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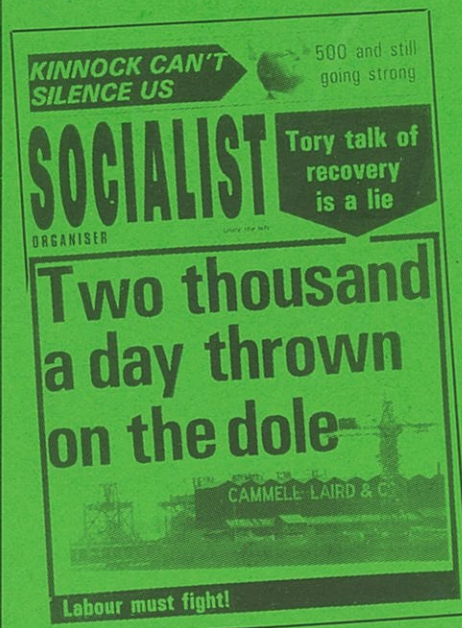
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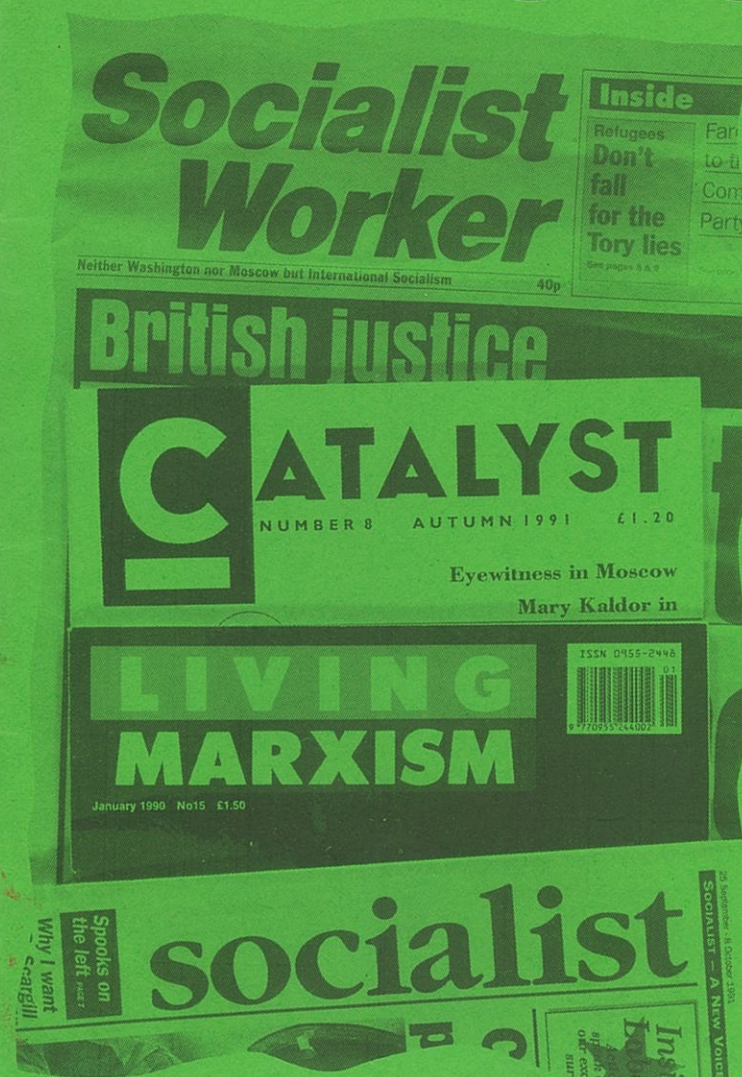
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A tragedy of the left



Socialist Worker and its splits

An Alliance for Workers' Liberty pamphlet

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The cure for a capitalist revolution to replace capitalism remains as strong as ever.

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The *Alouatta palliata* (Howler) was first seen in May 1959, in the Chiriquí District, Panama. It was taken to the Smithsonian Institution by the Smithsonian Institution, and is now in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

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Introduction: where the SWP came from

Small groups — and the biggest of the groups in Britain, the SWP, is still a small group — groups without implantation in the working class, have little power of cohesion when strong political divisions emerge. When members of a small organisation whose *raison d'être* is propaganda for certain ideas begin to disagree, especially on some emotion-charged issue, then there is little motive for the minority not to break away. Little or no disruption of work follows division; there is no coercion available to the majority except persuasion or moral pressure; in practice the majority is often keen to be shot of the minority; and the minority, given will and determination, can set up a new organisation making more congenial propaganda.

These are the structural reasons for the state of things on the left. There are, however, *turning points* in the history shaped by these basic conditions. The collapse in 1949-50 of the RCP, a group into which almost all British Trotskyists had been united for some five years, produced what became the *Militant*, the SWP, and the Healy WRP.

Almost in passing the conference outlawed all groupings in IS which had differences with the leadership across the board and not just on special issues. That is not how it was phrased, but that is what it meant, as those critics of the leadership who tried to stay in the organisation soon found out in the years following the "de-fusion" of Workers' Fight on 4 December 1971.

The conference decision produced immediately — we were expelled! — *Workers' Fight* Mark 2, forerunner of today's *Alliance for Workers' Liberty and Socialist Organiser*. In early 1973 a group which soon became the RCP and RCG was expelled. In 1975 the IS regime set up on 4 December 1971 purged a sizeable chunk of the cadre and leadership of IS as it had been on 4 December 1971! That "IS Opposition" soon disintegrated, but many of its leaders are active today around *Catalyst* magazine and the *socialist*

newspaper.

4 December 1971 was the point at which IS changed radically, and set off down the road to becoming what it is today, a caricature "toy-town Bolshevik" party.

How did IS get to that stage, having, for 20 years before 4 December 1971, devoted much of its energy to denouncing this sort of politics? After the RCP broke up in 1949-50, the Healy group was a serious organisation. The other two ex-RCP groups, the future *Militant* and SWP, were tenuous enterprises at best. The group around Cliff began in 1950 with about 70 people (the figure comes from one of the group's then joint secretaries) and published *Socialist Review*, a small duplicated (later printed) monthly, which lasted until 1962. When an anthology of articles by the group was put together in 1965, the editor explained that no articles before 1957 were weighty enough to merit reproduction, and he was not wrong. Reading a file of the paper you are left wondering why they bothered, or, bothering, why they did not make more of an effort. The paper made stodgy general socialist propaganda with a strong pacifist tinge to it. The group's central leader, Tony Cliff, was writing studies on the USSR satellites and on Mao's China, but they were books obviously written for the academic market.

The group seems to have had little life to it, and declined slowly through the '50s. They sold the magazine of the US Shachtman group, which did have intellectual life to it, but was slowly moving away from Leninist ideas.

By 1958, when the Healy group had grown into a considerable organisation, recruiting hundreds from the CP after the Russian suppression of the Hungarian revolution, the *Socialist Review* group numbered 20. So disgruntled with their existence did they become that a gathering of the group decided, with only two votes against — Tony Cliff and his wife, Chanie Rosenberg — to try to fuse with the Healy group (nothing came of it. Source: T. Cliff).

The decay was not just organisational. In 1950 the group subscribed to all the ideas of Leninism, differing from other Trotskyists only on their characterisation of the USSR. A decade later, they did not seem to know quite what they were.

Cliff, in his big pamphlet on Rosa Luxemburg, published in 1959, said that Lenin's ideas on organisation were not suitable for West European conditions. The group was a loose and variegated federation of individuals, with an incoherent and ill-defined but distinctive libertarian tinge to it, combined with a seeming commitment to the idea of an organic ripening towards socialism by the existing mass working class movement: the job of the revolutionary, said Cliff in *Luxemburg*, was to stay with organisations like the Labour Party all the way through until the socialist revolution.

An attempt to build any sort of Leninist organisation, said Cliff, even one like the SLL in 1959, which continued to work in the Labour Party, was just "toy-town Bolshevism". Polemical opposition to the Healyites' increasing emphasis on the "revolutionary party" lent momentum and emphasis to the *Socialist Review* group's evolution on this question.

When, from 1960, the group began to grow, recruiting CND youth, what grew was this federalist, vaguely libertarian, vaguely social-democratic, explicitly anti-Leninist hodge-podge. In the middle 1960s Cliff would, when talking to Leninist critics, tell us that "IS is centrist" [i.e. half-revolutionary, half-reformist], though he himself, he insisted, was a Bolshevik. The others, such as Michael Kidron, had no "Fourth Internationalist background", but he, Cliff, had, and that was why he remained a Bolshevik despite the group's "centrism"!

His writings said otherwise, and so did the group he (and his writings) had built, but he meant it, and it was important for the future. The mistake of his critics — and of some of his supporters — was to take seriously what he wrote polemically and sometimes

speculatively, or to serve as ideological buttressing for what he wanted to do at a given moment, when in fact he would casually ditch or re-write such arguments when external pressure, new opportunities or sheer caprice led him to want the opposite.

That would happen in the late '60s.

And yet, when all is said and done, the *Socialist Review*/IS group seemed the most hopeful organisation on the left by the early or middle 1960s. The Healy organisation, the SLL, was still much bigger, but rigidly Stalinist in structure, more and more destructively sectarian, and held in an unbreakable grip by men — in the first place Healy — who were going mad politically (and not only politically). By contrast, Cliff's group was alive, ostentatiously committed to maintain the freedom and the duty of its members to think for themselves, and led by people, in the first place Tony Cliff, who had not yet let their minds become pickled and petrified by dogmatism and the fear-based pseudo-political religiosity which saturated the SLL and made the rank and file of the SLL helpless against the whims of their all-controlling popes and cardinals.

More: in the 1950s Cliff would probably have said that he was trying to recast, redevelop, and refocus the fundamental ideas of the Lenin-Trotsky tradition in the new and unexpected conditions of a post-war world dominated by capitalist stabilisation and growth, and by Stalinist expansion in the more backward parts of the world. In his analysis of the USSR and of East Europe and China, and in the early editions of the *International Socialism* magazine (after 1960), he had tried to tackle some of this work. What went wrong?

What went wrong ultimately was that he lost heart and lapsed back into the sort of caricature "Leninism" he then despised. What went wrong also was the quality of Cliff's theoretical work, and Cliff's hints-and-half-thoughts method of work (see below). Buoyed up as he was by the conditions then, when the left was in flood-tide and there was no time for anything but to "organise", he abandoned all such concerns after 1968.

Any such theoretical re-working, re-elaboration and development of the Lenin-Trotsky tradition, such as Cliff set out to do in the '40s and '50s, is either freelance work which may, one day, help build a socialist organisation, or work done in conjunction with continuing to build an organisation. If the latter, then the other basic ideas and norms of the movement must be stubbornly held on to and defended while the problem areas are tackled and dismantled, or else everything is let go to pot and to seed — as the Cliff group went to seed in the 1950s and 1960s.

Much of Cliff's work never got beyond hints and half-thoughts. For example, he wrote an important article on the question of "substitutionism" — the fact of the Bolshevik party's progressive substitution of itself for the working class when the Russian Revolution became isolated — to mark the 20th anniversary of Leon Trotsky's death (an article heavily indebted to Isaac Deutscher's second volume on Trotsky, "The Prophet Unarmed", published 18 months earlier). This was a variant of the question: did Bolshevism generate Stalinism? Was the Bolshevik party's method of organisation a distinct and independent cause of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution? (This was a favourite thesis of "left" critics of the Bolsheviks).

Cliff — as the discussion in one of the articles in this collection establishes — did not manage to answer the question clearly one way or another, but, by hints and half-thoughts, he said, yes, Bolshevik organisational methods did contribute to the development of Stalinism, or may have done. But he did not decisively leave the ground of Bolshevism and take up position on another ground: he kept a foot in both camps — while building an organisation sharply committed to the idea that any sort of "Leninist party", any sort of "leadership", leads to "substitutionism".

And Cliff's theory of state capitalism was not a theory of state capitalism at all, as both state capitalism and capitalism had been theretofore understood by Marxists! Cliff locates the state capitalist character of the USSR's economy not in exchange values, or in any economic relationships at all, but in the competition of the Stalinist system with the West over the — potential — use values of the arms produced by the rival US-led and

USSR-led blocs. He crammed a society which, by his own description, is not capitalist, but a new form of society, neither capitalist nor socialist, into a confused collage of labels taken from historic — real — capitalist formations. Subjectively and arbitrarily he argued that the USSR was capitalist as a result of something — use value competition — common to every economy etc.

And the place of Cliff's "state capitalism" in history? He vehemently denies as against the workers' state theories — and against Max Shachtman's bureaucratic collectivism — that this system is "post-capitalist". Yet he himself defines it as at the very end, at the last extremity, of capitalist development before socialism. He was right against those who believed that Stalinism was some sort of "post-capitalism". But, in placing state capitalism at the very end of capitalist development, he was almost as wrong as them, almost as far away from the truth, about the place of Stalinism in history. And that is the decisive question for Marxists, underlying the dispute about labels.

One tip-off, unmistakable in itself, as to the quality of Cliff's work, was his treatment, in his study of Russia, of the ideas of Leon Trotsky. He does not really come to grips with what Trotsky is saying.

His "exposition" of Trotsky's ideas is a shoddy travesty, in fact a disloyal travesty. Instead of coming to grips with what Trotsky really says, which would have been one way of going forward theoretically, Cliff chose instead to polemicise against straw men on whom he put a mask with Trotsky's face. Serious work would have had to take Trotsky seriously, especially when refuting his ideas.

Much of Cliff's work is crude economic statistics-gathering passed off as politics (in the same way, I suppose, as his party's numbers-gathering to "build the party" is passed off now as politics). In his writings on the Middle East, for example, from the 1940s onwards, Cliff focuses more on the price of Middle East oil than on the issues motivating and dividing Jews and Arabs. That was his approach even when his political conclusions were closer to ours than to his own position today (that the Israeli Jewish nation does not have a right to exist) — see, for example, his pamphlet on the June 1967 war.

Cliff uses statistics and quotes like a Stalinist — to back up a preconceived thesis or objective. Thus, when he decided to be a "Leninist" again in 1968, he simply re-wrote a paragraph in the *Luxemburg* pamphlet, with neither explanation for the change nor even reworking of the exposition leading up to the changed conclusion. He was convinced now that Lenin had been right on the question of the party as against Rosa Luxemburg (and as against the Cliff of 1959!) He never explained himself even when visibly embarrassed and under pressure at internal meetings from people like the present writer. How or why he changed his mind remained a close secret. All the observer could know was that Cliff, the scourge of "toy-town Bolshevism", had switched tracks "back to Lenin".

Cliff's attempt in the 1950s and '60s to reanalyse reality led not to disciplined constructive development, or enhancement of the traditions or positions of the *Socialist Review* group started out with in 1950, but to the group's decay and disintegration both politically and organisationally in the 1950s, and then, in the 1960s, to incoherent political and organisational zig-zags. Cliff the "Bolshevik" found himself at the centre of a middle-class academic-student discussion club trained in anti-Leninism; then in 1968 he took a flying leap backwards, declared himself to be a Leninist again — and set about restructuring the organisation on centralist lines.

The group had grown rapidly in the mid-'60s, recruiting vaguely libertarian youth. It started a turn to the working class in 1965 around a pamphlet on the Labour government's incomes policy written by Colin Barker and Tony Cliff. Then came the youth revolt, and the giant demonstrations against the Vietnam War. IS grew steadily. To grow during the anti-Vietnam War movement they had to radically change the position which had differentiated them from the workers' statist Trotskyists in 1950 on the Korean War. In 1950 they had refused to take sides in the Korean war; now they joined the chants of praise to Ho Chi Minh on demonstrations against the Vietnam war. They were defencists!

By 1967, when the youth upsurge was already under way, the Labour Party left had collapsed. IS pulled out of the Labour Party, raggedly. Cliff, who used ideas as buttresses and counters, hastened to produce the necessary rationalisation. He wrote articles for their paper (renamed *Socialist Worker*, having been *Labour Worker* since 1962) proving that Labour had never been socialist in the first place! As if that was ever the reason why Trotskyists were in it! Keir Hardie, he now discovered, was a fake.

The decisive change governing all the changes in the group, and probably spurring Cliff's re-thinking, was the astonishing political suicide of the Healy SLL, which had overshadowed IS and against which much of IS's anti-Bolshevism was directed. In the late 1960s the SLL started to go mad.

It responded to the big anti-Vietnam war demonstration in October 1968, at which there were over 100,000 people, with a leaflet which explained "Why the SLL is not marching". The march, it said, was a conspiracy set up by the capitalist press to boost the prestige of the march's organisers on the left *at the expense of the great Marxist leaders of the SLL!*

The possibilities for growth facing IS, already now having some hundreds of members, mainly young enthusiastic middle class people, were dazzling in these circumstances.

The barrier to growth was the loose, messy federalist organisation built by people educated by Cliff to equate any centralised small revolutionary group with "toy-town Bolshevism" and "substitutionism". That now stood in Cliff's way. But not for long!

Early in 1968 Cliff and his close friends came out for "Leninism", and conducted a campaign that lasted for the rest of the year to "centralise" IS. It was an astonishing change. Many of Cliff's previous supporters denounced him as a traitor to libertarian socialism! Lots of them left. Others left the group for other reasons: an important group of workers in Manchester left in protest of IS's denunciation of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia!

The "de-fusion" conference of 4 December 1971 was the culmination of a long process of "tightening up" the IS group. The organisation was growing, the class struggle was burgeoning. A stropky democratic organisation inhibited the leadership, and constricted its room to manoeuvre.

So Cliff and his friends began to *substitute* themselves and the leading committee for the organisation. In 1971 it was still a volatile organisation, with many new members who did not know its history even two years back. It became necessary for Cliff (and with him the people who now publish *Catalyst*) to maintain prestige by, for example, denying that IS had ever had any other position than calling for British withdrawal from Northern Ireland, when in fact *Socialist Worker* had made propaganda in support of the good work of the troops when they were first put on the streets, in August 1969. (See Appendix 1 in this pamphlet).

The issue that brought it all to a head was the European Community. Britain was due to join the EC in January 1972, after much hesitation. All the revolutionary left groups had initially refused to take sides with either of the ruling-class factions, for or against EC entry. *IS* journal had said this in 1963, when Britain had previously attempted to join. "In or out of the Common Market, the problems facing the British labour movement are likely to be very much the same. Indeed the point is that the issues facing us are more similar to those facing European and American workers than at any time in the past 40 years". Even the Healyites had said: "What in fact has happened is that labour and trade union 'personalities' and journals have found themselves quite naturally taking sides on the question: what is best for British capitalism? In most cases that is not surprising, but it exposes the misleadership or lack of leadership of both the Right wing and the Tribune and other Lefts..."

But the Communist Party (following USSR foreign policy), the trade union

bureaucrats (comfortable in their cosy coexistence with the institutions of the British state), and the *Tribune* left (reflecting both the latter), all came out against the EC. Narrow and obtuse British nationalism was what their attitudes came down to.

After initially treating the nationalist left with contempt, the revolutionary groups bent under its pressure and, for fear of isolation from the workers influenced by the nationalist left, changed their positions, one after the other. They used slogans like "the Socialist United States of Europe" as a deodorant to cover the nationalist smell.

IS was the last to jump on the anti-EC bandwagon. It voted overwhelmingly at its 1970 conference against a proposal to oppose Common Market entry. At Easter 1971 a motion putting the same position — ambiguously worded in places, but presented and argued for as reiterating the position of previous years — was again overwhelmingly carried.

By June 1971, however, the IS leaders began to face the problem that the vocal militants in the labour movement influenced by the CP, by the Labour left, and by general chauvinism, were against the Common Market and would not take kindly to IS or anyone else who told them they should not be. Tony Cliff, a gifted intuitive politician, produced, with Chris Harman, *Theses on the Common Market*.

Those *Theses* argued, falsely, that Common Market entry represented an especial threat to the working class, but did not challenge the 1971 Conference position in principle. They were concerned with how, tactically, to relate to the anti-Market left. They proposed that IS members should put the old Trotskyist case, but "vote with the left". A substantial minority of the National Committee, including *Workers' Fight* members, opposed the *Theses*, but they were accepted.

Thereafter there was a rapid slide downhill. A longstanding position having been overturned under cover of jesuitical "reinterpretation" of the 1971 resolution, and the NC having been persuaded to authorise "flexibility" in voting, the leadership now had the bit between its teeth. Within a month, Duncan Hallas, the most supple-spined and least fastidious of the IS leadership, and then its National Secretary, was making *propaganda* in *Socialist Worker* in favour of "No to the Common Market".

Workers' Fight challenged the IS leaders' right to behave like that. We demanded a special conference. We needed support from one-fifth of the IS branches to get a recall conference — 23 branches. We got 23 — but no conference. The National Committee put an arbitrary deadline beyond which branches could not declare for the recall conference. The Executive Committee admitted to 22 branches endorsing our call. From the 23rd branch the National Secretary denied receiving notification. He was lying or the secretary of the branch was lying, and if we ask who gained, the balance of probability tips decisively against the EC. It was just a bit of commonplace trade union bureaucrats' chicanery...

Thereafter, the IS/SWP echoed and sometimes amplified the chauvinist "Broad Left" rejection of European unity. Today, a mere 20 years later, faced with an anti-European furor led by Margaret Thatcher, *SW* has swung back, and on Europe now sounds like *Socialist Organiser*!

The argument against a special conference in 1971 was that it would take time and effort that could ill be spared — though our proposal had been that one day of a weekend rally already scheduled for October 1971 be organised as a special conference. The IS leaders were soon to find time not only for a special conference, but for a six week campaign to prepare for it. Its purpose was to eject the *Workers' Fight* tendency from IS.

The leading tendency, controlling the organisation by machine manipulation and demagoguery, could no longer — so the experience of the fight on the Common Market convinced them — afford the luxury of free discussion and free debate. They had decided to grip the organisation firmly by the throat, and in the first place they gripped us by the throat. They called in "de-fusing", as if it were reversing the fusion of *Workers' Fight* and IS in 1968, though not more than one in six of the 1971 members of *Workers' Fight* had joined IS in that fusion. The campaign to expel *Workers' Fight* was the last dying

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I.S. and the revolutionary party

The explosion of political discussion in IS ignited by the sudden change of line by Cliff in favour of building the embryo of a 'revolutionary party' seemed six months ago to be the most hopeful thing on the British left. Many, seeing also the new-type IS positions on Vietnam and the Middle East — a radical break with the abstentionist attitude of the Group to this kind of struggle in the first 15 years of its existence — wondered whether the leadership might not even disavow other aspects of its past.

But actually the leadership **disavowed none of its past**. Cliff said he had **always** advocated a revolutionary party, and had in fact **always** been right on the issue. Some of us remembered differently. However, the important question was and is not the meting out of historical Justice — but whether or not a **real** turn had been made by Cliff and company towards the building of a revolutionary organisation after the model of Bolshevism and the Fourth International.

Democratic centralism was of course impossible given the level of consciousness and commitment in the Group. It was possible (just!) that the leadership intended to carry out a campaign to **transform** the members and methods of work. This question has in the last four months been answered decisively — in the negative. Those who last Autumn were making passionate speeches for 'democratic centralism' suddenly switched off the 'juice' once formal centralisation had gone through. A merely formal structural change had taken place in the Group, necessitated in the eyes of the leaders on technical grounds (1200 to organise! — see Cliff's document of June 1968) and presented in their usual style in a suitable demagogic sauce as 'Leninist democratic centralism'.

But Leninism is much more than an organisational formula — and blind empirical turns (such as the one which led to the 'new line') are the very anti thesis of Leninism. Moreover the leadership became terribly alarmed after the last conference by how seriously some of the members took the demagoguery. Whether or not they ever intended other than a change of **forms**, they have moved noticeably backwards in the last four months as if startled by their own boldness in having moved forward at all. The Group has merely achieved a loosely centralised version of its old self, which doesn't in any

A critique of Cliff on the Party. [Easter 1969]

sense approach democratic centralism. The methods of the leadership are adamantly anti-Leninist and remain what they were before the 'new turn'. In fact the Group is still stuck in the centrist mud — and going backwards.

The events since the November conference; the tremendous degree of confusion expressed in shifting positions, realignments and dramatic voltefaces; leaders mouthing new slogans one day, and venting hysterical spleen when their slightly critical followers remind them of the self-same slogans the next day; the loose use and misuse of terms like democratic centralism, bolshevism etc; the methods of the leadership against their opponents and even against mild and loyal critics (gossip, distortion and the arbitrary raising of organisational issues and deficiencies) — all this is the sign of a serious political and organisational crisis and ferment in the group.

What are the roots of the crisis? Why are the old leaders so politically mercurial on this question? Why does IS, the numerically most imposing revolutionary group in Britain, need to go through a deep convulsion to even arrive at an agreed conception of the sort of party it must become — or if it should become any sort of party? Those who said 'no party' (and reacted in horror and consternation to Cliff's proposals) were not only new people, but included also hard-core members.

The root of the crisis is that for many years IS has propagated an attitude of hostility to, scepticism regarding, and **theoretical rejection** of the idea of building a Leninist revolutionary party, and in particular of the conception of a small revolutionary socialist party functioning in any sort of centralised fashion.

The 'old guard' was **educated** in this view; the recent recruits were in practice educated by the normal mode of functioning of an organisation which drew (and draws) the practical conclusions from this theoretical attitude to the Leninist party. The "democratic centralism" proposals created such consternation because they implied an (unacknowledged) repudiation of the old theory and practice of the group. And the consternation continues because the leadership in no way changed or wants to change the **essence** of its approach. In fact it goes along happily with methods legitimate under the old theory but monstrous if one formally accepts the Leninist conception of the party and is nominally trying to lay its foundations. And because many of the members eg the 'Democratic Centralists' have taken seriously the need for a change in political content as well as form.

But the IS leadership insist on attempting to combine their old methods of operation with the declaration of a formal democratic centralist group (now with much less emphasis) and also with the declaration that they **haven't** changed their views on the party!

Thus the absence of an explanation of the past line of Cliff and Co. on the party, allied to half-hearted change in forms and the clash of various interpretations of democratic centralism (even **within** the outlines of general IS politics) results in the present political and organisational confusion and incoherence.

If the group was genuinely changing and the implications of the new formal politics were being effected, then it would be disruptive and muck-raking to make an issue of Cliff's past views. But in the given situation there is no other way forward. To advance, the theoretical roots of the present situation must first be uncovered: the crisis in the group will be resolved either by a genuine advance to a Leninist organisation, or by a consolidation of the present Cliffite back-sliding and the stabilisation of the group as a better organised centrist group.

"... The year 1919 ... The entire structure of European Imperialism tottered under the blows of the greatest mass struggles of the proletariat in history and when we daily expected the news of the proclamation of the soviet Republic in Germany, France, England, (and) in Italy. The word 'soviets' became terrifically popular. Everywhere these soviets were being organised. The bourgeoisie was at its wits' end. The year 1919 was the most critical year in the history of the European bourgeoisie. ... What were the premises for the proletarian revolution? The productive forces were fully mature, so were the class relations; the objective social role of the proletariat rendered the latter fully capable of conquering power and providing the necessary leadership. What was lacking? Lacking was the political premise; i.e. cognizance of the situation by the proletariat. Lacking was an organisation at the head of the proletariat, capable of utilising the situation for nothing else but the direct organisational and technical preparation of an uprising, of the overturn, the seizure of power and so forth — this is what was lacking." (L.D. Trotsky: The first five years of the Communist International, Vol.2 p.193.)

"Events have proved that without a party capable of directing the proletarian revolution, the revolution itself is rendered impossible. The proletariat cannot seize power by a spontaneous uprising. Even in highly industrialised and highly cultured Germany the spontaneous uprising of the workers in November 1918 only succeeded in transferring power to the hands of the bourgeoisie. One propertied class is able to seize the power that has been wrested from another propertied class because it is able to base itself upon its riches, its cultural level, and its innumerable connections with the old state apparatus. But there is nothing else that can serve the proletariat as a substitute for its own party." (L.D. Trotsky: Lessons of October)

THE CLASS PARTY OF THE PROLETARIAT In the succession of class societies the changeover from one system to another has taken a number of different forms. European Feudalism arose as a synthesis between the Germanic tribes and the decaying Roman Empire, which had always had an element (the Coloni) inside the slave-operated latifundia comparable to feudalism.

The bourgeoisie on the other hand grew up within the womb of feudalism, as part of a developing division of labour inside that society. It was subordinated to the overall rule of society by the feudalists and the absolute monarchists, but never as the main exploited class, the source of surplus produce. It was itself an auxiliary participant in that exploitation, a secondary appropriator of the sweat of the peasants. It developed organically, slowly ripening within feudalism's womb, only attacking the feudalists to eliminate all rivalry with and restrictions on itself.

This is true even in the Great French Revolution, where the development of their struggle for power went beyond the aims of the bourgeoisie proper and fell into the hands of super radicals, leaders of that group (the sans culottes) standing nearest to the modern proletariat — ie the Jacobins. The fact that the bourgeoisie developed their own means of production, their own forms, under the old system meant that they had leisure, material resources, etc., to generate their own class culture, and the possibility of sufficient education, independent of their feudal rivals, for the ripening of the objective conditions for their assumption of full power to be adequately reflected in their collective consciousness (though not fully rationally or consciously, and often clothed in mystical garb).

Trotsky wrote that he who possesses surplus product possesses the key to the Church, the Arts and the sciences. Before the bourgeoisie's revolution triumphed they didn't have the only key — but they certainly had a key. The bourgeoisie as a whole, already within feudalism the possessors of the new means of production, could benefit from a 'political' revolution which was not directly of their doing, not directly in their immediate control, such as the French or even the English.

'FOR THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION — POLITICS DOMINATES' With the proletariat it is altogether different. It remains a slave class right up to the point of taking power. The economic ripening that creates the necessary preconditions for its assumption of power, the growing socialisation of anarchic, individualistic capitalist production takes place organically when these means of production are still in the hands of the bourgeoisie. The role of the proletariat during this process is that of wage slaves, the basic exploited class.

(The degenerated and deformed workers' states are a special case, but, without going into details, all revolutionary marxists agree that the process there will only be completed when the masses of the proletariat take direct power — i.e. make a political revolution, but one with very big 'social' effects. It is this which separates the revolutionary marxists of all the different shades from the stalinists and all their Deutscherite fellow travellers.)

The super-exploitation of the colonial workers and peasants notwithstanding, even if that exploitation temporarily means an easing of the pressure on the West European and US proletariat, this remains true. For this reason Lenin said that for the proletarian revolution, politics dominates. That is, politics is the means for economic emancipation, for the proletariat's seizure of the means of production.

CLASS CULTURES As the last enslaved class and the first ruling class having no exploited class under it, and standing at the beginning of the transition to classless society, the development of the proletariat presents formerly unknown problems. Likewise in the question of consciousness. Because they were semi-conscious, if that, embodiments of a new class society's organic development, the bourgeoisie did not need to be clearly, rationally conscious of what they were doing. The English bourgeoisie thought they served the word of God, and the French bourgeoisie thought it was abstract Reason, Liberty, Democracy, Fraternity — no matter. They still blundered their way empirically towards a society which expressed their needs, of which they were only instinctively conscious.

The proletariat has no key to the arts, culture and science. This lack is more serious for the last class to establish its own rule than it would have been for the bourgeoisie. For us, consciousness is vital — the conscious participation of the masses of the proletariat based on a clear understanding of what is. No mystification, no blundering for the class that represents the first step of humanity out of class society.

But not only that. The proletariat in capitalist society, without the possibility of developing an independent culture, is not a blank page: inevitably it becomes pervaded with the ideas of the ruling class. Ideological chains buttress and make firm the economic chains that hold them down. This is even more true in times of relative social peace.

The growth and concentration of the means of production create the prerequisite for working class power and also cement and organise the

proletariat in gigantic concentrations, in a way impossible, for example, for peasants. The possibility thus exists for a transition to a higher stage, of the workers taking power. And the tidal movements, the crises inevitable because of the contradictions of capitalism, time after time in different countries propel the workers into the streets in a struggle for power, more or less consciously conducted. This struggle too flows inevitably, organically, from the nature of capitalism.

But it does not result in victory. Victory is **not inevitable**. As early as the Communist Manifesto the issue is stated clearly. The inevitable class struggle has two possible outcomes — transition to a higher stage as a result of the victory of the progressive class, or regression by way of anarchy and the mutual ruination of the contending classes. Nazi Germany and the present potential of world destruction can leave no doubt about this.

THE PROLETARIAN IDEOLOGY — MARXISM The battle for a favourable outcome from the current class struggle between bourgeois and proletarians thus becomes a question of a conscious fight. Bourgeois society represents a very high level of control and understanding by man of his environment. Thus man can begin to understand the laws of that environment — of society — created by all his own history. Certain layers within bourgeois society become aware of the issues, of the true nature of the modern class struggle that has dominated Europe and the world since the days when Marx and Engels wrote of the haunting spectre of Communism.

Paradoxically, it is not the proletariat, the subject of future history, that first becomes conscious of the situation. Not even a section of that class. It is sections of the bourgeois intelligentsia who become aware of the real nature of the molecular processes of society in general and modern society in particular.

It could hardly be otherwise. Understanding of the objective laws of nature (including society) could only be possible for those with full access to science, the highest of modern sciences, inevitably bourgeois science: the custodian of that science is not the proletariat but the bourgeois intelligentsia. This is a result of the separation of mental and manual labour in all class society.

By its nature, capitalist society prevents an objective view by the majority of the intelligentsia of their own doomed society. But the development of bourgeois science, particularly up to the mid-decades of the 19th century (while the bourgeoisie was still progressive) still had a portrayal of objective reality at its base, creating the possibility of a new synthesis which embodied the newly-discovered laws of social evolution. This provided the necessary understanding to enable the proletariat to rise above that crude religious, dreamers' socialism concocted out of half-remembered elements from its past and hostility to the existing system; and to imbue the social struggles imposed on the proletariat by the movements of a society with purpose and comprehension.

Thus the proletariat and its organic movement arises separately from scientific socialism. The 'mingling' of the two takes many forms, not all of them conducive to the most positive outcome. The openness of the proletariat to the influence of the science which is generalised from its own experience and which expresses its interests is dependent on the ebbs and flows of society. Marxism itself comes under attack, both open and subtle — attempts to tone it down, adulterate it with a wide variety of bourgeois trash, or distort and caricature it.

A MINORITY PARTY The proletariat is not a homogeneous class and even in the most favourable conditions only a limited section can become fully conscious. The Communist Manifesto, while pointing out that the Communists

had no interests apart from the proletariat, also added: "The Communists are, practically, the most progressive and resolute sections of the proletariat of all countries. ... They have, theoretically, the advantage over the great mass of the proletariat of understanding the line of advance, conditions and general results of the proletarian movement."

History, before the rise of the modern proletariat, had evolved that form of the organisation of an advanced section of a class known as a political party. The struggle to fuse the spontaneous movement of the working class with the ideology that represents its long term interests must take the form of a struggle for the organisation of the advanced layers of the class in a party that is acutely class-conscious and ideologically clear.

This party will be scientifically conscious and permanently organised for the proletarian class struggle: the regular army of the class which, en masse, can only approach revolutionary consciousness in sharp periods of crisis, and even then not permanently, scientifically. It must be militant on all three fronts of the class struggle: the economic (spontaneous), the political and the ideological. Here it must defend revolutionary marxism and combat the ideology that springs up in the working class movement under bourgeois influence. This party must be so organised and disciplined that it can fulfill its role of skeletal structure of the proletarian class in all its struggles, linking and co-ordinating the various aspects of the struggle. If it is to fulfill its tasks this party must fight continuously, consciously, to perfect itself, subordinating its organisational form to the tasks imposed by the rigorous nature and course of the struggle.

Not only must it fight vigorously against the bourgeoisie in the front line of the class struggle, but also against those inside or close to its own ranks who represent the class enemy or bend under its pressure. Indeed, its ability to overthrow the bourgeoisie will depend on a successful prosecution of the fight against all vacillation and all accommodation to the established order. **This party will conduct the struggle of the proletariat in a campaign spirit — to win.**

MARXISM AND THE BRITISH LABOUR MOVEMENT We exist in a country where all the inter-actions of the material environment have produced a peculiar type of workers' organisations: the trade unions and their political equivalent, reformism, bargaining within the bourgeois political set-up as an organic part of the system. The British labour movement grew up spontaneously in a way that has been compared to plants growing chaotically in an untended garden. Its history is a series of zigzags, at one time lurching to over-emphasis of the 'political' front of the struggle, then fetishising the economic struggle — **with a general, almost complete neglect of the struggle on the ideological front.**

Bolshevism, on the other hand, was born in the virgin territory of Russia; it was consciously built by revolutionaries who drew on the immense experience of the west European proletariat, including the negative aspects of this experience — opportunism and its rationale, revisionism. Bolshevism was the alternative type of labour movement to the apparently imposing but actually chaotic and fragmented organisations of Western Europe. Its essential basis was a conception, a la Engels, of the class struggle as a unity of three fronts, with the party as the consciousness and skeletal structure of the class in the various stages of the movement, co-ordinating the various aspects of what was essentially the same struggle.

Lenin's point about the ideological battle front being decisive can really be understood when we realise that the tremendous energy and decades-long activity of the British working class have resulted in no basic political gains, and

the economic victories are built on shifting sand. **The British working class, left to spontaneity through a peculiar combination of historical circumstances, has been utterly defeated ideologically. And this has conditioned everything else.**

On the ideological front we are the warriors of the proletariat. We wage the fight for... the merging of marxism with the spontaneous struggles of our class. And not only do we 'mingle' an existing marxism. Our primary possession, lying at the base of all the developed ideas of marxism, and the progenitor of all future developments of the theory in line with reality, is the marxist method. We must understand the dialectics of development. There is a necessary interaction and possible enrichment of the developing struggles by marxism and of marxism by the developing reality. Lenin said it very well: theory divorced from practice is sterile, and practice divorced from theory is blind.

We are faced not with a fresh proletariat as were the Bolsheviks, but with one that has a long history and is encrusted with a definite set of organisations, in every sense the victim of the conjuncture of its own blind activity and the relatively conscious bourgeois system. Without the class we are impotent; the class without marxism is doomed to defeat, however magnificent its strivings in crisis periods, however glorious its struggles. Spain proved that conclusively. If October 1917 was the positive demonstration of the need for a new type of workers' party, then the betrayal and defeat of the heroic Spanish — equal in their spontaneous activity to the Russian workers — teaches the same lesson negatively.

'THE CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP' The experience of the working class in Russia, Germany and Spain led the Trotskyist movement (as earlier the Communist International) to declare that only the construction of democratic centralist parties, fully grounded on the theory and practice of marxism/Leninism, could lead the class to power. It denounced those who said there could be an absolute maturity of the working class which would lead to an automatic transition to power. The most magnificent risings in Germany, Spain (and to some extent Britain) had been led to frustration and defeat by their own conservative apparatus. The fight therefore was to overcome the 'crisis of leadership' in the working class — to create parties that would embody the historical interests of the working class.

This is **our task**: this task will be completed or the working class in the future will go down to defeat in Britain as in Europe. There must be no equivocation. No easy, false optimism. The issues must be stated clearly. The outcome of the future battles will only be victory if the advanced layers can organise themselves into a class conscious marxist party.

OBJECTIONS TO LEADERSHIP Leadership arises within parties and class because of unevenness of development; all people haven't got the same training, the same experience, the same inclination, the same drive. We, when we develop a revolutionary party, aspire to have that party as a whole, as an organism, function as the leadership of the class. Likewise within the party, albeit on a higher level, there is a repetition of the unevenness. Here too unevenness of development means sharp differences in consciousness, political understanding and above all in serious commitment to the preparation for the proletarian revolution: certain people emerge who embody the best — the consciousness, the drive, the organisational propensities, necessary to the party. And of course there is a 'hierarchy' down to branch level. Even in groups (eg anarchist) where leadership is regarded as original sin, it can be seen how, de facto, certain people always dominate, either generally or in particular fields.

Unlike the anarchists, Bolsheviks recognise this. For us, consciousness is the vital spark, the beginning, and this means not only recognition that leadership will evolve but that leadership, the most conscious political centre, is the most important element. We recognise that specialisation and concentration develop people, that only by such serious revolutionary leadership can the revolutionary party keep abreast.

For us, leadership is not an evil — we frankly recognise that in this period of unevenness of development generally, there must be a division of function a delegation of authority, and this must be on the basis of ability.

Let the anarchists bemoan this; let the IS-ites deny it; let Ted Grant take refuge behind the SLL caricature — history shows the need for a special type of revolutionary proletarian party, organised in a special way. Let those who want guarantees from history shudder in fear lest a highly centralised party aid 'degeneration' in an unfavourable future: the organisation of single cells into multi-cellular bodies gave rise to the phenomenon of death. It also made life as we know it possible. Melancholics may bemoan that the organisation of the human body implies death: we content ourselves with observing that no body equals no life.

For us in politics the Bolshevik party is like the body. It also has the advantage that degeneration is only possible in certain highly unfavourable conditions. But modern history shows that no bolshevik-type party in times of crisis means no revolutionary life for the proletariat.

Side by side with the vulgar mechanical ideas of the Militant group — ideas which amount to crude determinism — we have the necessary concomitant: the implied idea of a full ripening of the working class. This leads to the practice of passive waiting for this ripening; which in turn leads to a disparagement of the role of conscious activity and of the Bolshevik combat party. (For these people the party exists, if at all, in the future; here and now it is non-existent even in embryo — how then can it exist in the future?) There are people, such as the Cliffites, who explore this attitude theoretically and appear to believe in some absolute ripeness. (See T. Cliff: IS, Autumn 1960.)

There are those who look back over the past 50 years and say: 'The workers were defeated — which proves "immaturity"; capitalism has developed tremendously since then, despite sharp and very costly downswings including World War 2; it has given birth to a virtual second Industrial Revolution, despite all the continuing contradictions — which proves that, in keeping with Marx's axiom that no social system disappears until all the productive forces contained within it are exhausted, it could not possibly have been overthrown.'

Those who take this line belong neither by temperament nor outlook to the work of preparing the proletarian revolution; at best they can be well-wishers and describers of the process: in no case can they join or build an organisation that proposes to march boldly onto the highway of history and play an active part.

They also distort history. They confuse and reverse cause and effect. The west European workers have not failed to take power because capitalism mystically contained within itself hidden seeds of future development, these seeds being protected by some guardian God even in times when capitalism was prostrate: — no. Rather, capitalism continues because the working class, impelled by the monstrous convulsions of capitalism (particularly and initially after World War I) revolted and were betrayed and delivered up to the reactionary butchers by their own renegade apparatus.

Neither was the degeneration in the USSR inevitable because the revolution

itself was a world-historic accident hopelessly premature and inescapably doomed, with the degeneration being aided and speeded by the structure of the Bolshevik Party. Rather, it was the absence of such democratic centralist marxist parties in the west, to fight the apparatus that was the product within the European labour movement of the past era of conservative accommodation to the status quo. This absence it was that ruined the European revolution, and left the successful revolution in Russia in isolation to degenerate and sink into the backward Russian mud.

That capitalism could pick itself up again, in time, out of the troughs that have included the betrayed and defeated proletarian revolts, is easily explainable by the nature of capitalism itself — in the nature of its development mechanism it experiences periodic booms and slumps, expressions of its inner contradictions. Beginning in 1914, the same forces led to such catastrophic events that the continued existence of the system was in question. We have briefly considered the results; the point is that the very depth of the crisis, is social wastage, played the same role for the system as the earlier, smaller blood-lettings, the slumps which cleared the way for a new boom each time.

That this also meant a continual, indeed very rapid development of technology is also in the nature of capitalism. At the cost of proletarian blood and degradation in ever-increasing quantities, capitalism has survived and sometimes 'prospered' in the last 40 years. It is difficult to think of a likely situation of inexorable crisis out of which west European capitalism, the most dynamic system ever, couldn't possibly survive.

But side by side with this the recurrence of crises where the overthrow of the system becomes again possible, is an inevitability. Only an Atomic war could remove this. The revolutionary party is thus the key. Those who deny the primacy of the combat party — in theory or in practice — work against that force which will be decisive for victory even in the most favourable circumstances.

THE DEMOCRATIC CENTRALIST PARTY The task therefore is to build a serious cadre organisation, an embryonic bolshevik party, as the immediate concrete step in the fight to reorganise the British labour movement.

But what is this party? Is it just an accidental sum of individuals who agree to propagate a common view of what should happen in the future? Or is it qualitatively different from what usually passes for a group or a party? We think it is. Let us examine it.

The democratic centralist party is conceived as an active, functioning organism. It is not a casual conglomeration of individuals and of so much democracy, so much centralism added up — but an organic fusion of these things into a higher unity. Each member is a cell, and there can be no dead, inactive cells. This aspect is absolutely vital both for centralised activity and for full democracy. A combat party, strongly organised, can have no dead-wood; its function is to prepare, organise and fight the class struggle; it is an army on the march (Lenin: "The column of steel"); its measure must be its will and ability to respond to events decisively and sharply.

This means that the central leadership, democratically elected and controlled, must be in full position, having been appointed as the highest active consciousness, to give directives which are binding. To do this effectively it must know exactly what resources are available — and where. Unless it knows as near as possible what forces it can muster, then even an approximate calculation (to be submitted to the test of practice) is not possible. That is, bolshevik-type activity is not possible. Centralism demands an active membership.

DEMOCRACY Likewise, democracy also demands an active membership. Inactive members, dead cells, poison a living organism — and they certainly poison a living bolshevik organisation's democratic life. **Only an organisation with a fully active membership can be fully and consistently democratic.** Look at all the organisations of the labour movement: some members are active, the majority are not. The leadership is only there by default and, through cliquism, is self-perpetuating. Differences in experience in organisations where only some members are active allow some groups to dominate, allow the passive members to be manipulated. How can passive members be directly involved enough, be sufficiently in tune, to appreciate all the issues?

The function of a democratic centralist party is to usher in the future. In the matter of an active membership it must **ante-date** that future. The bane of working class organisations is that the pressure of daily life under capitalism for the workers prevents full interest, full activity on their own behalf by the masses — even where formal democracy exists. Lenin after the revolution proposed an immediate shortening of the working day, irrespective of the economics involved, because he saw this block on the self-activity of the masses as a terrible barrier. We can observe its effects in the unions and Labour Party now...

The revolutionary bolshevik party, existing here and now with all the pressures of capitalism, must yet if it is to perform its function overcome the pressures sufficiently to enable it to have an active membership and a conscious democratic life. We must be able, **by our consciousness of our responsibilities**, to create such conditions for ourselves, ahead of the masses of the class, or we will never lead that class out of slavery. Only those who seriously devote their lives to socialism, who organise their lives around the single purpose of fighting for and with the class, can be revolutionary socialists of the vanguard. It is a hard logic, but one imposed by an equally hard reality. And it is this reality, with its tremendous pressures dragging us down to accommodation, that we must rise above and overcome.

Only a fully active membership can be an approach to a guarantee of full democracy. Members who are fighting actively know that every turn, every twist of the leadership, every lapse of the centre, has a direct bearing on themselves; they know that their local work may be ruined by the national leadership. Consequently they will be vitally concerned with what goes on. They will be compelled, as they value their party and its work, to keep everything under review, to decide, take a position on every issue, to the best of their ability.

FLEXIBILITY As we have seen, democratic centralism is not a measured quantity of both, but a dialectical fusion. A flexibility of both aspects is part of its structure: the flexibility of steel. Depending on the environment and the tasks which it consciously works out and sets itself, it is capable of the most rigid discipline (imposed by the political authority, established by the practical leadership of the centre) needed to fight the bourgeois state; and of the flexibility needed for the fullest possible democracy in the given situation.

It is capable of working underground **without** democracy, or in conditions of full democracy: full democracy prepares the way, educates and disciplines the organisation to enable it to transform its structure underground when forced to. The original Bolshevik Party is of course the classic example of this. It was able, from 1903 onwards, to respond organically to conditions where no democracy was possible and, when conditions permitted as in 1905, to expand like a great plant, broadening its base, generating the fullest democratic life. Then once again in 1907/08 it faced rigid entrenchment.

CENTRALISM Without centralism there can be no practical revolutionary activity. The function of a democratic centralist party is political action (or preparation for action). This must be as effective as possible, bringing the fullest weight of the whole party to bear on one given point which may be decisive. This is only possible with strong central leadership, closely connected with all the local branches by strong organisational sinews. It is only possible where dissenters accept a duty to carry out in practice majority decisions. And this in turn is only possible where such internal relations exist that decisions are arrived at democratically; that the minority's 'submission' is seen, **by both sides**, as really a submission to the test of events.

This is the second coefficient of democratic centralism. **No democracy equals no unanimity of action, no confidence in the directives of the leadership.** Trotsky compared democracy to oxygen — ie not a liberal fetish but a functional need for an organic party, which could be done without for a period, in exceptional conditions, **but at a cost.** Democracy, in decision, in equality of rights for majorities and minorities, in the complete 'neutrality' of the party machine in face of internal differences, plays the vital function of allowing the party to live and grow and adapt and change aspects of its line where necessary.

Minority rights play the vital function of preventing monolithicism of line; the 'leadership' isn't God-appointed, functioning with papal pretensions to infallibility, but its positions are submitted to experience and its abilities to practical demonstration. Minorities are loyally active dissenting (obviously within certain limits) groups which are potential alternatives: they are reserves, accepted and preserved as such by the party as a whole. The mutilation of this by the Communist Party was possible only by the installation of hacks who had no position except of dog-like regard for the slightest flicker of an eyelid by the Soviet bureaucracy — the Dutts, the Thorez, the Togliattis.

REVOLUTIONARY IDEOLOGY Lenin said: 'No revolutionary ideology means no revolutionary movement'. Without revolutionary Marxism there can be no consistent fight to build the democratic centralist party. Without a conscious fight for Marxism, necessarily the job of the highest pinnacle of the movement, the revolutionary centre, the would-be revolutionary party will find itself inevitably accommodating to the broad labour movement (and in the final analysis to capitalism) in practice, and it will find its supposedly 'revolutionary' ideas ever more compartmentalised, ever more 'prayer' like: ever more "a credo and not a guide to action".

The ideological front is the crucial battle-front in the laying of the foundations and the building up of the democratic centralist political organism. A vital part in maintaining the status quo of capitalism is played by traditional ideology: only a crude 'materialist' would minimise the importance of ideology in cementing the ties between masters and slaves in capitalist society. Engels pointed out that it was only in the field of ideology that men became aware of the conflicts that take place in the material world. It has been said many times that ideas assume the power of material forces when they grip the masses. And this does not apply only to correct ideas — it applies even more to illusions.

The prerequisite of a revolutionary party is to break decisively, clearly, with all bourgeois ideology. We must fight against all fully developed bourgeois ideology in general, and in the working class movement in particular we must fight that ideology which springs up spontaneously and which must be classified, after Lenin, as bourgeois — even when it includes elements of a naive 'socialism'. There are **no half measures here**, no 'neutrality', no abstentionism. **We either fight bourgeois ideology or we succumb to it.** This fight is first

conducted within the party. The party is the instrument for waging the struggle to break the ideological chains that help bind the proletariat to the bourgeoisie. The importance of this fight cannot be overstressed. It is the to-be-or-not-to-be for revolutionary politics.

CLIFF ON THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

"The most important observation to be made about every concrete analysis of forces is this: that such analyses cannot and must not be ends in themselves (unless one is writing a chapter of past history), and they only acquire significance if they serve to justify practical activity, an initiative of will. They show what are the points of least resistance, where the force of will can be applied most fruitfully; they suggest immediate tactical operations; they indicate how a campaign of political action can best be presented, what language will be best understood by the multitudes, etc. The decisive element in every situation is the force, permanently organised and pre-ordered over a long period, which can be advanced when one judges that the situation is favourable (and it is favourable only to the extent to which such a force exists and is full of fighting ardour); therefore the essential task is that of paying systematic and patient attention to forming and developing this force, rendering it ever more homogeneous, compact, conscious of itself..." (Antonio Gramsci: *The Modern Prince*, p. 173).

"...the presence of a revolutionary party, which renders to itself a clear account of the motive forces of the present epoch, and understands the exceptional role amongst them of a revolutionary class; which knows its inexhaustible, but unrevealed powers; which believes in that class and believes in itself; which knows the power of revolutionary method in an epoch of instability of all social relations; which is ready to employ that method and carry it through to the end — the presence of such a party represents a factor of incalculable historical importance." (Leon Trotsky: *Communism and Terrorism*, p. 18)

"... The great historical significance of Lenin's policy ... his policy of irreconcilable ideological demarcation, and, when necessary, split for the purpose of welding and tempering the core of the truly revolutionary party..." (Leon Trotsky: *The Permanent Revolution*, p. 49)

"The Bolshevik party has shown in action a combination of the highest revolutionary audacity and political realism. It has proved by experience that the alliance between the proletariat and the oppressed masses of the rural and urban petty-bourgeoisie is possible only through the political overthrow of the traditional petty-bourgeois parties. The Bolshevik Party has shown the entire world how to carry out armed insurrection and the seizure of power. Those who oppose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the Bolshevik leadership were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat. The Bolshevik Party achieved in the civil war the correct combination of military art and Marxist politics. Even if the Stalinist bureaucracy should succeed in destroying the economic foundations of the new society, the experience of planned economy under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party will have entered history for all time as one of the greatest teachings of mankind. This can only be ignored by bruised and offended sectarians who have turned their backs on the process of history."

"But this is not all. The Bolshevik Party was able to carry on its magnificent 'practical' work only because it illuminated all its steps with theory. Bolshevism did not create this theory: it was furnished by Marxism. But Marxism is the theory of movement, not of stagnation. Only events on a tremendous historical scale could enrich the theory itself. Bolshevism brought an invaluable contribution to Marxism in its analysis of the imperialist epoch as an epoch of wars and revolutions; of bourgeois democracy in an era of decaying capitalism; of the correlation between the general strike and the insurrection; of the role of the party, Soviets and trade unions in the period of proletarian revolution; in its theory of the Soviet state, of the economy of transition, of fascism and Bonapartism in the epoch of capitalist decline; finally in its analysis of the degeneration of the Bolshevik party itself and of the Soviet state. Let any other tendency be named that has added anything essential to the conclusions and generalisations of Bolshevism. ... All the varieties of intermediary groups (ILP of Great Britain, POUM and their like) adapt every week new haphazard fragments of Marx and Lenin to their current needs. They teach the workers nothing." (Leon Trotsky: *Stalinism and Bolshevism*, p. 18/19)

"Reactionary epochs like ours not only disintegrate and weaken the working class and its vanguard but also lower the general ideological level of the movement and throw political thinking back to stages long since passed through. In these conditions the task of the vanguard is above all not to let itself be carried along by the backward flow: it must swim against the current. If an unfavourable relation of forces prevents it from holding the positions it has won, it must at least retain its ideological positions, because in them is expressed the dearly-paid experience of the past. Fools will consider this policy 'sectarian'. Actually it is the only means of preparing for a new tremendous surge forward with the coming historical tide."

"Great political defeats provoke a reconsideration of values, generally occurring in two directions. On the one hand the true vanguard, enriched by the experience of defeat, defends with tooth and nail the heritage of revolutionary thought and on this basis attempts to educate new cadres for the mass struggle to come. On the other hand the routinists, centrists and dilettantes, frightened by defeat, do their best to destroy the authority of revolutionary tradition and go backward in their search for a 'New World'." (Leon Trotsky: *Stalinism & Bolshevism*, p. 4, New Park 1956 Ed.)

The IS nucleus was perhaps nowhere more guilty of the sort of theoretical backsliding from the ABC of communism described here by Trotsky than on the question of the Party — the cardinal question for revolutionaries who want not merely to comment on history but to actually take part in it and try to dominate it; not merely to laud proletarian spontaneity or play a fifth wheel to it — but to prepare in advance for it, to help transform it, and organise it so that it is not just an explosion but an effective self-controlled force to achieve the transformation of society.

The old (?) IS position on the party comes under the following headings:

A) The concept of the relationship between class and party as elaborated by Leninists in the light of the victory in Russia and the defeat in the west, was abandoned.

B) Cliff advocated an old fashioned social democratic concept of the party — based on Luxemburg's ideas, but 'Luxemburgist' in the worst and most unenlightened sense. Cliff abandoned, if he had ever understood, the Leninist

theory of the role of consciousness. And he distorted the experiences of history (eg Germany 1918) which underlie the theory of the party.

C) The role and type of Bolshevik leadership was rejected as 'substitutionism'; Leninist-type leadership was seen as necessarily leading to substitutionism; an organised party of this sort was presented as almost invariably conservative, and any demarcation of such a group from the class as reactionary. The conception extended into the consciousness and methods of the group as it was built.

D) Cliff's writings asserted a causal relationship between Bolshevik centralism and stalinism.

E) This was done largely by ignoring the ideas of the Trotskyist (Leninist) movement on these questions. Cliff jumped backwards half a century, glorified Luxemburg's mistakes and set out to emulate them. Occasionally distortions and even misquotations were resorted to.

In the past year, some of the above have been surreptitiously amended and removed from the record (eg the new passages in the 1968 edition of 'Luxemburg' which quietly substitute for old ones) in a manner which shows contempt for theory and therefore for the essential basis of a Leninist party, and which creates a massive incoherence in the line of the group. The use of certain Trotsky quotations in the exposition of the party question in the 'France' pamphlet which hark back to the Leninist theory of the party, also adds confusion when Cliff still insists that he was right on the party and particularly on substitutionism.

Whether these assertions are true or not can be checked by examining the article on **Substitutionism** and the 1959 edition of **Luxemburg**, Chapter 5. There is a serious difficulty in that Cliff does not very clearly expound all his views on the question — he confines himself to 'hints and half-thoughts' for much of the time. Attempting to draw the loose threads into a knot may be a little tedious — but it is necessary.

A MINORITY PARTY? Cliff, 'Luxemburg', p.49: "*Marx's statement (the proletarian movement is the self-conscious independent movement of the immense majority in the interests of the immense majority) and Lenin's, that revolutionary social democracy represents 'the Jacobins indissolubly connected with the organisation of the proletariat' are definitely contradictory.*"

Cliff goes on to caricature Lenin's remark (which in fact anticipated the actual connection that was to develop between the workers' organisation, soviets, and the communists in Russia) with talk about conscious minorities manipulating unconscious majorities. This (Lenin's idea? Or Cliff's caricature?) "*may be grafted onto 'socialism' only by killing the very essence of socialism, which is the collective control of the workers over their destiny.*"

What Lenin was actually in process of doing was to solve, to find in practice, the answer to a contradiction within the Communist Manifesto between the statement Cliff refers to and another, that 'the dominant ideology in any epoch is that of the ruling class'. A contradiction in real life also, because of the subordinate position of the workers. Lenin was in fact taking seriously another idea of Marx and Engels, that the class struggle takes place on the three fronts of economics, politics and ideology, and rigorously (in a Russia saturated with 'legal Marxism' where everyone, even liberals, were 'marxists' and proletarian marxists needed exceptional sharpness and consciousness) building an organisation dedicated to this conception of Engels' — an organisation which subordinated considerations such as size, and number of worker members, to a

clear revolutionary marxist line in the various types of circumstances that evolved: a small, elite, non-elective compact group with few workers when that was the only way to maintain the political line; and an expanded, open, mass elective group when that became compatible with maintaining a marxist line.

Lenin refined Marx's conception. Marx was correct insofar as every revolutionary situation calls forth the activity of the masses, often reaching advanced levels of consciousness. This is expressed in great class organs — soviets — which have the potential of power. Lenin's great merit was to solve in practice the problems posed by the bourgeois tendency to dominate the proletariat (directly or through accommodation to revisionism); to appreciate and fight for demarcation of the revolutionaries from the others and thus to prepare for the victory of the masses of the class when they moved.

Thus Cliff — in 1959! — caricatures Bolshevism.

Lest this be taken as faith in automatism of development, Cliff quotes Luxemburg on the impossibility of socialism without self-conscious activity of the masses of workers — "*Without the conscious will and the conscious action of the majority of the proletariat there can be no socialism*" (Luxemburg). But where is this going to come from in a society dominated by the ruling class? A sort of spontaneous ripening of consciousness, embodied in a general proletarian organisation, arrived at through the experience of the class? Presumably.

For Leninists such confusion (of pre-1914 social democracy, including Luxemburg) was clarified by understanding the relationship between the mass spontaneous activity of the class and the hard organised minority: the spontaneous action would, by definition, happen anyway; the point is to build to prepare for it, at the same time interacting with it as it developed. Luxemburg lost her life because she had not adequately done so.

Cliff presents Luxemburg's "possible" over-estimation of spontaneity and "possible" under-estimation of organisation as stemming from opposition to the entrenched German party bureaucracy. She counterposed spontaneity as the first step in revolution to reformist sterility. But, he says, she generalised from this truth so as to embrace the struggle as a whole.

He concludes: Rosa Luxemburg "perhaps" underestimated the role of a revolutionary party — but her strength lay in her complete confidence in the workers' historical initiative... "The really great historical merit of Rosa Luxemburg, in face of prevailing reformism, was to emphasise the most important power that could break the conservative crust — that of workers' spontaneity". While Luxemburg had some deficiencies, one should be "wary of concluding that her critics in the revolutionary movement, above all Lenin, were at every point nearer a correct, balanced Marxist analysis than she was". And — in opposing mass action to bureaucratic reformism she "may have bent the stick a little too far..." towards spontaneity.

Cliff never conceives of the need to build a non-bureaucratic organisation to help ensure the victory of the mass upsurge against the bureaucrats. He never appreciates Lenin's role in building such an organisation. He ignores the fight of the Bolsheviks against Mensheviks and Liquidators, and its importance for the workers' victory in 1917. Instead he sees that victory as all a matter of automatism, that the environment decreed it. Cliff criticises Luxemburg for underestimating the Labour bureaucracy — but at the same time he ignores and dismisses those who advocated a conscious fight for Marxist clarity against such forces; and adamantly defends Luxemburg

from even a hint of criticism for not having built an anti-bureaucratic revolutionary organisation earlier.

Under the heading 'AGAINST SECTARIANISM' Cliff discusses the relationship of Luxemburg and the left to the German social democracy.

"Emphatic as she was that the liberation of the working class can be carried out only by the working class itself, Luxemburg was impatient of all sectarian tendencies which expressed themselves in breakaways from the mass movement and mass organisations". (She failed to organise the fight because of her mechanistic conception of the armageddon that would raise the proletariat to clear out the social-democratic Augean stables. Yet Cliff quotes Engels to justify her. He equates minority leadership with sectarianism. SM). "She insisted despite her conflicts with it that revolutionaries should remain in the social democracy. Even after 1914, and after Liebknecht's expulsion (1916) from the Parliamentary group, she and Liebknecht stayed on the grounds that to break away would turn a revolutionary group into a sect". She persevered in this view when the Spartacusbund gained influence and was becoming quite a recognisable force as the war dragged on. Cliff approves! As the mass opposition movement, mass strikes with political implications, developed, Luxemburg, despite the pressure from the ranks, advocated remaining in the SPD, to stay and fight and thwart the policy of the majority at every step. When the Independent Social Democrats split in 1916-17 she went with them. Only after the outbreak of the 1918 November revolution does the Spartacusbund form the KPD.

Cliff, p. 53: "Rosa Luxemburg's reluctance to form an independent revolutionary party is quite often cited by Stalinists as a grave error and an important cause for the defeat of the German revolution of 1918. They argue that Lenin was opposed to the revolutionary lefts' adherence to the SPD and continuing association with Kautsky. There is no truth at all in this legend". [This passage has been expurgated from the 1968 edition]. Luxemburg, he says, made a clearer assessment than Lenin of Kautsky — and much earlier.

Lenin, July 1921: "We know the history of the Second International, its fall and bankruptcy. Do we not know that the great misfortune of the working class movement in Germany is that the break was not brought about before the war? This cost the lives of 20,000 workers..." Not only Stalinists considered it a grave error!

It is true that Luxemburg understood the German 'Centre' sooner than did Lenin. The point, however, is that Cliff is blithely dismissing the whole question as a Stalinist myth (and Stalinist myths are usually of a different order...) and therefore — in 1959 — refusing to draw the conclusions from the event — and the German events were decisive for the conception of the Party put out by the early Comintern. It was not a question of who said what first, but of a mature summing-up by Lenin and the C.I. of the defeat of the German revolution. When Cliff dismisses this he is dismissing not a Stalinist legend but the Leninist theory of the party, in its most finished form.

Thus we see Cliff endorsing with mild criticism Luxemburg's stress on spontaneity vs. reformist bureaucracy — in opposition to a policy of building a non-bureaucratic organisation to serve and prepare for the proletarian spontaneous struggles.

THE ROLE OF MARXISTS

In line with his endorsement of Luxemburg's attitude and practice in Germany,

Cliff in the 'Substitutionism' article reaches conclusions on the role of marxists which are legitimate only on the basis of: (1) a conception of a mechanistic development of the whole class, and (2) complete abandonment of any conception of bolshevik-type leadership.

"The role of marxists is to generalise the living evolving experience of the class struggle, to give a conscious expression to the instinctive drive of the working class to reorganise on a socialist basis".

Merely an expression? Not the development of the permanent consciousness of the class with the concomitant duty to lead? "Organised expression" — is this not substitutionism or sectarianism? Or merely pointless, when it will all happen anyway? The conclusion could only be (and it was for IS) passivity, a variety of the 'Blackboard socialism' model, with its casual whisper in the ear.

This line, which simply removes any leading role for a revolutionary party as conceived by Leninists (as opposed to the 'technical' party that Cliff acknowledges) is only rational on the basis of a vulgar evolutionary conception of a maturation of the class. It excludes sharp breaks and jumps in class development, the points where the activity of an organised Leninist combat party can be decisive. It ignores the fact that the working class en masse only sporadically reaches a peak of revolutionary activity.

In practice the line in 1959-60 said simply: wait around in the Labour Party

PARTY EMBRYO OR DISCUSSION GROUP

Following from this concept of the role of the party in relation to the class was a concept of the small party as only a variety of discussion group. And this is in fact largely what IS was until the last year or two.

"... The path to socialism is uncharted" (Cliff on Substitutionism). True — but isn't it indicated by the experiences of Russia and the ever recurring events like France's May? For Cliff in 1960 it obviously wasn't. Bolshevism was, apparently, merely a Russian experience, perhaps an unfortunate one or at any rate one teaching only negative lessons.

"Wide differences of strategy and tactics can and should exist in the revolutionary party. ... The alternative is the bureaucratised party or the sect with its 'leader'". How wide the differences? Organised in which way? Under democratic centralism — with clear internal demarcation? Obviously not. No — wide as a discussion group called 1960 IS. This could only be possible for an organisation where 'tactics' and 'strategy' are largely unconnected with practice. This formulation, without mention of democratic centralism (in a context which rejects it) excludes the possibility of a combat party type of group.

Cliff advocates no alternative here — merely a waiting game. But the sects and leaders arose not from lack of looseness but because of the erosion of revolutionary consciousness in a period of isolation, of tactical fetishism, etc. Even this has a positive side — the preservation of revolutionary ideas (even at the cost of dehydration) and preparation for the future: which IS conspicuously failed to do.

THE PARTY AND THE CLASS IDENTICAL

Cliff: "The party must be subordinate to the whole". He might as well have used the word 'identical' here. He advocates extreme open discussion of every party issue before the mass of the class — without qualification: "The freedom of discussion which exists in factory meetings which aims at unity of action after decisions are taken, should apply to the revolutionary party. This means (why?) the party is not the class — SM! that all discussion on basic issues of policy

should be discussed in the light of day, in the open press. Let the mass of workers take part in the discussion, put pressure on the party, its apparatus and leadership." Thus the party is seen not as a freely selected grouping of opinion, but as the forum of the class. And Cliff's final position in this article is therefore based on a conception of an almost homogeneous working class (seen as the way to overcome the danger of substitutionism) and of the possibility of some absolute condition of ripeness. "Let the mass of the workers ... put pressure on the party ..." — this happened favourably in 1917 in Russia. But when there is a downswing in consciousness?

Then the effect of such 'pressure' is reactionary, and how can it be overcome and counteracted unless the party stands alone, to a degree; clearly demarcated, capable of resisting the class enemy **even when the pressure is exerted through sections of the working class?** The point about a situation like 1917 when the masses were ahead is that it is exceptional — **highly exceptional**. The machine of a revolutionary party may tend towards conservatism in spontaneous upsurges — but it is normally the **vanguard**, normally massively in advance, precisely because it is the permanently organised force. And it must maintain itself from being dissolved in the class in times when the class is not in advance of it. The ability to combat bourgeois and reactionary ideology in the class is impossible if the party is to be open to pressure from it: do we allow the dockers when they march for Enoch Powell to put pressure on us? But then, Cliff lost sight completely of the battle on the ideological front. This battle must be fought, or the party as such will cease to exist.

In conditions like 1940 America, when a reneging, capitulating petty bourgeois section of the SWP wishes to appeal to the general public to put pressure on the party, a position such as Cliff's is reactionary....

In the long term the interests of the class and the party are identical. But 'normally' they must be separate — or the party will cease to operate in the interests of the workers and will operate **against** their interests.

REVOLUTION — BOURGEOIS AND PROLETARIAN

Nevertheless a party, apparently, is necessary (pp. 39-40, 'Luxemburg'). Cliff cites the spontaneous beginnings of 1789, 1905 and 1917, and their 'later' need for leadership. Amazingly he entirely **ignores** the cardinal **differences** between the bourgeois and proletarian revolutions in this juxtaposition of the French (bourgeois) and Russian (proletarian) revolutions. For him the conception of the party is merely one of a technical necessity and therefore it is essentially the same for both types of revolution: hence he fails to differentiate between them. (The 'France' pamphlet reproduces this quotation from 'Luxemburg' on the need to go beyond spontaneity. Into it is interpolated a quotation from Trotsky to differentiate the French and Russian revolutions. Yet another belated change.)

CLIFF DISCUSSES LENIN'S CONCEPTION

Lenin, Cliff stresses, faced an amorphous labour movement, unlike Luxemburg, who faced a bureaucratic one, and his views must be seen against this background. Faced with amorphousness in the labour movement Lenin stressed the need to supplement the flaring spontaneous workers' movement by "the consciousness and organisation of a party". Socialist theory must come from the outside and was "the only way the labour movement could

move directly to the struggle for socialism". The projected party would be made up of a highly centralised band of revolutionaries. He quotes Lenin on the need to organise the party from above down — "from the congress to the individual party organisation".

Stalinists and 'non-Stalinists' have quoted 'What is to be done?' as applicable **in toto** to all stages of development in all countries. "Lenin was far from these Leninists. He pointed to exaggerated formulations in 'What is to be done?' at the 2nd Congress: "The basic mistake of those who polemicise against 'What is to be done?' today is that they tear the work out of context of a definite past milieu, a definite, now already long past period of development of our party... 'What is to be done' polemicised correctly against Economism, and it is false to consider the contents of the pamphlet outside its connection with this task". Lenin was concerned that 'What is to be done?' should not be misused".

However, Lenin wasn't quite saying what Cliff makes him say.

"The basic mistake made by those who now criticise 'What is to be done?' is to treat the pamphlet apart from its connection with the concrete historical situation of a definite, and now long past, period in the development of our party. The mistake was strikingly demonstrated, for instance, by Parvus, (not to mention numerous Mensheviks) who, many years after the pamphlet appeared, wrote about its incorrect or exaggerated ideas on the subject of an organisation of professional revolutionaries.

"Today these statements look ridiculous, as if their authors want to dismiss a whole period in the development of our party, to dismiss gains which, in their time, had to be fought for, but which have long ago been consolidated and have served their purpose.

To maintain today that *Iskra* exaggerated (in 1901 and 1902!) the idea of an organisation of professional revolutionaries, is like reproaching the Japanese, after the Russo-Japanese war, for having exaggerated the strength of Russia's armed forces, for having prior to the war exaggerated the need to prepare for fighting those forces. To win victory the Japanese had to marshal all their forces against the probable maximum of Russian forces. Unfortunately, many of those who judge our Party are outsiders, who do not know the subject, who do not realise that today the idea of an organisation of professional revolutionaries has already scored a complete victory. That victory would have been impossible if this idea had not been pushed to the forefront at the time, if we had not 'exaggerated' so as to drive it home to people who were trying to prevent it from being realised.

"'What is to be Done' is a summary of *Iskra* tactics and *Iskra* organisational policy in 1901 and 1902. Precisely a 'summary', no more and no less. That will be clear to anyone who takes the trouble to go through the file of *Iskra* for 1901 and 1902. But to pass judgment on that summary without knowing *Iskra*'s struggle against the then dominant trend Economism, without understanding that struggle, is sheer idle talk. *Iskra* fought for an organisation of professional revolutionaries. It fought with especial vigour in 1901 and 1902, vanquished Economism, the then dominant trend, and finally created the organisation in 1903. It preserved it in the face of the subsequent split in the *Iskra* ranks and all the convulsions of the period of storm and stress; it preserved it intact from 1901-1902 to 1907.

"And now, when the fight for this organisation has long been won, when the seed has ripened and the harvest gathered, people come along and tell

us: 'You exaggerated the idea of an organisation of professional revolutionaries!' Is this not ridiculous?

"Take the whole pre-revolutionary period and the first two and a half years of the revolution (1905-07). Compare our Social Democratic Party during this whole period with the other parties in respect of unity, organisation and continuity of policy. You will have to admit that in this respect our Party is unquestionably superior to all the others — the Cadets, the Social Revolutionaries, etc. Before the revolution it drew up a programme which was formally accepted by all Social Democrats, and when changes were made in it there was no split over the programme. From 1903 to 1907 (formally from 1905 to 1906), the Social Democratic Party, despite the split in its ranks, gave the public the fullest information on the inner-party situation (minutes of the Second General Congress, the Third Bolshevik, and the Fourth General, or Stockholm, Congresses). Despite the split, the Social Democratic Party earlier than any of the other parties was able to take advantage of the temporary spell of freedom to build a legal organisation with an ideal democratic structure, an electoral system, and representation at congresses according to the number of organised members. You will not find this, even today, either in the Socialist-Revolutionary or the Cadet parties, though the latter is practically legal, is the best bourgeois party, and has incomparably greater funds, scope for using the press, and opportunities for legal activities than our Party. And take the elections to the second Duma, in which all parties participated — did they not clearly show the superior organisational unity of our Party and Duma group?

"The question arises, who accomplished, who brought into being this superior unity, solidarity, and stability of our Party? It was accomplished by the organisation of professional revolutionaries, to the building of which Iskra made the greatest contribution. Anyone who knows the Party's history well, anyone who has had a hand in building the Party, has but to glance at the delegate list of any of the groups at, say, the London Congress, in order to be convinced of this and notice at once that it is a list of the old membership, the central core that had worked hardest of all to build up the Party and make it what it is. Basically, of course, their success was due to the fact that the working class, whose best representatives built the Social Democratic Party, for objective economic reasons possesses a greater capacity for organisation than any other class in capitalist society. Without this condition an organisation of professional revolutionaries would be nothing more than a plaything, an adventure, a mere signboard. 'What is to be Done?' repeatedly emphasises this, pointing out that the organisation that it advocates has no meaning apart from its connection with the 'genuine revolutionary class that is spontaneously rising to struggle'. But the objective maximum ability of the proletariat to unite in a class is realised through living people, and only through definite forms of organisation. In the historical conditions that prevailed in Russia in 1900-05, no organisation other than Iskra could have created the Social Democratic Labour Party we now have. The professional revolutionary has played his part in the history of Russian proletarian socialism. No power on earth can undo this work, which has outgrown the narrow framework of the 'circles' of 1902-05. Nor can the significance of the gains already won be shaken by belated complaints that the militant tasks of the movement were exaggerated by those who at that time had to fight to ensure the correct way of accomplishing those tasks" (Lenin, Collected Works vol. 13).

For Marxists today (and in 1959) it was not enough to point to the peculiar conditions of Russia. That may explain origins — it is not a summary and nor

can it be a dismissal. The conscious method, the combat party and all that is Bolshevism, developed not in one stage but in a whole struggle for the Bolshevik Party (1902-1905/7-1912-1917) up to the Revolution and also after it. International Bolshevism rests on the whole body of writings and experience, of which 'What is to be Done?' is only a part. Cliff in 1959 did not seem aware of this. The essence did not depend on externals — and it was this essence that was 'exported'. It was this that Trotsky defended in the Fourth International. And it was this, in the 1959 context, that Cliff rejected — by false polemical methods. He drew conclusions which could only legitimately have been drawn from the full picture up to 1919 and beyond — on the basis of a one-sided and falsified version of 1904.

And the same on p. 93: "For Marxists in the advanced countries, Lenin's original position can much less serve as a guide than Rosa Luxemburg's, notwithstanding her overstatements on spontaneity. Rosa Luxemburg's conception of the structure of the revolutionary organisations — that they should be built from below up, on a consistently democratic basis — fits the needs of the workers' movement in the advanced countries much more closely than Lenin's conception of 1902-4, which was copied and given an extra bureaucratic twist by the stalinists the world over". (This passage has been partly expurgated in the 1968 edition).

1) To simply describe the Stalinists as 'copying' Lenin in 1902-4 is grotesque — it ignores Stalinism's essence: the misunderstanding is possibly significant for much of Cliff's attitudes.

2) It misunderstands the 1902 position and its connection with the whole evolution of Bolshevism and the international communist movement.

3) It is false to counterpose 1902 and later Bolshevism (as Lenin points out).

4) It is false to counterpose Lenin's views of 1902 to Luxemburg, without giving a rounded picture of Bolshevism as we now have a view of it. He winds up endorsing Luxemburg's views in their totality without ever really discussing Lenin's full views, in their totality.

STALINISM AND BOLSHEVISM

Cliff's writings of this period clearly saw and responded to a serious connection between Bolshevism and Stalinism. This is quite unambiguous in a whole series of nuances.

"However, if the state built by the Bolshevik Party reflected not only the will of the Party but of the total social reality in which the Bolsheviks had now found themselves, one should not draw the conclusion that there was no causal connection at all between Bolshevik centralism, based on a hierarchy of professional revolutionaries, and the Stalinism of the future" (emphasis SM).

What was this causal connection? Cliff is by no means lucid, merely connecting it in general with the phenomenon of 'unevenness'. "From this unevenness in the working class flows the great danger of an autonomous development of the party and its machine, till it becomes, instead of the servant of the class, its master. This unevenness is a main cause of the danger of substitutionism". "The history of Bolshevism prior to the revolution is eloquent with Lenin's struggle against this danger..." I.e. centralism and a machine amount to an inherent tendency to substitutionism?

But neither the party nor its machine ever became the master — Stalinism and Bolshevism were not twins. Stalinism did not flow evenly either from organic changes in Bolshevism, or from such changes in its role. It was its dialectical negation.

Thus when Cliff argued against any identification of Stalinism and Bolsh-

evism, in 1968, he confronted his own past and those miseducated by it.

CLIFF ON SUBSTITUTIONISM

Throughout Cliff's writings runs the thread that the danger of substitutionism arises from leadership, which arises from unevenness; the corrective to this is mass action, and therefore any minority leadership of the type necessary in the beginning for a small party that wants to be more than either a servicing agency or a commentator is ruled out and branded as a form of substitutionism. Cliff quotes figures from the high point of the 1905 revolution and from 1917 on party membership: he concludes that... small groups can't substitute for mass revolutionary parties! But there were and are other periods when the revolutionary organisation is condemned to smallness — and how they operate then is not unconnected with their prospects of serious growth in upsurges. The business with the quotation from Lenin above shows Cliff as not able to see Lenin's point on the connection between the foundations and the later development. Here he applied the same blindness to Britain, in what was meant as a rejoinder to the SLL. What his ideas implied was the most passive commentating and propaganda, while awaiting the class to move. The result of equating leadership with substitutionism, as the ideas percolated into the group, was drawn in IS journal no. 31 on ENV: the stewards "were — quite rightly — afraid of being 'adventuristic', but adventurism is better than nothing. In a way the stewards' legitimate fear of substituting themselves for the majority of the workers was, we feel, carried too far... at the most general level they saw only that substitutionism was a danger, but did not see that the theory of substitutionism (with which IS has often been identified) implies no rejection of the need for leadership" (Rosser and Barker). Unfortunately that is what it was interpreted as implying in the Group's practice.

This article on Substitutionism is a highly polished example of the permanent method of comrade Cliff, that is, eclecticism. No consistent analysis is rigorously adhered to: incoherence necessarily follows. He repeats the materialist analysis of how substitutionism took place: "Under such conditions the class base of the Bolshevik Party disintegrated — not because of some mistake in the policies of Bolshevism, not because of one or another conception of Bolshevism regarding the role of the party and its relation to the class — but because of mightier historical factors. The working class had become de-classed". End of the discussion? No! Cliff has more to add — speculations, hints and half-thoughts about some 'causal connections' — and some semi-anarchist conclusions, etc. etc. etc!

(LITERARY) REFORM OR REVOLUTION?

But in 'Luxemburg', edition '68, Cliff is a changed man! Nowhere is the result more startling than in the final paragraph of the chapter on Luxemburg and Lenin.

1959 edition: "For Marxists in advanced industrial countries, Lenin's original position can much less serve as a guide than Rosa Luxemburg's, notwithstanding her overstatements on the question of spontaneity".

1968 edition: "However, whatever the historical circumstances moulding Rosa's thoughts regarding organisation, these thoughts showed a great weakness in the German revolution of 1918-19".

Of course people change their minds. When Marxists do so it would be good to know why and how. The important thing here too is method. A Marxist's exposition is based on an analysis of the real world to which he brings

certain conceptions: his conclusions are drawn from this analysis. Thus the train of thought is clear, the reasoning and considerations are designed to expound, to convince. In this case there is a mystery: one and the same exposition (without supplement) leads to opposite conclusions. Why? How does Comrade Cliff reach his conclusions?

RESULTS AND REALITIES

Thus the IS attitude to the question of the Leninist Party has been a compendium of the attitudes of a senile 'Luxemburgism', of 'tailism' and contempt for the idea of organising a small propaganda group as a fighting propaganda group.

The current change — motivated allegedly on the May events in France but seemingly owing as much if not more to the happy coincidence that the Group had just too many members to make federalism comfortable: after all, what conclusions were drawn from the Belgian General Strike in 1961? — has resembled not so much a rectification of theory and practice by serious communists, as an exercise in the medieval art of palimpsestry.

An element in the incoherence is Comrade Harman's article in the current 'International Socialism' [reprinted in IS's 'Party and Class' pamphlet — Ed. 1977] — Clearly a muffled polemic with Cliff's old views — or rather a surreptitious attempt to bring 'the theory' of the group in line with what the leaders have been saying recently. It is not in any sense a signal for a change in methods of functioning and serves only as a decoration for a practice no different from the past in its essentials. It is therefore an academic exercise (useful, despite the strange silence on the Trotskyist movement's struggle to maintain the conception of the combat party against social democracy and Stalinism for 40 years). It clears up none of the practical or theoretical confusion: to do this plainly requires an attempt to relate the reality of the group to the theory that has moulded it.

The leadership continue as of old with as little understanding of the conscious Leninist approach: no attempt at serious planning of work; no conception of an activist rather than a tailist, accommodationist approach (e.g. Industry, VSC, Youth). IS remains a group without a programme, with only the ravaged remnants of the programme of Trotskyism patched with a few eclectic rags. It does not begin programmatically, objectively, and map out its tasks — it trims empirically, subjectively.

If Cliff's confusion on substitutionism etc. in 1960 was — essentially — the result of casual eclecticism, the 'new approach' to the Party today is similar: an assemblage of various conceptions and approaches without consistency and in danger of falling between all the stools. Neither a loose left social democrat-type group big enough to survive beyond the revival of left social democracy itself (probable after Labour's defeat), nor a Bolshevik cadre group tempered and organised and capable of entering into and changing, or gaining from, events — including such a revival when it develops. The leadership does not have a clear conception of the party that needs to be built. "Whether the IS group will by simple arithmetic progression grow into a revolutionary party, or whether the party will grow from a yet unformed group is not important for us" (Political Committee document, October 1968). On the contrary, it is vital. If the strategy is one which expects any big changes from the shift to come in the already organised labour movement (all experience in the past suggests that this the likely way a real mass revolutionary movement will develop in a country like Britain) rather than by arithmetical accretion, then this decrees the need for us to build a cadre movement to be able to in-

tervene. The lack of a clear strategy on the relationship of IS to the class and the organised labour movement is obvious. Consequently IS is being built as a loose, all-in type group. Lacking a strategy the leadership looks always for short cuts. Ironically the theorists of 'substitutionism' have in the last three years come close to substituting (as a fifth wheel) for the rank and file industrial movement, and now for a broad left social democratic one. This is only possible, however, in the absence of a genuine left social democratic grouping — i.e. for a very short period.

IS's growth is largely the result of a series of unpredictable events — e.g. the suicide of the SLL — which have left IS as the only contender in the field and thereby transformed it from a discussion group without a future into a potentially serious revolutionary organisation. IS is thus going through a crisis of identity. It is not often that it is given to organisations to make a sharp turn, a second dedication. IS has this opportunity. It has still not decided definitively which way it will go.

Sean Matgamna. Easter 1969.

I.S. and Marxist theory

IS's contempt for theory. I think this is very complex, and on the face of it would appear to most people very wrong. Shouldn't it be spelled out?

When Gerry Healy and Cliff debated a couple of years ago — so I'm told — Cliff made his most effective reply to this charge from Healy (by which Healy meant contempt for traditional theory) by pointing to the **original** work by the IS leadership and contrasting it with the SLL which had 'a wonderful press churning out nothing but reprints'. Cliff posed as the developer of theory, as the living Marxist as opposed to the Talmudist Healy.

I think we must understand that there is some truth in this claim. I believe it is one reason why IS can — or has so far — lurch along loosely, allowing (even now) a level of tolerance unthinkable in any other group. Often the 'tolerance' is sheer indifference. I agree, but that is only possible because IS has a pretty solid body of theory and is nearer than almost all the 'orthodox' Trotskyist groups to a 'party' in the sense of being a rounded 'whole' — however small and however far from being able to play the role of a revolutionary party in relation to the class. The 'orthodox' groups are all to a far greater extent than IS mere factions that have failed to become anything wider.

Yet I agree with the statement that IS has contempt for theory. Why? Because the IS theory is the possession of a handful of mandarins, who function as both a group mandarin and as a segment of normal academic Britain. What theory there is, is **their** theory: they are quite snobbish about it, it is written in a complex language, **making no concessions** to any possible members (such as workers) who are less educated than the mandarins. (There is even a hierarchy within the hierarchy: Mike Kidron... wrote a document on the 'Third World' a year or so ago that even the mandarin section of the National Committee openly said it couldn't decipher!).

For the non-initiated popularisations will do. For example, observe the method in Hallas' 'Socialist Worker' "propaganda" [see 'The Meaning of Marxism', by Duncan Hallas, where the series is collected — ed. 1977]. He is leading up to IS's theories about Russia. He reaches the stage where he has to define capital. He does so in such a way that he can easily, later on, produce the full Cliffite theory on Russia and so on — definitions and views whose "Marxism" is questioned by all but a tiny group of people, and which is easily demonstrated as not bearing a very obvious resemblance to the Marxism or Marx... But does it ever occur to Hallas to tell his readers this, present the arguments, let them judge? No! Ideological conmanship is better, smoother.

This is, of course, inseparable from a manipulationist conception of the organisation. The members don't **need** to know the theories — the leaders can be relied upon — and demagoguery and word-spinning phrasemongers like Cliff and Farmer can bridge the gap. It is in this sense that IS has contempt for theory — **contempt for the Marxist conception of theory and its necessary**

relationship to the organisation as a leaven and tool of the whole group. 'Contempt' is not the best expression for it, though, is it? The priestly caste most certainly have contempt — for the uninitiated — but their theory is their special treasure, their badge of rank, their test for membership of the inner elite. There **actually** is such open caste snobbery in IS — as you know... The second and real sense of IS's 'contempt for theory' is in their **use** of theory, the function of theory, the relationship of theory to practice: there is no connection between the two for IS. Do you know that in last week's debate at the National Committee Cliff said **and repeated** that principles and tactics **contradict** each other in real life!

This is **organically** connected, of course, with their mandarinism, with the derivation of much of their theory (in a raw state) from bourgeois sources. It is an esoteric knowledge — for if principles contradict tactics and practice, if theory is not a practical and necessary tool, if theory and practice are related only in the sense that theory sums up (in one way or another) past practice, perhaps vivified with a coat of impressionistic paint distilled from what's going on around at the time — but not in the sense that theory is the source of precepts to guide practice, to aid in the practical exploration of reality — why then, where is the **incentive** to spread theoretical knowledge? What is to prevent the polarisation of the organisation into the mandarins and the subjects of the demagogic manipulation of the mandarins and their lieutenants? What is to prevent the esoteric knowledge of the mandarins from being **just one** in intellectual 'in-group's defining characteristic, to be played with, juggled with, and to do all sorts of wonderful tricks with: after all it is very rarely tested since it doesn't relate to reality. Consider the state-capitalist theory (i.e. Cliff's version — I believe a Marxist theory of state capitalism, **applied rigorously**, would lead in an entirely different political direction to that of Cliff) relating to China, Korea, and to Vietnam. Take those three **together**, look at the history of the group — **there is no possible consistency**. The theory is one thing — reactions to Korea in 1950 and Vietnam in 1967 entirely a matter of mood, impressions, pressures etc. etc.

'The conscious method' — it is indeed the lowest common cliché among 'the groups' — our problem in IS is to show what it means. But the whole weight of the organisation, built in defiance of it, weighs down on us. It is a question of the conscious method **versus** the clever juggling of people in the central IS leadership who are subjectively revolutionaries — but entirely bourgeois in their method of thinking and conception of politics. These people are very like the Lovestoneites (the Right Opposition group in the USA) referred to by Cannon and Trotsky in 1940. I've recently come across some of their material — and Hallas could have written the anti-Trotskyist sections!

Do you know what I think our real problem is regarding this — say on the Common Market issue? It will help them to grow, to gain strength, to avoid losses, and therefore to be imposing enough to continue to be the 'natural' choice for raw leftists just coming on the scene — or at least a sizable section of them. Opportunists who are capable and have resources and who are fortunate enough not to have to face principled opponents with a sizable base and sizable resources can always do that — in times of normalcy. The tragedy is that what is being built is not a revolutionary organisation that can stand up under pressure when needed. That's why the sort of moral panic and collapse on Ireland in 1969 is so revealing and so significant for the understanding of IS.

[Excerpt from a document given limited internal circulation in *Workers' Fight*, 1971]

I.S. generates its own sectarian mirror image

Open letter for revolutionary regroupment

[September 1974]: Extracts.

In 1967 Workers Fight put out its first public statement, condemning the arid sectarian paralysis of the main 'Trotskyist' tendencies, the Socialist Labour League (now Workers Revolutionary Party) and the 'Militant', and calling for a Trotskyist Regroupment.

In the event it was the International Socialists who responded most aptly to the radicalisation at that time. Turning their face towards the working class and their politics towards the left, IS grew rapidly. Yet the old centrist leadership, round Cliff, have kept their hold and defeated and expelled successive oppositions. In the last three years (*since 1972*), particularly, IS has degenerated rapidly. Although IS still contains many excellent militants, internal political life has been squashed flat, and the contents of 'Socialist Worker' have become increasingly trivial and shallow. As with all centrist tendencies, strands of apparently revolutionary politics are inextricably mixed with reformism and capitulation to bourgeois ideological influence in the working class.

At the Rank and File conference on March 30th this year (1974), IS called for and secured the defeat of a resolution spelling out guidelines for a vigorous fight against racialism and for equality for women, and for a revolutionary attitude to nationalisation and workers' control — on the grounds that these demands were "too advanced", too far beyond the "minimal" policies a militant rank and file movement should have!

Unfortunately, if IS is willing to leave the more difficult questions of the class struggle aside for the moment, the capitalist class is not. Only weeks after IS had argued that the question of workers' control and workers' inquiries was far "too advanced", the British Steel Corporation announced 1000 redundancies on Teesside. The Shop Stewards' chairman, an IS National Committee member, had one answer: the sackings must be delayed until a government inquiry...

The IS leadership prefers to have 'rank and file' conferences and 'rank and file papers' held together by the most shallow organisational, trade-unionist approach, with a large dose of demagogy and pretence, rather than use its forces in any serious fight for revolutionary politics.

In any situation of sharp conflict, the IS leadership have shown themselves panic-stricken and dithering. When the war in Ireland against British imperialism spilled over into Britain, with the IRA bombing of the officers' mess at Aldershot barracks in February 1972, after the massacre of 13 unarmed civilians in Derry, 'Socialist Worker' retreated into condemnations of 'indiscriminate terrorism'. In 'Socialist Worker', the then National Secretary of IS branded himself and his organisation with infamy, with a classic statement of the panic and cowardice of a centrist in an imperialist country when faced with

the revolt of the colonial victims. A Guevara could say, echoing the sentiments of revolutionaries from time immemorial: "When ever death may surprise us, let it be welcome so long as other hands reach out to pick up the rifle that falls from our hands." Mr Hallas reversed this sentiment, appropriately, with the admonition to Irish freedom fighters that for every British soldier killed there were a hundred to take his place!

When a mass strike movement exploded in July 1972, against the jailing of the five dockers, IS nervously waited to see how the workers would move before IS would dare call for a General Strike.

IS may be able to expose the corruption and the hypocrisies of the ruling class — 'Socialist Worker' does it, often brilliantly, sometimes disgustingly (as when it named blackmail victims) — but for overthrowing the capitalist class IS can contribute nothing useful.

.....

BEFORE, DURING, and after the First World War, revolutionaries throughout the world revolted angrily against the parliamentary opportunism of the Social Democratic Parties. In their first rebellion, however, many of them simply turned the Social Democratic parliamentary opportunism inside out. They rejected the use of parliamentary elections as a platform for socialist ideas: wrongly, though, to be sure, the "one-sidedness" of those who negated parliamentarism and stressed only industrial direct action was immensely more healthy than the opportunism it reacted against.

Likewise, there is a danger today that the half-and-half politics of organisations like IS can produce a reaction towards "all or nothing" sectarianism. This danger is all the greater in that there is today no authoritative, theoretically-equipped leadership of the stature of the Russian Bolsheviks who led the Communist International through its 'infantile disorder' of ultra-leftism.

Marxist theory exists today in a shrivelled, undernourished state. The gaps opened up and the corruptions accumulated in decades of isolation and defeat must be made up for or cleared away; and enormous arrears must be made up in terms of serious analysis of new developments. Given this confused, unclear state of theory, there is a danger of sects forming, in this way: casting around for some "answer" to the opportunism of groups like IS, many comrades will seize on particular themes or aspects from the communist tradition. By vigorous proclamation of this or that aspect of Marxist doctrine, they will hope to protect themselves from the danger of similar opportunist degeneration. The development of critical thought, inside the larger revolutionary-left tendencies will lead only to a scattering of sects. As each sect is formed, it will need to justify itself, to establish distinctive positions, to develop polemics against all other tendencies and thus it will dig itself deeper into the sectarian ditch.

There are tremendous dangers involved in an immature over-reaction by way of simple negation: saying yes where IS says no and no where IS says yes; in a general revulsion against IS which reacts against that very aspect of IS which must be an irreplaceable part of the attitude and activity of any healthy revolutionary organisation — orientation to the working class, involvement with it as it now is, at all its levels, attempts to take to workers in their language and on their own terms (though not only on their terms) without purist fears of contamination or the childish belief that everything must be said, **always**.

True, IS is guilty of a narrow-minded workerism, of accommodating to

backwardness and bourgeois ideology within the working class, and of habitually taking a line of least resistance. True, IS's leaders who are neither cowards nor subjectively opposed to revolutionary politics, think they are being clever in avoiding contentious issues, in muting revolutionary politics rather than fight for them within the working class, as on Ireland, as on the openly opportunist change of line on the Common Market, etc. They believe such 'politicking' will allow them to 'build the party' — not understanding that a 'party' so built, whose influence outside its own ranks is based on evading working class backwardness, parochialism, etc, rather than fighting it, will be helpless in any crisis.

They do not learn from clear lessons, such as the CP's experience in gaining the 'leadership' of London's dockers by avoiding politics and sticking to bread and butter issues. When racism became an issue the CP leaders were swept aside in the sick tide that swept London's dockers into the street in support of Powell in 1968.

The IS leaders believe above all in a model of the party which neglects the ideological struggle in the working class, which builds "the party" not on a cadre basis but by recruiting a raw membership who are dominated by a few leaders and a highly undemocratic 'machine' of 'professional revolutionaries', relying heavily on demagoguery and manipulation. The main task of the 'party' is to help generalise the class struggle.

To IS's criminal neglect of the ideological struggle and its crude and narrow workerist tendency to avoid "needlessly complicating" its work by giving issues like the oppression of women, or Ireland, the stress in their work that the objective importance of these issues demands — can be counterposed an equally one-sided and no less wrong 'model' of the 'party'. It is an essentially sectarian model. Where IS downgrades the ideological struggle and non-trade-unionist struggles, the sectarians downgrade the class struggle itself. Inverting IS, some go so far as to shrug off as marginal or unimportant the task which is indeed central for revolutionaries — integrating into and helping to generalise the class struggle. IS can be criticised for approaching this task in a tailist and opportunist way. But the task remains vital! (It was the fact that IS was trying to relate to the working class that made the IS-WF regroupment possible in 1968).

It can be argued — and we believe truly — that IS's practice of neglecting the ideological struggle together with its narrow trade-unionist approach implies a spontaneist conception of socialist revolution. In response, the sectarians deny even the existence of a spontaneous tendency towards socialism in the working class in a country like Britain. Thus, completing the process of systematically inverting IS, they lock themselves into a propagandist, SPGB-ist, blackboard socialism model of the revolutionary party and of the socialist revolution.

Both the IS tail-endist, left-social-democratic model of the "the revolution" and its caricature propagandist inversion are wrong. Comrades who adopt the sectarian caricature, in part or in whole, can discredit and ultimately destroy themselves as revolutionaries — and in the short term they can only appear to vindicate the IS leadership. They pay IS the undeserved compliment of defining themselves by IS politics — negatively, but recognisably.

In reality there is a tendency towards spontaneous communist in the working class — certainly in a country like Britain. If it were not so, and socialism were possible only when sufficiently many workers had attended a full course in Marxism, then the programme of Marxism would be a hopeless utopia. The true statement in the Communist Manifesto that the ruling ideas in any society

are the ideas of the ruling class would simultaneously be a sentence of doom on communism — on all attempts to consciously challenge, as the working class must, that ruling class, and take control of society out of its hands. Marxism and Leninism recognise that if the struggle of the working class is generalised and intense enough, then tendencies towards spontaneous communism manifest themselves.* To deny it would be idiocy because history provides no lack of evidence — France May 1968 being the most important recent example. Even without the generations of socialist propaganda which certainly influenced events in France, capitalist society with its giant collectivist industry mechanically imposes collectivist notions on a working class when its revolt is powerful, widespread, and intense enough to demand general answers to the question: what do we do next? — and capitalism regularly drives the working class into such revolts. The uniformity of factory seizures, the creation of workers' councils, and so on, over many countries, despite gaps in time and large breaks in any continuous revolutionary tradition, further prove the point: though to look for 'pure' spontaneity, given so many decades of revolutionary propaganda, many be like looking for a sterilised, microbe-free instrument in normal atmospheric conditions.

What Leninism denies is that **scientific socialist consciousness** can arise spontaneously, that the communist-oriented revolts, 'generalised struggles' of the working class produce a stable scientific consciousness. It is the task of Marxists to build an organisation possessing that consciousness, disseminating it, trying to integrate itself into the proletariat **whatever its level of struggle** — in preparation for the time when there will be a congruence of the revolutionary tendencies of the working class, imposed by capitalism, and the scientifically derived programme of communism, based on an understanding of the laws of capitalism, including the laws of class struggle and of the innate revolutionary potential of the working class.

The task of communists is to fuse scientific socialism with the class struggle; the legitimate criticism of IS is that it tries to fuse mechanically, as an organisation, with the organic, spontaneous class struggle at its present level, by diluting or ditching much of its formal Marxism — failing to prepare a cadre and thus failing to prepare to lead the masses in revolt, when they revolt. To turn towards the working class is the essential elementary wisdom of proletarian revolutionists. The day-to-day working class struggle, even in a crude syndicalist form, is the raw material of communism: it is the task of revolutionaries to transmute it, now into elements of scientific socialism organised in a revolutionary party, as a means of later preparing the proletarian revolution. IS's concern with, even 'obsession' with the working class, would be right, on the conditions defined above — if IS's politics were different and if its conception of **what** to do regarding the working class and how to do it were different.

** IS's error is to take this general truth, valid for the whole class in action or for big sections of it, and to talk and act as if the same were true for limited strike action — indeed for all strike action, all bread and butter struggles. Thus tailendism. In reality while big and general mobilisations of the class have this tendency there is nothing inevitable or automatic about it transcending reformism; the big mobilisations of 1972 didn't.*

The crude inversion of IS which begins by deriding and scoffing at talk of 'generalising the class struggle' could never be right, can never lead to correct revolutionary practice, can never solve the central problem of communist practice and party-building: how to fuse our politics with the organic struggle of the working class. The sectarian model is the 31st or 51st draft of the model of the SPGB (founded 1904)... It is the stuff from which petty bourgeois cults and sects are made, cherishing their 'Theory' their 'programme', and their self-satisfied existence. However 'perfect' the programme of such a tendency, unless it is able to relate to the class and its struggles, it is arid and sterile. In certain historic periods, revolutionaries may be isolated through no fault of their own; but in Britain today the 'programme' of people who cannot relate to the working class or, even worse, who deny the primacy for revolutionaries of attempting to do so, is, *ipso facto*, an abortion; it is like a man with all his five senses missing.

The "Old IS" cadre break with Cliff

Open letter to the "I.S. Opposition"

[January 1976]

Comrades:

You have decided to leave IS. You have decided that it is impossible to argue both the line of IS in the working-class movement and your differences inside that organisation.

We agree with you. The internal regime of IS becomes tighter and more arbitrary as the stunts and antics of the leadership become more desperate and irrelevant.

You have declared your intention to establish yet another organisation and yet another paper on the left. While we welcome your decision to leave IS we do not see that you represent a clear alternative. We do not think that your criticisms of IS lay the basis for yet another small grouping on the fragmenting British left.

The Crisis and the Left

The working class movement is suffering a series of economic and ideological defeats. The £6 limit, the Chrysler debacle and the right wing push in the unions tell us that. At all levels of the trade union movement traditional militant and left leaderships are under attack. The bosses and the Labour government have won significant victories.

But the organisations and the combativity of the working class remain. They have not been smashed. However, the traditional leaderships do not have the answers that can maintain their dynamic, galvanise support in the branches and on the shop floor, and lead to a momentum of forward struggle.

All areas of struggle — wages, unemployment, the cuts — pose the need for more than militant battle. They pose the need for working class answers and alternatives to the crises and uncertainties of capitalism. The problem for revolutionaries is to unite a significant section of militants around those answers and alternatives, a section of workers who can lead workers in struggle and provide an alternative political answer to the false solutions of the reformists.

Significant sections of workers exist open to revolutionary answers and ideas. The problem is how to connect with them, how to lay the political base for a revolutionary workers' party. We say a new working class leadership can be equipped only by transitional politics (the method of the transitional programme), starting from particular struggles and battles of our class but posing the working-class alternative in sectional issues and in society as a whole.

We do not think those politics can be lifted from pamphlets of the late 1930s, although we stand squarely on the methodology of Trotsky's programme. We do not stand for abstract 'explanations' or sermonising on 'the

programme'. The questions of control, of who should pay, of where will the money come from, are sharply posed in struggle. Only our involvement in that struggle and the testing of our experience in vigorous political debate inside our organisation can develop transitional politics worthy of the name.

The decline of I.S.

The Great Pretenders of the 1960s and early 1970s were not up to this task. Despite the huff and puff they have not developed a cadre that can stand as a political alternative in the labour movement. The class never rallied to its waiting self-designated generals in the WRP. That does not surprise us. IS seemed to many to have more potential. Its entire method — the belief that increasingly generalised economic militancy could fill the 'vacuum on the left' with a new revolutionary leadership — rejected the idea of transitional politics. Hard militant battles now, and editorials on the rational socialist future, was the IS recipe.

In the years of direct action militancy against the Tory government, IS politics came close to expressing the mood and horizons of sizeable sections of militant workers. With some of you at the helm IS had its triumphant period. (Though it was triumphant only in terms of recruitment, and limited even in those terms, while the response to difficult political questions was as inadequate as ever).

Capitalism and the class struggle did not remain within the realms of IS politics and explanation. More militancy, more exposures, more vainglorious calls to build the International Socialists, attracted less and less workers. The organisation could not hold the morale and unity of its own membership. It could not tackle the problems of the real world, a Labour Government and increasing disunity and ideological confusion in the class.

The results we all know: the rank and file papers quietly expired, paper sales declined and membership turnover and demoralisation accelerated.

Faced with confusion and disarray in the class, IS has tried to turn its back on it all, to hope it will all just go away if snarled at loudly enough. It has searched for untainted, unscathed young workers to hate the Labour Party, to march the by-passes of England and build 'the party'. It is no serious alternative to workers — it is a laughable self-centred and conceited sect.

But what is your alternative?

The Traditions of I.S.

You state categorically that you see no need for you to question the traditions of IS. Even more, you claim to be their true representative. You scatter the sayings of Duncan Hallas throughout your statements as if he were part of your grouping — even if he does not realise it himself. Duncan Hallas' body may lie a' mouldering in Cottons Gardens — but his soul goes marching on in the ISO!

Your belief is that the Cottons Gardens leadership has betrayed its politics, that you will put them straight. You even talk of fusing with a healthier IS in the future!

You criticise IS's bureaucracy. But that bureaucracy was not born yesterday. The carnival of expulsions started when Workers' Fight was expelled in 1971. Workers' Fight wrote at the time:

"Certain comrades who opposed the official line on the Common Market

[Jim Higgins was one of them] support the expulsion on the grounds that it isn't 'safe' for them to organise 'polite' internal discussion when we're around. By helping to expel us they want to restore their own freedom to have the nice atmosphere of a debating club amongst the **leading circles**, by allowing the group machine in effect to outlaw organised tendencies which fight the official line.

"Some of these people have spent more than a decade (before IS rediscovered in 1968 that it did, after all, 'believe' in the need for a Leninist party) making cynical cracks about democratic centralism. They saw it as an entirely bureaucratic system. They still see it as a bureaucratic system — only now they see a 'use' for it, and are prepared to wield the hatchet. They have never understood that it is the democratic element of democratic centralism which is unique to Leninism, and not centralism, nor that it is possible to organise a relatively civilised democracy within a revolutionary organisation. They do not understand it now.

"If the Tendency [i.e. Workers' Fight] is expelled, that will mark a qualitative change in the growing machine's control of the group. It will set a precedent which they will use as they think fit..."

The bureaucracy is only the tip of the iceberg of IS politics. The IS leadership never understood the question: **what is a revolutionary party for?**

What the working class lacks is not organisation, but, first and foremost, **political awareness**. The working class is the most powerful class in history when it is **politically aware**, with clear aims and a clear strategy. It is utterly weak when — as is normal — it is befuddled by ruling class ideas in their various forms, including reformism.

A revolutionary party is based, first and foremost, on a persistent battle for clear Marxist understanding and against the influence of ruling class ideas. It always fights to focus workers' struggles **beyond** routine reformist aims — if possible, developing and generalising the struggle towards revolutionary aims; certainly, educating workers in the connection between each partial grievance and the overall communist programme.

That fight to go beyond reformism is the fight for transitional demands. Each demand, to the extent that the revolutionary party can really mobilise for that demand, is connected to more advanced demands, ever more clearly directed against the very foundations of the capitalist order.

The method of transitional demands is not a matter of formulas from a recipe book; it is a matter of being completely free from reformist routinism, being constantly on the look-out for the revolutionary potentialities in any struggle. It therefore needs a lively, critical-minded, politically educated membership in the revolutionary party.

Those three elements — the Leninist conception of a revolutionary party, as built on strict ideological clarity; a high level of democracy and political education in the party; and the method of the transitional programme — are all closely interconnected. **IS rejected all three long ago.**

I.S.'s version of 'the Party'

IS has always understood 'the party' just as a 'technical' machine for linking together militants. IS never understood what makes a proletarian communist party quite different from all other parties: the fact that it seeks to lead a revolution where the workers will be fully conscious of their aims, not foot soldiers in someone else's army. In IS's view, difficult political issues, like

Ireland or the EEC, can and should be ducked, if that helps to 'build the party'. No effort to link day-to-day struggles with revolutionary aims; just the recipe of 'more militancy' and abstract socialist propaganda. No effort to educate the membership; as long as they could sell papers and recruit more members, they would be 'building the party'.

The trouble is, this 'party' proves quite useless when the struggle breaks out of routine limits. When confrontation blew up in Ireland in August 1969, IS could only rely on British troops to solve the situation. When the armed struggle against imperialism invaded Britain in 1972, with the bombing of Aldershot barracks, IS panicked. Reversing the revolutionary declaration — "if I should die in struggle, a hundred will spring up in my place" — Socialist Worker advised Irish freedom fighters that it was no use killing British soldiers since for each one dead a hundred would take his place. When a rolling mass strike movement erupted against the Tory jailing of five dockers in 1972, Socialist Worker didn't get round to calling for a General Strike until after the return to work!

The IS leaders could see few militant workers to link together in the 1950s, and '60s, and thus contented themselves with a loose, 'libertarian', discussion-group IS. Today, they see thousands of militant workers. They do not recognise any **political** problems in fusing these militants into a revolutionary party. It is simply a matter of **organisation**, of finding this or that stunt to rope militants into 'the party'. Logically and naturally, they see those who raise political criticisms — yourselves, or ourselves, in the Left Faction — as annoying interferences in this serious and urgent business of 'building the party'.

There is one and the same methodology in the 'libertarian' IS of the 1960s and the bureaucratic IS of today — the methodology which sees the 'party' as first and foremost a **machine**, with politics and programme **secondary**.

To go back to 1974 IS, 1971 IS, or to 1967 IS, is no answer. Your leaders, using the 'Guardian' as their mouthpiece, mimic the world-weary tones of early-1960s IS. 'We will not build the 57th Trotskyist sect... we will perhaps produce a paper and see how it goes'. Comrades, you are a 'sect' by your numbers: if you follow IS methodology, you will become a sect by your politics — the sort of sect, like the early-1960s IS, that distinguishes itself by cynical and snobbish jibes at those more energetically and positively committed to building a revolutionary party.

1976 IS is the child of IS traditions. If you do not like the baby, it is no good wishing to turn the clock back to the happier time when it was conceived.

Your alternative to I.S.

You say — IS has done it, why can't we with the same politics? The scantiness of your conference documents depends on that argument. Hallas and cliff have done your homework, but omitted to read and understand it themselves. But the IS tradition of building the party was always flabby and opportunistic and you have never challenged that. You disagree with the tactics and antics of the leadership at present. You have never looked at the methodology, the idea of party building that IS based itself upon. You don't look at why IS rose and fell as it did.

You say that you fought for 'transitional politics' inside IS and failed. You know that is a lie. Occasionally the words 'transitional politics' were to be found in your documents, never explained and never fought for. They meant different things to different sections of your membership. Primarily, your

appeal was to those who, quite healthily, stood for internal democracy, against sudden leadership twists and turns, and for protecting any fledgling rank and file movement from the devastating embrace of the IS industrial department.

You had few areas of common politics to offer as an alternative. Transitional politics was a mention, not a coherent political platform.

Where does the I-CL stand on your positions?

Where IS has turned its back on the class in disarray, searching for untainted militant workers, we think your politics have a marked tendency to accommodate to the confusion and problems of the working class.

1. **Participation.** We cannot agree with you that the participation schemes of Chrysler and Leyland (deliberately put forward to break the independence of the shop stewards) should be cooperated with in any way by revolutionaries. Where workers vote to accept (and we recognise that you, too, would vote against acceptance) revolutionaries must stay and build the independence of shop floor organisations from all decisions of management and their flunkies. Attempts to 'break it from the inside', to 'act as a spy', can only build up the credibility of these schemes. Revolutionaries must stand clearly against this stream, as the only way to be proved right in practice and in the long run.

2. **The Broad Left.** While rejecting the unprepared and unpolitical exit of IS from the Broad Left in the AUEW, it is our view that your comrades have not had a clear perspective of breaking significant groups of workers from the Broad Left's electoral orientation and dominance. The role of Bob Wright over Chrysler underlines more than ever the urgency of clear political independence from the Broad Left, coupled with maximum unity in genuine battles against the Right. We do not consider the ISO capable of developing that position and orientation.

3. **The Monopoly of Foreign Trade.** We have noticed this slogan wafting unannounced and unexplained into your documents and conversation.

Neither the ex-Workers' Fight nor the ex-Workers' Power comrades in the fused I-CL ever treated the Transitional Programme as holy writ or a fetish. On the contrary, we used and use such demand as, for example, the sliding scale of wages, in a concrete context. Workers' Fight, indeed, rejected the sliding scale of wages in a different situation in 1972-3. The I-CL uses it now not from dogma but in terms of its relevance to rampant inflation, the dangers of sectionalism and fragmentation, and because it clearly puts the problem of inflation onto the bosses' shoulders as a class.

Transitional politics is certainly not an exercise in describing workers' demands of the present in the language of 'Trotskyist' textbooks, and thus falsifying the content and nature of the demands as they actually exist in the working class movement. Transitional politics is not a way of watering down our politics to make them acceptable and palatable to workers.

To raise the monopoly of foreign trade, on its own, as an 'alternative' to import controls, is the reverse of the method of the transitional programme. We attempt to relate transitional demands to the consciousness of workers — but always with the aim of redirecting that consciousness so as to meet the objective needs of the struggle and move towards revolutionary conclusions. If demands don't relate to the objective needs and to revolutionary aims, they are not transitional demands no matter how much they relate to workers'

consciousness.

The monopoly of foreign trade is a feature of a workers' state. We absolutely do not advocate the bourgeois state having such a monopoly. Neither Trotsky's Action Programme for France nor the Transitional Programme raise this slogan in that way. It is raised as part of a series of measures for a workers' government. To use it while implying we advocate the present government implement it is to sprinkle 'Trotskyist' holy water on the reactionary chauvinist demand for import controls — a demand which is no less reactionary for being raised by confused textile, steel, or car workers. As we argued on the Common Market issue, workers cannot make a chauvinist demand a 'class issue' just because they take it up, or because the majority section of the bourgeoisie is against it at any given moment. The call for import controls is intrinsically class-collaborationist. To call for a monopoly of foreign trade in reply to this is a retreat from internationalism. It means standing indistinguishable from the Tribunites and Trade Union Left while winning not one argument against the chauvinist and reactionary bases of their positions.

The politics of accommodationism can keep you warm. They can win you friends in the labour movement. They offer an alternative to the absurd isolationism that IS has set for itself. But they will never, comrades, lay the basis for the building of a revolutionary party.

Your politics and your future

We note with anticipation that Roger Protz's paper will contain advice for those struggling in Ireland. We note your paper will be 'cultured' and have a sense of humour! But the record of your grouping inside IS, and the omission of any mention of women's liberation or Ireland in your documents convince us that you will not carry out a principled ideological fight on those issues. On the Common Market, most of your members supported the opportunist ditching of an internationalist line in favour of a 'No' vote (and those who didn't kept it a pretty private matter). On Ireland your comrades have gone along with, not only the neglect of all Irish work (e.g. non-involvement in the Troops Out Movement) but the failure of IS to argue for a clear internationalist position of support for those fighting 'our' army. Your list of prospective pen-pals around the world is no substitute for the fight for internationalism where it must really start for us, here where we live and work.

You are right to see yourselves as standing firmly in the tradition of IS. That tradition, that view of how to build 'the party' and what 'the party' is, can only lead to opportunism and flabbiness. Internal democracy has no room in a manoeuvring bloc. You have increasingly disagreed with the results of that opportunism, of its ultra-left turn. But you have not questioned and challenged the methodology that these antics flow from. As a result we see a prospect for any new organisation established by you of a drift to the right and to accommodation. You will not be a serious pole of attraction to workers looking for answers and alternatives. You do not have the politics and the clarity to hold your grouping together for long except as a loose federation. Once outside you will recognise just how little help, and how little appeal, there is in the idea that IS was right until Cliff became uncontrollable.

The WSL has tried to create the son of the WRP, based on the belief that Healy has betrayed Healyism. Ever since 1973, the IMG has been rent by conflict between bitterly opposed factions — each claiming to have the true interpretation of the same USFI Theses. You are now trying to build a group

on the basis of reviving the 'true IS'.

The history of all these groups has ended in tragedy for those who pinned their faith in them. Their method and politics were wrong. To attempt to rebuild those shells on the basis of imagined past correctness offers the left only a farce. You observe with horror IS becoming a 'state-capitalist WRP'. Do you wish to become a state-capitalist WSL?

We call on you to seriously discuss your politics with the I-CL. We are committed to open discussion and joint work in the interest of preventing the left fragmenting into a series of tiny and localised groups. We are not committed to any of the fetishes that have bedevilled and dragged down the left. We believe in regroupment around the discussion of an Action Programme for the working class now, not as cobbling together a federation of the discontented.

We do not think the ISO can steer a consistent and independent course. This letter has tried to explain why. We call on you nationally and locally to discuss and clarify the issues.

Socialist Worker and 'Troops Out'

In most of the hard left today it is difficult to get a rational discussion about whenever we should be for or against the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops. Troops Out is a dogma and a fetish. To question it is to define yourself out of the left. Amongst the most dogmatic and least thoughtful on this question is the SWP — whose members reflexively shout abuse at those who question the wisdom of Troops Out without a political settlement.

Yet, back in 1969 when the British army was first put on the streets in Northern Ireland, the SWP refused to call for their withdrawal. Members of the SWP (IS) who wanted to call for Troops Out were denounced as "blood-thirsty fascists". The leadership kept up an unprincipled common front against the opposition. For example, Duncan Hallas was in agreement with the opposition, but he either kept his mouth shut or backed Tony Cliff in the debates. For nearly a year IS maintained the position.

Today they deny that they ever had it, and say it is slander to say they did. In the interests of clean living and in the hope of shocking comrades miseducated by the SWP's current line on Ireland — that 'Troops Out Now' is a matter of basic principle which only "scabs", "pro-imperialists" and "Zionists" question — into thinking about the issue, we print this account of what happened in IS in 1969.

In August 1969 the major group on the far left in Britain, panicked by the pogroms in Belfast and Derry, were so relieved to see the British troops go into action that for nearly a whole year they dropped the slogan 'British Troops Out'.

For months before August, when the British troops had no role in Northern Ireland affairs, they had made Troops Out one of their main slogans. It was a front page headline in Socialist Worker in April 1969! In August, when the troops moved centre stage, it was eloquently dropped.

On August 17th 1969, a hastily convened special meeting of members of the two leading committees of the International Socialists voted by 9 to 3 to drop the Troops Out slogan "as a headline", while the text of articles and editorials would make clear that IS wasn't really siding with the British Army.

But the IS leaders were facing both ways. The decision to approve what the troops were doing had to be defended against the IS leadership's critics from the left, notably the Workers' Fight faction within its ranks.

Already in the very first editorial, which was supposed to put to rights the absence of Troops Out "in the headline" by warning about the army's "long term role", Socialist Worker readers were told that though the troops were "not angels" they will not behave with the same viciousness as the RUC and B-Specials "because they do not have the same ingrained hatreds". (A resolution at the Executive Committee to insert a statement that the troops' presence was "in the long term interests of British imperialism" had in fact been voted down by Tony Cliff, John Palmer and Paul Foot.)

The warning seemed to consist of the mildly critical thought that "It should not be thought that the British troops can begin to solve the problems (of the Catholic workers). The role of the British troops is not to bring any real (!!) solution to the problems of the people of Northern Ireland..."

Within a couple of weeks, the main fire was directed at the leadership's critics. (Meanwhile, a Troops Out emergency motion at IS's conference was defeated after the leaders had pulled out a good many demagogic stops to create an atmosphere of hysteria in which those who argued for Troops Out were accused of being "fascists" who "wanted a bloodbath".)

There were constant attacks in Socialist Worker on "those who call for the immediate

withdrawal of British troops", accompanied by warnings about the horrors of life in Catholic Belfast without British troops. "When the Catholics are armed they can tell the troops to go", a front page caption in SW generously conceded. But the idea of these armed Catholics using their bullets to tell the troops to go was just unthinkable: "...they would merely add their bullets to those of the Paisleyites and provoke an immediate clash in a situation which would lead to massacre." And "when the Catholics are armed" they would tell the troops to go because, the assumption went, they wouldn't need them anymore — not because they were and would be the enemy.

The paper had at first presented the issue as a purely internal Northern Ireland one, as if the British ruling class had no interest in the matter. The troops were passive and neutral: "Behind the lines of British troops the repressive apparatus of Stormont remains" — as if the troops were not themselves repressive.

Continuing this line of thought: "the Special Powers Act, which permits imprisonment without trial, has not been revoked" — presumably, if the troops were really doing a proper job, they might have gone on to revoke the Act. "And when the troops leave..." it will all still be there. It didn't occur to them that the troops might not leave but stay on and themselves imprison people without trial.

The IS leaders concocted an elaborate and convoluted theory of lesser and greater contradictions to justify their position.

The greatest 'contradiction' was between the troops and the Paisleyites, who were thwarting British designs for a bourgeois united Ireland. Meanwhile the 'contradiction' between the troops and the Catholics' barricades, and the Catholic workers' arming and self defence, would only become acute "at some future turn". A centre page article by Stephen Marks presented the case for British troops to stay under the headline: "Fine slogans and grim reality — The contradictory role of British troops gives Catholic workers time to arm against further Orange attacks".

The benefits of the British army in Belfast and Derry were that they were "freezing" the conflict, "buying time" and providing "a breathing space" in which Catholics could prepare to fight the Orange mobs. They could also, apparently, "re-arm politically" in the course of opposing the moderates' calls for reliance on the army — though no thanks to Socialist Worker, which stood four-square with the moderates with its apologetics for the British Army.

The 'contradiction' between the Army and the Catholics' barricades and guns was in fact acute from the first day. The army's aim was to prevent such self-defence — by substituting for it, and by repressing it.

In the very week when the troops were taking down the barricades this same article talk-

ed of a "future turn in the situation when the demolition of the barricades may (1) be needed in the interests of British capital itself and not merely of its local retainers".

IS made a big thing of the barricades. Defence of the barricades had been its militant call, substituted for Troops Out as soon as the troops were on the streets. The special issue of SW on Ireland following the change of line had declared in banner headlines: "The barricades must stay until: *B-Specials disbanded *RUC disarmed *Special Powers Act abolished *Political prisoners released". And on 11th September the main headline was "Defend the Barricades — No peace until Stormont goes".

This was in fact a call for British direct rule indefinitely — just as today calls for "Troops Out and Disarm the Protestants" translate in the real world into a demand for more troops not less — for who is going to "Disarm the Protestants"?

But the week the barricades were taken down in Belfast found SW with its main centre page policy article defending SW's failure to call for the troops to go (and in so doing, defending the troops themselves); and the week the barricades were brought down in Derry, as a prelude to the liquidation of 'Free Derry', found SW utterly silent on the question.

To continue to call for the defence of the barricades would have meant to call the Catholics into conflict with the troops — which really would have exposed 'the main contradiction' in IS's line.

When IS finally re-adopted Troops Out in May or June of 1970 on a National Committee resolution from Sean Matgamna of Workers' Fight (they had fought tooth and nail to avoid defeat on the question at the Easter conference two months earlier) the IS leaders said they had been right all along, and of course they were right now to change. One took one's position "in response to changes in the immediate role of the troops". It all depended on just what the Army was doing at any particular time, though in fact the decisive change in the relationship of the Catholics to the British soldiers didn't come until later, when the switch from a Labour to a Tory government (June) led to a clumsy 'get tough' attitude to the Catholics, and then to the curfew on the Lower Falls in July 1970.

The IS leaders didn't for long hold to that line that they had been right all along. For many years they have denied they ever argued for the troops to stay, and declare that those who say so are slanderers, "scabs", "pro-imperialists", "Zionists" etc.

In true Stalinist fashion they go through the old papers, picking out a quote here and there out of context to support their claim that "week after week after week" they opposed the troops. But there are two simple words that they can never quote after the August of that crucial year, and they are: TROOPS OUT.

A vote was taken as to whether we should demand the withdrawal of British troops as a headline.

For: cdes. Hallas, Rotz, Nagliatti

Against: cdes. Looker, Harman, Cliff, Osborne, Cox, Widgery, Palmer, Milsom, T. Lindop

Belfast on Sunday: when the Catholics are armed they can tell the troops to go

Time is vital to bring aid to the Northern people. The intervention of the British troops only allows a temporary breathing space in which the defences of the Catholic community can be strengthened.

In Derry in particular the

But it should not be thought that the presence of British troops can begin to solve their problems.

NOT ANGELS

Because the troops do not have the ingrained hatreds of the RUC and Specials, they will not behave with the same viciousness —

The breathing space provided by the presence of British troops is short but vital. Those who call for the immediate withdrawal of the troops before the men behind the barricades can defend themselves are inviting a pogrom which will hit first and hardest at socialists.

There followed a lengthy discussion on the situation in Ireland and our attitude to British troops.

Whilst there appeared to be general agreement on the role of SW editorials in stating the reactionary role of the British troops of the role of British Government, the argument still waged over the putting of the slogan now "withdraw British troops".

Cdes. Cliff & Palmer had said we must emphasise working class action in the South, whilst recognising that the Catholics in the North wanted British troops to remain. Cde. Hallas said that it was incompatible to support working class action in the South and yet accept troops in the North since the role of troops is to protect partition. However unpleasant, we have to tell the truth. Cdes. Harman, Palmer & Cliff pointed out that we have to take the objective situation in Northern Ireland. Catholics are not asking the British troops to withdraw if they did, the troops would go and the Catholics would be murdered. The B-Specials had not noticeably responded to the decision to disarm themselves. There were 20,000 licensed guns (how many unlicensed?) and the Catholics didn't get them. At the same time, the troops were not there, cde. Palmer pointed out, to protect Paisley, but to consolidate the Stormont regime, and with Paisley calling marches against Unionist traitors, the troops would be forced to act against Paisley and his supporters.

The meeting after further discussion, very clearly held positions.

(1) Cdes. Palmer, Cliff, Harman, Harris & Prots — that we continue with our present policies.

(2) Cdes. Hallas, Nagliatti, that we should prepare the ground in our editorials to eventually call for the withdrawal of British troops.

(3) Cde. Lindop — that we call for the withdrawal of British troops now.

Clockwise: Socialist Worker, 11.9.69; next two, SW 21.8.69; SW page 1 11.9.69; minutes of special IS leadership meeting, 17.8.69; IS EC minutes 29.9.69.

The SWP in December 1991

By Tom Rigby

We can now reveal the *real* Socialist Workers Party. Documents smuggled out of the organisation and now in the hands of Socialist Organiser provide a very interesting picture of the state of affairs inside the "smallest mass party in the world" as it gathered for its recent conference.

The documents depict a shockingly low level of political understanding, and virtually no internal democracy.

Let us see first how the Central Committee "perspectives" document deals with the coming General Election — an election in which millions of class conscious workers will be willing Labour to win with every fibre of their being, an election in which the future of our class is at stake, with a choice between five more years of Tory attacks or a Labour government under which the working class movement can again flex its muscles and have at least a fighting chance of forcing some concessions.

SO will be fighting for a Labour government and a Labour vote in every constituency, and at the same time saying to workers: prepare to fight *against* Kinnock for every small improvement and reform! What of *Socialist Worker*?

They see things differently. They do have the slogan "Kick the Tories out!", but their real attitude is best expressed in this half-thought from the Central Committee: "*Since the end of the Gulf War, we have been faced with a new political situation characterised by the lack of a national political focus for the bitterness at the base of society*".

Abracadabra! Now you see the election, now you don't!

Of course there is a national political focus for all those who hate the Tories. It is the General Election! Just because the SWP does not know how to intervene in it, that doesn't mean it does not exist.

On the contrary, it is the SWP which does not exist as a serious political tendency, since it is unable to relate to the election except in the most passive way. While mouthing the slogan "Don't wait for Labour!", they have done nothing positively to hasten the election, or to challenge Kinnock's election agenda. The SWP lets the Labour right wing define the issues in national politics.

Such sectarian passivity is bound to disorientate the membership, and there is plenty of evidence of that in the internal documents. For instance, take this confession from two Cardiff comrades in a document modestly entitled *Our Time Has Come*:

"*The absence of a big nice focus for our activity is certainly confusing, but in any confusing political period we should return to the principles that bring us into the party in the first place... the critical role of a revolutionary party*". What kind of revolutionaries forget that millions of workers desperately need a Labour government just because the reality of Kinnockite control of the Labour Party is not very "nice"? What kind of party has as its central principle... the need to be a party?

Any class-conscious worker will be inclined to consider such people dilettantes; and "Pre-Conference Document No.2" certainly confirms that view when it assesses the Walton by-election.

"*The argument [within the Liverpool SWP] centred on should we go 'on the knocker' for Mahmood... the argument had been won formally but when we came to go out on the first Sunday only four comrades turned up*".

The SWP claims 6000 members. They said the Walton by-election was the key test for the left. SO supporters were denounced as right-wingers because we opposed Lesley Mahmood's candidacy as a stupid stunt. The SWP produced an Open Letter to the Left ("Time To Take Sides") on exactly this theme. And then these super-tough Bolsheviks mobilised just 0.067% of their membership for the task at hand!

Nowhere does the document mention that the SWP were excluded from canvassing by the *Militant* organisers of the Mahmood campaign, or explain why the SWP silently and meekly accepted its exclusion.

For well over twenty years now the SWP and its forerunners have maintained a deeply contradictory attitude to the Labour Party. As the years have gone by this has led to their politics getting more and more inconsistent so that now the SWP effectively has *two* policies on the Labour Party.

There is the 'normal' attitude which amounts to defining themselves as a single issue campaign with the object of getting disillusioned people to leave the Labour Party.

Then there is the 'election time' policy of making a great fuss about being 'pro-Labour' best summed up in Paul Foot's immortal prose during the '79 General Election campaign: "During the next few weeks I will be a very strong Labour supporter" and absolutely cynically outlined in their recent conference documents:

"Labour may very well lose [the election]. It would then be very difficult to intervene in arguments amongst the best Labour voters as to what went wrong if *we were seen to have abstained*".

This is advertising agency politics.

In both cases, what the SWP does is tail-end passing moods, presenting themselves as the militant embodiment of these moods rather than working out a consistent policy.

Thus you get the ludicrous situation of calling on people to quit the Labour Party and then calling on workers to elect the same party! [Presumably minus as many class-struggle socialists as possible, thus weakening our ability to force Kinnock to concede to working-class demands].

This confusion has been deepened by their latest conference document which moves towards an understanding of the Labour Party as fundamentally no different from, say, the US Democratic Party.

"Historically, Labour was a bourgeois workers' party, not simply in the sense that it got workers' votes, but also that it had a cadre of working class activists".

But this is beside the point. The US Democrats have a considerable amount of working class electoral support and some working class activists, but this doesn't make the party a 'bourgeois workers' party'. On the basis of this reasoning, if the SWP are to be consistent they would call for a vote for the Democratic Party in the US and for the ANC in a future South Africa!

But of course they won't; that would not be *seen* as radical enough.

In reality, what defines the Labour Party as a "bourgeois workers' party" is its organic link to the unions.

But this is only brought up as an *afterthought* by the SWP leadership in the context of explaining to their more naive comrades that no matter how hard they huff and puff, they won't blow Kinnock's house down. "None of this means the Labour Party is going to disappear... it has an organic connection with class organisations."

Thus the two lines continue to co-exist in an unstable compound resulting in no coherent policy for the political wing of the mass labour movement. This brings us to the question of programme. Several resolutions made it into SWP head office calling for the party to adopt a programme. There then followed a very stilted 'debate' in the pages of the pre-conference bulletins.

In essence, a party programme is nothing more nor less than a given tendency's relationship to the class that it would aspire to lead. In addition to immediate perspectives that is providing an answer to the question "What next?" A fully developed programme must include an understanding of the working class as it exists and how it must change ideologically and politically to become fit to pursue the goal of working class self-rule; of the relationship between working class power and the final goal of communism; and an understanding of the nature of the world around us from the Labour Party under Kinnock to the collapse of Stalinism and the "triumph of capitalism".

In this sense, the SWP's lack of a programme is nothing more nor less than its refusal to try and make sense of the real world.

Neither side in the SWP discussion seem to be properly aware of this.

One 'faction', with support in the Liverpool and Hornsey branches at least, wants a programme and called for the SWP to set up a special 'programme' commission.

The 'Central Committee' opposed this — but not in their own name. They got Gareth Jenkins to argue for them: "The possession of a formal programme guarantees nothing" [true, but irrelevant].

"We do have a programme. In addition to 'What we stand for' in the paper, there are also the perspectives that flow from our concrete analysis... on fighting the Tories, reacting to the Gulf War etc."

So Gareth tells the comrades: "We don't need one but, just in case we do, we actually have one". Ingenious, but not very convincing. [He'll have to wait longer for his seat on the CC, I think].

Gareth then shoots himself in the foot by attempting to insert some 'theory' to justify his stance:

"Trotsky was at his strongest when putting forward concrete perspectives in response to developments like the rise of fascism in Germany". Precisely!

But try and find a 'concrete perspective' other than hate Kinnock but vote Labour in the pages of *Socialist Worker*.

You won't. The SWP has no programme because they have no policy for the mass labour movement as it actually exists... just the desire that it be different. Poor Gareth also had to take on the onerous task of defending the Central Committee's proposal to abolish what remains of the SWP's severely limited internal democracy — the National Committee.

The CC announces: "This year we have abolished the branch committees structures which ran the branches for the best part of ten years... In the past year, the National Committee has been largely irrelevant... activity has been pushed by the Central Committee, by the organisers and by the activists inside the branches". Hence good bye National Committee.

So the SWP has now adopted a structure which consists of a handful of full-time organisers [the Central Committee], branch leadership 'teams' [arguably a new word for the old 'abolished' branch committee] and... nothing else, except what ad hoc meetings the Central Committee may feel like calling.

The idea of what in Leninist theory a National Committee should be — a politically selected forum that combines and balances seasoned cadre with the best fresh organisers with the aim of checking, developing, reassessing and testing the organisation's activity — has been totally lost.

In its place, you have an arguably *less* democratic structure than the Bolsheviks were forced to employ under conditions of Tsarist illegality.

A structure that would delight Joyce Gould. As one recent ex-SWPer commented: "I left the Labour Party to join the SWP because the Labour Party was becoming bureaucratic. But the SWP was no different. In two years I got just one vote and that was just to rubber-stamp a branch committee slate."

To justify such centralisation, you get the kind of crass caricature that I thought the SWP reserved for their opponents on the left, but (it seems) they employed among themselves too. Gareth again:

"Saying the CC has too much power, is to misunderstand what democratic centralism is about... spending time consulting the members as to whether this or that initiative is correct would inevitably mean missing opportunities and turning the organisation into a debating club".

Presumably the CC will make the trains run on time as well.

The tragedy here is that the SWP have now adopted an internal structure which confirms exactly what an anti-Marxist and anti-Leninist bourgeois academic or journalist would say is Leninism.

They are a living caricature, the exact opposite of what they used to be in the dim and distant 'anti-Leninist' past of the early '60s Cliff group.

Back then they spent most of their time attacking Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League for displaying *exactly* the same characteristics as they do now.

The only reason this can come about is that the SWP leadership has never digested or understood what a revolutionary party is all about.

For them, "Building the party" simply means, first and foremost, building an organised machine. Politics comes a very poor second.

But a 'revolutionary party' is not the poses, badges and slogans of the SWP. On the contrary, to build a revolutionary party, is to take part in the concentrated organised effort of a Marxist tendency directed to the purpose of fighting the class struggle on the industrial, political and ideological fronts.

That is the task that the Alliance for Workers Liberty sets itself.

From page 5

kick of the effervescent, anarchic IS of the 1960s. If you discount the slanders, demagoguery, distortion of positions, and unscrupulous use of the IS machine, it was all quite liberal. When we pointed out the inexorable logic of what was happening, and the qualitative transformation that must follow, the immediate facts seemed to contradict us. The experience of IS/SWP since does not, alas, contradict us! Read Appendix 2!

Workers' Fight was duly "de-fused" on 4 December 1971. On 14 January 1972, *Workers' Fight* no.1 appeared. A short statement on the separation of WF from IS concluded as follows: "*The real tragedy, though, is that the opportunities for the revolutionary left which existed in 1968 should have led only to the consolidation of a tightly controlled left-centrist sect, which is most certainly what IS now is*".

The documents collected together in this pamphlet document major stages in this process. Organisations change: few have changed as spectacularly as Cliff's. Today the SWP has one central answer to more or less every question posed in politics: "build the Leninist revolutionary party". It must seem strange to anyone familiar only with the present-day SWP to read the first document in this collection, dating from Easter 1969, a criticism of the Cliff tendency for its longstanding anti-Leninism.

Yet those criticisms are central to any explanation of the evolution of the group after it declared itself Leninist. As the document proves, and as the subsequent history also proves, in 1968 Cliff and company did not in fact set about building a Leninist party, but merely creating a centralised small political machine. They did not know what a Leninist party was then any more than they had known what it was in all the preceding years when they had identified Gerry Healy's sect with Leninism and denounced Leninists as "toy-town Bolsheviks".

Today the SWP is a largely de-politicised political machine. "Build the party", its central all-purpose slogan, is not politics. A party is merely an instrument of politics, it cannot be a substitute for politics. The 1969 "Critique of Cliff" explained in advance why this would be so. It pinpointed the central weakness of the whole new "Leninist" project Cliff and company had taken up, and linked it with their radically false view of what a Leninist party was.

It also, albeit cryptically, criticised the IS/SWP's approach to the Labour Party. "*Whether the IS group will by simple arithmetic progression grow into a revolutionary party, or whether the party will grow from a yet unformed group, is not important for us*" (Political Committee document, October 1968). On the contrary, it is vital. If the strategy is one which expects any big changes from the shift to come in the already organised labour movement (all experience in the past suggests that this is the likely way a real mass revolutionary movement will develop in a country like Britain) rather than by arithmetical accretion, then this decrees the need for us to build a cadre movement to be able to intervene..." (this pamphlet, pp.28-29).

The second document ("IS and theory") expands on one important point about the group's attitude to theory.

The third document deals with groups which broke off from IS, and, revolted by its "syndicalism", turned away from the bedrock class struggle of the working class. Such are today's RCP (*Living Marxism*) and RCG (*Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!*)

These two groups have gone through many and strange political zig-zags since their founders were expelled from IS in 1973, but a *sectarian* attitude to the working-class movement has been constant. We saw where they were going at the point of their break with IS, and attempted to influence them away from the grotesque mistake of developing a contemptuous attitude to working class struggle in polemical reaction to Tony Cliff's

syndicalism.

By 1973 IS had become a tightly centralised and demagogically manipulated organisation. Politically, the organisation focused all its hopes on the tremendously high industrial militancy then sweeping Britain. The distinction between militancy and socialist politics was lost sight of. The truth that workers in a bitter strike are more open to socialist ideas than workers in ordinary times was blown up into the nonsense that strikers almost automatically become socialists — if you manage to sell them "Socialist Worker". Politics was reduced to strike-servicing work and propaganda about building the party. Calls for a Labour vote were made in elections to avoid antagonising trade unionists, but the group had no strategic notion about the political development of the labour movement.

At its political core the group was syndicalist (committed to a view of socialism achieved purely through trade-union militancy), though the syndicalism was wrapped up in the pseudo-Leninist idea of the "need for a party". Against this the foolish caricatures grew up which rejected root and branch the truth that Cliff turned into a ridiculous caricature — the centrality for socialists of working class action. Against Cliff's caricature they developed their own parallel nonsense — and a far worse nonsense — which disparaged the class struggle itself.

The fourth document deals with the old leaders of IS expelled in 1975 — the "IS Opposition" of Richard Kuper, Stephen Marks, John Palmer, Jim Higgins, and others. They, they said, would continue the old IS tradition against Cliff's departures from it. To-day what is left of them cluster around *Catalyst* and *socialist*. They still have the ideas Cliff and company advocated in the mid-'60s, minus the turn to the working class. Most of them went through all the evolution of the Cliff group, through the installation of an authoritarian regime on 4 December 1971 and beyond, and then recoiled, reinforced in the anti-Bolshevism Cliff had taught them earlier by their experience of the regime they themselves had helped Cliff set up inside IS.

Those who do not learn from history, as the saying goes, are likely to repeat it. The *Catalyst/socialist* group is a feeble caricature of the Cliff group of the early '60s, which, when Cliff decided to do serious work, turned itself into the SWP caricature of Leninism! It is not at all ruled out that some of them will later repeat Cliff's 1968 "turn", if they decided to get serious, or when a new "turn to the working class" becomes possible. Those who do not learn...

There are two appendices. One deals with IS's position on British troops in Northern Ireland in 1971. The other is an article published in *Socialist Organiser* in December 1991, analysing the current internal regime of the SWP.

Sean Matgamna, 4 December 1991

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