

that Cliff's theory is largely based upon that. If we'd heard about it, we'd certainly have been very interested. We were keen on that sort of thing — theory — despite all the sneers you hear now about us having been a bunch of "workerists."

In summary, I believe that in the years between 1970 and 1975 there was a real attempt to build a new, unique type of revolutionary organisation, based upon the working class. Cliff's background and knowledge obviously helped us up to a point but,

in the end, his commitment to an orthodox "Trotskyist" conception of the party scuppered our efforts. I truly believe that Cliff had the chance to break out of the far-left ghetto, and he blew it: he blew it because of his background and training. I still believe that the working class can make the revolution in Britain, but they'll need a very different sort of organisation from that envisaged by Cliff. Serious revolutionaries need to study the history of IS in the early '70s and draw the necessary conclusions. ■

## Comrades were "history's instruments"

By James D Young\*

IN YOUR editorial introduction to the contributions by Jim Higgins, Mike McGrath and James D. Young, you stress that "some of those who participate in this symposium have moved a long way from the politics they had in IS/SWP."

To set the record straight, I want to stress that I did not belong to IS or the SWP (as distinct from the older Socialist Review Group). Furthermore, I do not recall Jim Higgins attending any meetings before 1960 by which time I was on my way out with my friends David Prynn, Donna and Seymour Pappert and Mike Maddison. In 1957 I had a blazing row with Cliff, who, in his anxiety to keep a Group intact at any price, expressed his determination to tolerate Sidney Bidwell's 'racism.' Moreover, I, for one, have not at all 'moved a long way' from my socialist politics of the 1940s and 1950s. However, I am willing to admit that, having steeped myself in the history of the Second International, I feel myself spiritually closer to the ultra-Left of the admirable Second than to the Third International.

For a spell, I was a part of the close family group of Cliff and Kidron. I therefore remember my sense of moral revulsion when Cliff told me in 1957 or 1958 that he was lecturing to civil servants and army officers on 'communism in Eastern Europe' at the establishment's Foreign Office in his 'Neither Washington nor Moscow' guise as Yagel Gluckstein. He even showed me the letter of invitation. Moreover, he always boasted of his contacts in Israel and the money he got from South Africa. What was from my viewpoint fundamentally anti-socialist was that he used his money to bully and control the members of the Socialist Review Group. But because I knew too much, he made sure in later years that my books would be ignored in the publications of the IS/SWP. But I still feel a sense of moral outrage against Cliff and Kidron who shamelessly used comrades as 'history's instruments' without concern for the human consequences. I also recall Cliff and his wife visiting me in my home town

of Grangemouth in 1955. Although my father was in his last phase of work as a docker, Cliff sat at my father's table for three or four days without expressing a word of thanks for the hospitality he had been given. And he most certainly was not interested in my father's experiences as a docker and dignified, if militant, trade unionist. He did not exchange a word with him.

Comrades who remember me from the old Socialist Review Group days say that I was 'an angry young man'. As I had come out of a working-class family with deep roots in the Scottish labour movement, I had much to be angry about. My anger at what contemporary capitalism is doing to ordinary folk is now much colder and more calculating. My anger is, however, no less strong than it was in my youth; and it is better informed and I hope more dangerous to the status quo.

The real tragedy of the 1990s is that there is no recognition on the Marxist Left of what was lost after 1917 — for example, the noble libertarian and democratic traditions of the First and Second Internationals culminating in, I suppose, the murder of Leon Trotsky in 1940. As a historian of socialist and working-class movements, it seems to me that there are many parallels between 1940 and today. When Victor Serge paid his tribute to 'the Old Man', he identified problems that have re-emerged since the collapse of 'communism' in Russia and Eastern Europe: "As I write these lines, as names and faces crowd in on me, it occurs to me that this kind of man had to be extirpated, his whole tradition and generation, before the level of our time could be sufficiently lowered. Men like Trotsky suggest much too uncomfortably the human possibilities of the future to be allowed to survive in a time of sloth and reaction."

This takes us back into the world of Tony Cliff and Gerry Healy — for they, too, share a heavy responsibility for the weakness of the democratic militant Left at a time when we should be taking *giant* steps forward. By regarding working people — and their own cadres — as 'history's instruments' to be manipulated and cast aside by all-powerful leaders, Cliff, Healy and Grant have made a formidable contribution to allowing the right-

wing Labour 'leaders' to get away with blue murder under an increasingly blue rhetoric.

Therefore I am at one with Sean Matgamna and *Workers' Liberty* in their efforts to get socialism back on the agenda. But I have great reservations and objections to Sean's ideas in his article 'The class struggle is the decisive thing.' Of course, the defence of the Welfare State is crucial and critical; but Sean's critique of *Critique*, *Red Pepper* and (why not the pseudo-Marxist) *New Statesman* ignores the fact that they fulfil a human need. Moreover, in a more radical period of history than our own, all of these Marxist and non-Marxist magazines could play a vital role in reflecting the coming of what William Morris called 'the great change.' As Trotsky argued in the preface to his *History of the Russian Revolution*: "For decades the oppositional criticism is nothing more than a safety valve for mass dissatisfaction, a condition of the stability of the social structure. Such in principle, for example, was the significance of the Social-Democratic criticism." Our dilemma is that we are living through a gigantic counter-revolution in which the folk around magazines like *Critique* and *Workers' Liberty* do not even grasp the distinction between bourgeois nationalism and the need to defend the nationality of small oppressed nations. Hence your quite disgraceful, ignorant and witch-hunting 'review' of my biography of *John Maclean: Clydeside Socialist* (Clydeside Press, 1992).

Furthermore, what really worries me about Sean's article is the apparent anti-intellectualism. Was Marx's *Capital* a piece of academic work in the pejorative sense of that word? Or Peter Fryer's ongoing work on the origins of the racism of Marx and Engels? The major political criticism to be levelled at groups like the counterfeit 'academic' *Critique* and the University Institutes for the study of Marxism and Socialism is (1) that they encourage 'Marxist' careerism at the same time as (2) they create illusions about isolated and little communities of 'socialism' being able to survive in imperialist *Brit* universities increasingly devoted to the anti-humanist philosophy of 'free market forces.'

But there is still an urgent need for a socialist counter-culture rooted in working-class communities. There must also be the supportive space in which individuals can contribute to the battle of ideas by undertaking teaching, research and writing. At the moment the Brits' universities are suspect as centres of objective studies of capitalism in decline; and the real criticism of magazines like *Critique* is that they provide our 'free' educational institutions with a 'liberal' mask.

The tragedy of the moment is that the forces of sloth and reaction have reduced the still declining constituency of the Left to impotence. Despite the Cliffs, Healys and Grants, socialism will always depend on learning, imagination and intellect, not brute force. By despising and rubbishising the limited democracy of the past, the 'Left' have played a major role in allowing the counter-revolution that threatens to gobble up democratic education and the humanistic Welfare State. ■

\*James D Young, member of the Socialist Review Group in the 1950s, is a writer active in Scottish socialist politics