

stopped. The reason, in the view of people like me at the time, was that the leadership were flushed with success but they couldn't face the long haul.

Previously, Cliff had criticised other revolutionary organisations for their incautious approach. He was particularly scathing about demands for a general strike tomorrow, if not today. When the Socialist Labour League became the Workers' Revolutionary Party, he said at a meeting: "They call themselves a party. I tell you something: I can walk into a tailor's shop and buy myself a field marshal's uniform, but it doesn't give me an army!" And yet, within a couple of years, what had you got? The SWP!

Now, the old caution — modesty, in a sense — had impressed me. These people had seemed serious and level-headed, in contrast to the pretentiousness and posturing of most of the rest of the "revolutionary" left. Of course, we didn't want to have to move slowly, but we recognised that, for all the industrial militancy, conditions in Britain at that time were not revolutionary or even pre-revolutionary, in the Trotskyist sense of the term. It was a serious, coldly realistic approach.

A crucial episode in the degeneration of IS was the crisis within the engineering fraction in 1974. We had quite a strong group of engineers in IS by then and Birmingham was the strongest branch. We worked though the CP-dominated Broad Left in the AEU, both locally and nationally. That was agreed IS policy. What happened was that the national Broad Left put forward a candidate for the position of National Organiser: Phil Higgs, the convenor of Rolls-Royce. Higgs was a hard-line Stalinist, but that wasn't the issue. The AEU was then in the process of a bitter left versus right battle and Higgs was clearly the most credible "left" candidate on offer. All the IS members of the Birmingham Broad Left put our names on his election address. Then we discovered that the IS leadership wanted us to put forward our own candidate — after we'd committed ourselves to supporting Higgs! They thought they could make the Great Leap Forward by splitting the left vote in the AEU!

There was enormous opposition to this move and the leadership organised a conference at the Holdsworth Hall in Manchester to which all members of the engineering fraction were invited. We hired a coach to go up there and the hall was packed. I moved the motion opposing standing a candidate and a leadership speaker put the other point of view. We won by an overwhelming majority so we thought the matter was settled once and for all. But was it, hell!

At the IS National Conference a special meeting of those delegates who were also members of the engineering fraction was held and the leadership got them to reverse the decision. We were outraged. This was Cliff's version of democratic centralism in action: the democracy bit is OK as long as the leadership gets its way but if not, then the centralism comes into play. So when the rank and file membership voted against standing a candidate, then Cliff organised a

vastly smaller number of engineers who were delegates to the National Conference to reverse the decision — using the thoroughly spurious argument that "National Conference is the supreme decision-making body of the organisation"! To this day, I'm not sure about the formal, constitutional correctness or otherwise of this ploy: but what I do know is that it was a thoroughly cynical manoeuvre that made a mockery of IS's pretences of "listening to the workers."

What happened next was that the vast majority of the engineering fraction made it quite clear that we would not be bound by that decision. So we had a crisis centred upon the most important area of the organisation's industrial work, the engineering fraction. The leadership sent Steve Jeffries to visit us and he made some very threatening noises about what would happen if we didn't fall into line. To this day it both amuses me and angers me when *Socialist Worker* goes on about lack of democracy within the Labour Party: Neil Kinnock and Tony Blair are mere amateurs at the game of dealing with dissidents when you've had experience of the likes of Cliff and Jeffries!

Jeffries' first port of call was Mick Rice, then a Lucas shop steward and regarded as the IS's leading figure in the Birmingham

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AEU Broad Left. We understood that after visiting Rice, Jeffries was intending to call at all our factories and expel us on the spot. So we had a meeting and I moved a resolution that any disciplinary action taken against Rice or any one of us would be regarded as applying to all of us: the "I am Spartacus" principle. It was passed unanimously.

So Steve Jeffries went round to people's homes and factories. I'm told he expelled someone in a pub! Eventually, we were all either expelled or resigned in protest. This didn't just happen in Birmingham, but nationally. I'm not sure whether such dramatic methods were used elsewhere, but, certainly, people who were not members of the engineering fraction resigned because the issue had come to symbolise the whole new dictatorial, centralised method of operating. We were never really an organised national opposition, but people like John Palmer, Jim Higgins and Roger Protz identified with us, and because they were national IS leaders, that gave our opposition a national resonance. We became the focus of a general feeling of discontent with Cliff's increasingly bureaucratic *modus operandi*.

Jim Higgins, the editor of *Socialist*

*Worker*, was sacked on the spot for no real reason. I went to the National Committee, although I wasn't a member, to protest. Roger Rosewell and Roger Protz were also up for expulsion because they had both applied for full-time positions within the NUJ without consulting the organisation. But Higgins had done no such thing. What Higgins and Protz (not so much Rosewell — and I say that, although I lay myself open to accusations of wanting to disown Rosewell with the benefit of hindsight) represented was the democratic, cautious, working-class tradition of the "old" IS.

We were not "anything goes" democrats or "pure" rank and filists or anarchists. We understood the need for constitutional norms and discipline. The Left Opposition (around Jo Quigley and Dave Hughes, influenced by *Workers' Fight* [the former Trotskyist Tendency of IS, expelled in December 1971]) was destructive. Something had to be done about them, although I wouldn't necessarily support the precise way they were booted out. But, in IS by 1975, the general mood (of the leadership and their supporters) had turned against anyone who didn't fall into line. The engineers were the focal point, but a lot of other people expressed similar views and were crucified.

We never had a formal faction. Palmer, Higgins, Duncan Hallas and myself had a meeting in London. Hallas claimed to be very sympathetic to us but he stayed with the leadership — he had his own personal reasons which were very sad and I don't want to go into them here.

After the expulsions and resignations, a fairly loose organisation emerged, calling itself the "Workers' League." I didn't join, although I wrote for their paper. By now I was very demoralised and I'd come to the conclusion that the traditions of Trotskyism were based on defeat and were going to be continually defeated. The prospect of success was too terrifying for someone like Cliff. Don't get me wrong: of course, Cliff wanted "success" in the sense of building a relatively large group and I've no doubt that, in the abstract, he still wants "success" in the sense of a workers' revolution. But people like him and Healy and Grant preferred a highly centralised, small group to the risks of a large influence in the class that might be difficult to control. The Trotskyist tradition is, I repeat, one of defeat. Possibly that's not fair to Leon Trotsky himself (Marx once said: "I am not a Marxist" when faced with the arid sectarians who used his name) but it's certainly true of the mainstream Healy/Grant/Cliff tradition of British "Trotskyism."

I'll give an example: when I was re-elected as a shop steward on to the District Committee, I was selling *Socialist Worker* openly, and widely known to be an IS member. And yet, by 1975, IS leadership supporters would ask "on what platform did he stand?", as though there must be something suspect about an open revolutionary winning a vote of the general working-class membership of a union. It was the same thing when the IS launched a genuine rank and file paper in response