

to a dock strike — I can't now remember where — in conjunction with the shop stewards, and it was a resounding success. Both the left faction and the Cliffites complained that the paper didn't carry any explanation of the nature of the state in capitalist society! I mean, what that says to me is that "revolutionaries" don't believe, fundamentally, that their ideas can win mass working-class support. And anything that seems to suggest the contrary is to be viewed with suspicion if not alarm.

Central to IS's success in the early '70s was the perception that the leadership *listened* to workers and their concerns. I don't doubt that at local level this was true and I've already described how stimulating that experience was for me as a new recruit in 1970 or thereabouts. But, with the benefit of hindsight, I now realise that a lot of that "listening to the workers" was highly sophisticated manipulation. In 1969 and '70 Cliff was going round listening to workers — he had no choice! But once we'd recruited a small but significant working-class base, Cliff saw no need to listen any more. He felt confident enough to show his true colours. Another example: Steve Jeffries said to me: "You've got to realise, we may not always operate through the trade unions." I thought at the time: A) What an absurd idea in a modern, industrialised society. Does he seriously believe that trade unions will become outmoded before the creation of socialism — *or even afterwards*? B) How cynical! People like me take trade unionism seriously and the IS claims to agree. Now, privately, you're telling me that the organisation is only playing with struggle in the unions: if so, why not say so openly, and see how that affects industrial recruitment!

Anyway, the engineering fraction and the people we'd gathered around us were all expelled or driven to resigning. The leadership predicted that we'd all disappear into trade union routinism or join the CP. But I'm proud to say that for long afterwards (in fact, until their own demise) the CP continued to treat us with the utmost suspicion. We may have broken with Cliff's version of "Trotskyism" but the CP still regarded us as "Trots", which is fine by me: I'm very proud of that, actually.

What are the lessons to be drawn from this experience of IS in the early '70s? Firstly, that here was a far-left organisation that appeared to be serious about building in the working class — which means, first and foremost, in the unions. As part of this process, the organisation said "we'll listen to rank and file militants, as well as preaching at them", which clearly set IS apart from the SLL and the IMG, for instance. In fact, that approach represented a fundamental break with the "Trotskyist" tradition of Healy and Grant. What wasn't apparent at the time was that Cliff was very much a part of that same tradition, but shrewd enough to conceal it for the time being. When they needed a working-class base Cliff and the leadership put on their "libertarian" facade (sometimes dressed up as "Luxemburgism") but, when the chips were down, they reverted to form, and a crude version of

*What Is To Be Done?* Leninism emerged. We were conned, in other words.

But there was, at one point, some real democracy imposed from below. Cliff couldn't stop that entirely. For instance, there was a disastrous experience during a strike at Chrysler when all the IS stewards were victimised, including Roger Kline. There was a big IS meeting in Manchester to discuss the lessons of this disaster and Cliff was destroyed in front of us all by a rank and file member, Roger Griffiths [an AEU shop steward at Lucas]. Cliff was arguing that IS members shouldn't be on District Committees of the AEU because that would inevitably draw them into being party to sell-out deals, as at Chrysler. Later on, of course, this ultra-left line developed into the SWP orthodoxy that members shouldn't even be shop stewards — the "pure" rank and file position! Roger came back at Cliff and said: "Do you realise that our rank and file industrial members need a safety net? They can't operate in isolation from the structures of the union as a whole. Our fault at Chrysler wasn't that we had a few members on the District Committee, but that we didn't *control* it. Left wingers — IS members — can *prevent* sell-outs by being on District Committees!" Cliff had no answer.

Jumping forward to the SWP of today: I've walked down the ramp in New Street [Birmingham] and noticed that the people selling *Socialist Worker* are getting younger and younger. There's nothing wrong with that in itself. Of course, you need a balance between youth and experience. I've already said that when I first joined IS the bulk of the members were young, white-collar workers or students — and none the worse for that. They were prepared to listen and debate ideas. Above all, they were prepared to get involved in the industrial struggle. The students flogged their guts out getting to grips with what must have been the utterly boring detail of things like productivity deals so that they could talk to workers on the factory gates as they sold the paper. You've got to admire people who were prepared to commit themselves like that, even if they were young and middle-class.

But these days the SWP doesn't seem to be part of the labour movement at all, and their young people don't seem to even know what the labour movement is. After we'd left, I was reliably informed that their members were instructed not to even speak to any of us. The people who were left weren't up to debating or arguing with us, and their new members had to be kept in ignorance of our existence — as though we'd never existed: true Stalinism.

The SWP, I understand, claim 8 or 9 thousand members now, but that's another lie. They never told the truth about membership in my day and their present claims are sheer lies. What you have now is a reversion to Healy/Grant style "party-building" with no regard to real influence in the class or the credibility you have amongst serious trade union militants. The SWP "tradition", in short, has fallen into the trap of all previous British "Trotskyist" sects. An example: after the invasion of Hungary, many CPers (the

best) moved towards the SLL. People like Peter Fryer and Brian Behan joined the SLL. They thought it represented a way forward — non-Stalinist but still left-wing. A more democratic, rank and file-orientated version of Leninism. The SLL proved to be a dead-end, and so did IS. It's the age-old struggle between the worker-militants who value democracy and practical experience, against the "professional revolutionaries" like Healy and Cliff who think they know best for the class. For a brief period, in the early '70s, IS seemed to be breaking away from that. But Cliff was determined to keep the old guard in control: when the workers threatened to take over, he re-asserted the control of the elite. I was, personally, tremendously bitter about this. I'd believed that IS was something different and I felt betrayed.

Partly it was due to Trotskyism's lack of roots in the working-class movement.

We were sometimes accused of "work-erism" and "economism" but I would emphatically deny those charges. For instance, we (the working-class members) had an extremely tough time on the Irish question, especially after the Birmingham pub bombings of 1974. I told the IS National Conference that *Socialist Worker* was considered in the factories to be an "IRA paper" and it was. But our working-class members in the factories stood their ground, and paid a considerable price in terms of loss of recruits, general unpopularity and, sometimes, physical assaults. Our lives would have been a lot easier if we *had* been soft on such issues. It was the same with other "difficult" issues. On women's rights: in one Birmingham factory the stewards had tried to stop a woman becoming a tool-setter, and we mobilised around that. We argued and fought around immigration controls. It's an absolute lie that we weren't interested in these questions, or that we deliberately avoided them. Sometimes a raw worker would come along to an IS meeting and he'd say: "I hate Dick Etheridge [the CP convenor at British Leyland, Longbridge]" and the IS leadership people would say: "He must be a great bloke, he hates Dick Etheridge." But it would turn out that this rank and file worker was a complete racist, and it would be us who'd point this out, and we'd say "no way can this guy be a member of IS." If anything, it was Cliff and the leadership who took an uncritical attitude towards the backwardness of raw workers prior to 1975.

State capitalism and the permanent arms economy theories were obviously important to us, but I have to be honest and say that very few — if any — workers joined IS at that time *because* of those theories. Most of us were broadly anti-Stalinist and anti-capitalist and the state-capitalist theory of the USSR and Eastern Europe seemed to fit the bill, putting the working class at the centre of the struggle for socialism. The CP's view that Russia and Eastern Europe were "socialist" was plainly nonsense. And the orthodox "Trotskyist" analysis of these states as "deformed" or "degenerated workers' states" was scarcely any better. We'd never heard of Shachtman's theory of bureaucratic collectivism, although I now understand