

The appearances of 1937 were deceptive. To judge by Norman's letters to his brother Howard, Harvard may indeed have been where his commitment to Communism peaked. Three long, angry letters, written when Norman was 28, depart radically from all the other 65 letters in this lively, genial correspondence. The three letters are polemical, cliché-ridden and in almost total conformity with the Party line. Of the second Trotskyite trial, then proceeding in Moscow, Norman wrote: "... as the damning evidence poured forth ... I had a sickening feeling ... so painful that I could hardly think of anything else." "The calm insolence with which [the accused] regarded the trust placed in them by the Soviet government was a nauseating spectacle." He rejoiced in the purge trials as an example of "Soviet justice." "Surely," he wrote Howard, with undue optimism, "the overwhelming exposure of Trotskyism ... will delight you."

Three quick letters from Howard proved him wrong! They made Norman "pretty sore," even "groggy," but did not stem the polemical flood. Even his penmanship deteriorated. The "party line," he explained, is "simply ... the necessity of the overthrow of capitalism [and] of the transitional dictatorship of the proletariat ..." "I have no sympathy with the view that opposition to this line ought to exist in the name of liberty." "The class struggle knows no parliamentary rules ..." "... the Soviet Union [is] the hope and pride of the working class." While not free of "bureaucracy," the Soviet Union "is such a magnificent achievement - the only real example of successful socialism."

Norman told his missionary brother that the church is "a waster of healthy emotions and ideals -." "... the real standard bearer for humanity for liberty and for man's rights to develop freely is communism -." He commended "... the visible withering away of the state which is going on" in the Soviet Union and the emergence of a "classless society."

The explanation for the tone of the three letters, so unlike anything else by Norman that I have read, may be that he had just learned of the death in Spain of Cornford, and also of E.C.B. Maclaurin, another close Cambridge friend. Concerning Maclaurin, he wrote his brother: "You and I are attuned so closely that you can imagine what I felt - a mixture of shame, pride and rage - shame at my own safe and easy life - pride in sharing a political cause and a love for justice and humanity in common with him and his kind, and rage at the complacency, and cunning, with which British, American and French 'democracy' regard German intervention [in Spain] as on a par with volunteers in the International Brigade"