5

²⁷ Whelan, D., 2004, The Sheehy Skeffington Papers, *Saothar*, vol. 29, pp 109-11; Dr Whelan, with Ellen Murphy, compiled the index of Sheehy Skeffington Papers (additional), which include those of Owen Sheehy-Skeffington, available at <https://www.nli.ie/pdfs/mss%20lists/Sheehy%20Skeffington%20List%2082.pdf>