

THE MAKING OF A PARTY?

The International Socialists 1965-1976

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The history of organised **marxist** politics in Britain, for almost a century, is one of continuous marginality. The number of people involved in **marxist** parties and organisations of any description has never exceeded a few tens of thousands at any one time. The problem of creating a socialist organisation of real political weight, to the left of the Labour Party, might well seem insoluble. Many have concluded, indeed, that this is so; from the leadership of the Communist Party, with its desire for long-term merger with Labour, and the deep-entry trotskyists of *Militant* to the thousands of ex-Communists and revolutionary socialists who have joined the Labour Party as individuals.

The overall record of failure should not blind us, however, to the real opportunities which have been lost due to the inadequacies of the **marxist** left itself. To give only the most important example, early British **marxism** was dominated by a sectarian propagandist tradition, which greatly militated against its achieving any decisive influence, either in the formative period of the modern labour movement, or in the great industrial upheavals just before, during and after the 1914-18 war. Nor should this record allow us to assume that the underlying features of British working-class politics, which have made for the unique dominance of Labourist reformism in the last three-quarters of a century, will never change. On the contrary, there are reasons for believing that they have already begun to be transformed.

The 1945-51 period of Labour Government was, in fact, a watershed in working-class politics. After a quarter of a century, we can see that 1945 was the political culmination, for the British working class, of the entire experience of two generations. In the first, the mass labour movement which emerged at the end of the nineteenth century found it needed a political "wing". In the second, the defeats of the mass struggles in the 1920s, followed by the frustrations of the thirties and the war, combined to focus all the hopes of the working class on the election of a majority Labour Government. The disappointment of these hopes has had effects which have been profound, for all that they may have been slow to reveal themselves.

Labour has been in a long, gradual decline since 1951, in numbers of voters, members, and activists, and above all in the commitment and conviction of all three. The decline has stemmed from the failure of the state-dominated "mixed economy" to satisfy either the old hopes with which it was born, or the new aspirations which it has helped to create. In the 1950s and early '60s, the problem seemed to be that larger, socialist goals were "irrelevant", since liberal reform was more appropriate to a prosperous welfare state. But as the contradictions of state-managed capitalism began to appear, Labour was returned to the managerial role which, in a sense, belonged naturally to it. In presiding, as it has now done for ten of the last fourteen years, over a system whose failings and conflicts have become more and more apparent, Labour confirmed that its decline of the 1950s had not been accidental, but was a symptom of a deeper failure, of a particular version of working-class socialist politics.

Labour's failures and decline have offered opportunities of a new kind to the marxist left, to break out of its isolation and to begin to create a credible, alternative socialist organisation. The opportunities have been magnified, in that they have come after a long period in which the working class has grown in numbers, strength and willingness to fight for its interests. Labour's crisis has been a crisis of the capitalism it has tried to manage, and has brought it into conflict with a militant working class. In such a period, it would be surprising if alternatives to the left of Labour had not grown.

There was, of course, one force to the left of Labour which survived the long period of its dominance: the Communist Party. It had, however, its own great political disadvantages—not just the legacy of stalinism, but its close association with the Labour left, and indeed with a left-wing version of Labour's statist, reformist, parliamentary politics in general. Although the CP was the only sizeable organisation on the left in the 1950s, its paper membership was small (never more than 30,000), its vote tiny, and even its industrial strength, its most important feature, still patchy. The CP was therefore unable to pose, by sheer size alone, as the overwhelming focus for the left. Its membership stagnated, despite all the opportunities, as new groups grew up to challenge it.

The main organisational focus for a new growth of the left was, therefore, in the revolutionary marxist groups to the left of the CP. Although a large number of these groups emerged, and several of them have had some significance, the main beneficiary, by a sort of natural selection process, was the International Socialists. Indeed on 1st January 1977, IS renamed itself the Socialist Workers Party, and claimed that, while still small and weak, it had become the new revolutionary socialist party which the British working class required. At the same time, the number of its critics on the marxist left, including many former members, was growing. While the SWP had undoubtedly a sort of pre-eminence on the far left, it was by

no means clear that it had really overcome the difficulties which had traditionally handicapped marxist groups in their attempt to form serious parties to the left of Labour.

The purpose of this article is to look at the development of the International Socialists in the decade of their real growth, from 1965 to 1976, up to the formation of the SWP. It is written by a participant, and the interpretation inevitably relies a great deal on my own experience and memory of the processes which I describe, as well as on documents of the period. The aim, however, is to ask two important questions. How far did IS realise the potential for a new socialist party which existed in this period? And to the extent that it has failed, what are the implications for socialists in Britain today?

1. *THE EMERGENCE OF INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM, 1965-68*

The emergency of the "far left" is usually dated, in Britain as elsewhere, from 1968. But it is certainly not the case that new groups came from nowhere, out of the upheavals of that year. Throughout the world there had been a long process of disenchantment with the social-democratic and communist parties, the cold-war opposites that dominated the labour movements. Mass movements against the bomb, and then the Vietnam war, had mobilised new generations of activists, uncommitted to the dominant ideologies of the "old left." And as the editor of a recent compilation has pointed out, the 1956 crisis in the Communist Party had a particularly "critical impact" in Britain, "antedating the formation of an independent Left in other countries by some years."¹ In this "new left", as it was first called, the previously subterranean currents of trotskyism, the tradition of revolutionary opposition to stalinism and reformism, surfaced and took on new forms. The origins of International Socialism, as IS were known (it became "The International Socialists" only after 1968), were in this process. In the struggles of the years up to 1968, IS grew to the point where "take-off" was possible.

1. *In the shadow of "orthodoxy" – the early years of IS*

The history of IS before 1965 is essentially that of a propaganda group. This was, naturally enough in view of their tiny size and isolation, the main role of all the revolutionary groups in Britain between the late 1940s and mid-1960s, whether trotskyist, anarchist or (in the '60s) maoist. The success of one group or another was a function of the content, presentation and style of their ideas. Since the groups competed for influence in the same restricted milieu, a great deal depended on their mutual interaction. In the case of IS, its approach was greatly influenced—negatively—by the dominant form of trotskyism in Britain.

The Socialist Review Group, forerunner of IS, had been formed in 1950-51 after its founders were expelled from the British section of the

Fourth International, then pursuing entry work in the Labour Party under the leadership of Gerry Healy. This was a period in which the traditional trotskyist opposition to Stalinism was being muted and replaced by optimism about its revolutionary role. Even Natalia Sedova Trotsky, widow of Leon Trotsky, came to denounce the leadership of the international movement her husband had founded.' The Fourth International's uncritical attitude to Tito was one source of conflict. The uncritical support given by Healy's group to the Russian bloc in Korea was, however, the final cause of the **split**.³

Underlying these political differences, of course, Socialist Review had a major theoretical difference with the mainstream of trotskyism. Its leader, Tony Cliff, argued that Russia and its eastern European satellites were not "degenerated workers' states", but bureaucratic state capitalist societies. Because the former view was held by Trotsky himself at his death, it was characterised as "orthodox": Cliff however saw it as involving revisions of basic marxist ideas. In his own work, as I demonstrate elsewhere, Cliff sought to apply the main categories of marxist orthodoxy to Russian **society**.⁴

This theoretically distinct stance enabled SR to survive as a tiny alternative to the larger trotskyist group led by Healy. The Hungarian Revolution apparently confirmed Cliffs analysis of a fundamental class struggle in Eastern Europe, and his perspective of a full social revolution. But it appears that, as Ian Birchall has written in his "official" history of IS. "Its small size prevented it from benefiting from the events of 1956."⁵ The group had only **33** members at its foundation, and seems **not** to have been much larger six years later. Certainly it was Healy's group which gained an audience among the leftward-moving ex-Communists, workers and intellectuals, who left the Party in **1956** and **1957**. Their new organisation, the Socialist Labour League, formed in **1958**, and the looser movement of the "New Left", were the two main outgrowths of that crisis.

The late fifties were however a period of some growth for SR, which may have had around **100** members at the turn of the **decade**.⁶ And they were important in two ways, neither of which Birchall really mentions. First, the emergence of an "independent left", open to discussion on an anti-stalinist basis, but unconvinced by "orthodox" trotskyism, certainly gave the group a wider audience. Second, and much more crucial, this was the period in which the group began to develop its theory beyond the orthodox, even fundamentalist basis of Cliff's Russia, and develop the basis for a distinctive approach to British politics. As I describe elsewhere, the theory of the "permanent arms economy", first developed by writers of the American trotskyist movement led by Max Shachtman (which had split from the Fourth International in 1940), was popularised by Cliff, and later developed by Michael Kidron, the group's most innovative writer.

Whatever our ultimate judgement of this theory as an explanation, it did give SR a perspective based on an understanding of two crucial points: that capitalism was not going to collapse into another 1929 crisis, and that state planning, by itself, had no inherently socialist quality, but was a means used by capital itself in its latest stage. In a striking series of theoretical articles and polemics in the late fifties and early sixties, Kidron filled out his analysis, and laid a distinctive economic basis for a perspective of "reformism from below." The period, he argued, was one in which reforms were increasingly won by sectional industrial action and other grass-roots struggles, not by parliamentary legislation or central bargaining. The revolutionaries of SR therefore presented themselves as the most consistent fighters for reforms.⁷

It was not until the mid-sixties that this perspective really came into its own, but at the end of the fifties it was one element which helped to mark off SR further as a realistic alternative to the "orthodox" trotskyism of Healy. The SLL degenerated swiftly from its fairly promising start: within a year or so of its foundation it had become profoundly bureaucratic, and many of its most talented members, workers and intellectuals, quickly left. It soon became the caricature of a trotskyist organisation for which it was well known throughout the 1960s. Heralding the collapse of capitalism at every turn, denouncing betrayal in every failure, constantly exorcising revisionist devils, it was in some ways clearly more stalinist than the Communist Party itself.' The SR group, which differed from orthodox trotskyism in general, came to represent the polar opposite to the SLL: realistic in economic perspectives, able to explain the failures of labour bureaucrats as well as to condemn them, nonsectarian towards other socialists, the champion of thorough working-class democracy in all areas of practice. This last point was emphasised by the publication in 1959 of Tony Cliffs study of Rosa Luxemburg, in which he suggested that Luxemburg's ideas of organisation, rather than Lenin's were the model for contemporary socialists. It was stressed again in 1961, in Cliff's attack on "substitutionism", the substitution of the revolutionary party for the working class, in which he advocated a party which discussed and decided quite openly in front of the workers.⁸

The SR group was the most coherent, open and thinking marxist alternative to the dominant "orthodoxy" of the SLL, and in the early sixties it began to grow, attracting refugees from the League (and the fading New Left), but more importantly a few young workers and students from CND and the Young Socialists. In 1962 the group took the name "International Socialism", from the journal launched two years previously, and with the slogan "Neither Washington nor Moscow but International Socialism", it appealed to the new activists more than other trotskyists with their defence of the Russian "workers' bomb." But despite opposition from IS and the forerunners of today's other main marxist

groups (IMG, Militant), the larger SLL were still able to dominate the YS. In 1964, before the return of Labour to office, they prematurely led its main body out of the Labour Party, forming an independent YS which has led a shadowy existence ever since. The remaining official YS, eventually renamed "Labour Party YS", became a rump. The IS group had grown to around 200 members, perhaps half the strength of the SLL. It was by no means a massive expansion, but it represented a growth in numbers and experience to match the new ideas which Kidron and Cliff had developed, and placed IS in a good position for further advance.¹⁰

2. In the "fragments" and the student movement—the first phase of rapid growth

One paradox of IS's theory of "the shifting locus of reforms"^w—from parliament and union hierarchy to shop floor and grass roots—was that before 1964 it had to be combined with support for Labour's return to office. IS warned of the "managerialist" tendency of an incoming Labour government, but in 1963-65 there was a powerful tendency for the newly politicised activists to invest it with many of their hopes. Indeed, movements like CND and Anti-Apartheid had achieved most of what was possible through mere protest and pressure, while the YS had torn itself apart in factional strife. The idea of an end to "thirteen wasted years" captured many socialists and trade unionists at the time, and certainly there was no electoral alternative to Labour.

The shattering of illusions in the Labour Government, which began in 1965 with the Immigration White Paper and the failure to act over Rhodesia's UDI, and developed rapidly in 1966 because of the seamen's strike and the wage freeze, was therefore a crucial turning-point in working-class politics. It was the point at which the working-class "apathy" of the fifties, still evident in Labour's declining vote in 1964, began to turn into active opposition to the Labour leadership itself. But it was an opposition which was sectional and even fragmented—the seamen's "stage battle" was hardly typical of these years. What was happening, indeed, was that the short, shop- and factory-based unofficial strikes of the boom period were becoming more widespread as the contradictions of British capitalism came to the fore. Unlike the Communist Party, whose main thrust was to pressurise the left-wing MPs and union officials, or the SLL, who raised grandiose demands in order to expose these same people, IS recognised that the situation was one of grass-roots reformism in crisis. Patchily, in 1965-66, its members started to withdraw from activity in the Labour Party and the YS, and concentrated more on the small-scale "fragments" of grass-roots militancy. These included strikes to defend shop stewards and to gain union recognition, private tenants' struggles against racist landlords, and the council tenants' battles against rent rises forced by the government in 1967, in which IS made its largest intervention.

An extension of IS's analysis was very important to this change of direction. Cliff and Colin Barker concentrated attention, as marxists had not done in Britain since the 1920s, on the forms of organisation "at the point of production." They picked out the spread of shop stewards, particularly in engineering, as the key development of the post-war boom. They hypothesised, moreover, that the imposition of incomes policy, together with attempts to control shop stewards by law, would generalise the response of the stewards, and create a shop stewards movement for the first time since the first world war. This movement, in conflict with the union bureaucracies as well as the employers and the Government, would be the basis of a new revolutionary workers' movement."

It is obvious in retrospect that this analysis was oversimplified, and that the paradox we have noted, in the theory of a "shifting locus" of the struggle for reforms, was to prove deeper. But in 1966-67, these ideas fitted well with the level of struggle. IS was still, moreover, very much under the sway of its thoroughgoing reaction to "orthodox" trotskysm, especially as represented by the SLL; it was more likely to minimise its own importance than to try to invent a pretentious machinery to fit its conceptions. The "struggle in the fragments" was practised empirically; indeed one of its dangers was, as Birchall rightly points out, that of syndicalism—adaptation to the narrow conditions of wage or rent struggles.¹²

Although the mass economic struggles of the working class were mainly confined to the sporadic strikes and protests which IS focused on, the most important struggles of this period were in fact elsewhere, in the growing student movement and movement against the Vietnam war. IS had, as Birchall points out, "no thought-out strategy for student work" before 1967; its student members, together with those of other marxist sects, had been active in the National Association of Labour Student Organisations which had been very strong in the period around the 1964 election. IS no more had a theory of students than did any other marxist group, but its ideas of the struggle at the "point of production" were rapidly translated into the student field. "Workers' control" became "student and staff control", and the opposition between militant students and the right-wing NUS machine easily fitted the general schema of grass roots versus bureaucracy. IS students were centrally involved in the movement at LSE, where student activism dated back to UDI in 1965, and effectively led the first sit-in in 1967. Starting here, IS members took part in most of the student actions of late 1967 and 1968. As the CP's student work was concentrated on the NUS, and the SLL idiotically counterposed its own organisation to the student actions, IS (although far from being generally dominant) was the largest single group in the new student left.

Closely linked with the student movement, but distinct from it, was the campaign against the Vietnam war, which took off with the mass

demonstrations in October **1967**, March **1968** and, of course, October **1968**. This movement proved the vitality of the strand of mass political campaigning, essentially apart from the mass of the working class and their organisations, which had been apparent in CND. It also showed the political advance made in this sort of movement, and in the student left which composed much of it. While CND had been polarised between legal protest and direct action, the Vietnam movement was divided between the advocates of "peace" and of "victory to the NLF." By **1967**, however, it was clear that the latter position, represented by the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, held the initiative. Because the CP clung to the "peace" position, it was outflanked even more than in CND; the SLL was reduced to handing out leaflets proclaiming "Why we are not marching"; the effective leadership of the movement was in the hands of revolutionaries—"The Week" (forerunners of IMG) who started VSC in **1966**, IS who were the main force in mobilising in the localities and colleges, and various maoists.

In one sense, therefore, IS's strategy of "work in the fragments" was being overtaken by events in **1967** and **1968**. Certainly the great expansion of the group in those years—from a little over **200** in **1966** to **450** at the end of **1967** and a notional **1,000** in late **1968**¹³—owed less to the proclaimed strategy than to IS's energetic, imaginative and flexible role in the student and Vietnam movements. Of course, it is probably true that the most serious of the new recruits were attracted to IS both because it always insisted that the main job was to win the working class, and because it had a realistic perspective on this task which stressed the modest level of workers' struggles by contrast with the revolutionary euphoria of VSC and the colleges. To that extent, IS got the balance right, more so than others such as New Left Review, some of whose leaders advocated the extravagant idea of universities as permanent "red bases" within capitalist society, or the infant IMG, who based themselves on the "new student vanguard" as its main upsurge subsided—let alone the CP or SLL.

But the events of **1967-68** were also, in ways which only later became apparent, beyond the understanding of the IS "old guard" itself. The central cadre of IS was formed in an orthodox—even, as I have suggested, fundamentalist—marxism, centred on the industrial working class. Its perspectives were firmly hitched to the traditional sectors, indeed to a large extent to the particular context of engineering. Some of the leaders, particularly Tony Cliff, were enthusiastic for the student movement while it lasted, and prepared to give the students their head; others less so. None of them, with the exception of Michael Kidron¹⁴ who played little part in IS after **1968**, seem to have understood the structural changes in capitalism which the student movement highlighted, and which were analysed by IS's own students. And even that analysis fudged the most critical issue, the extent to which the political period was changing beyond

the framework of IS's **perspectives**.¹⁵ The events of 1968 itself revealed the inevitable confusion into which IS was thrown by the whole unprecedented upheaval.

3. Rites of passage?—the 1968 *crisis* in IS

1968—that truly amazing year, in which so much was happening that it is difficult to sort out a pattern of events—was an obvious turning point for IS. If its modest perspectives and traditional style were strained by the upsurge in 1967, they were at breaking point by the summer and autumn of 1968. Crisis was piled upon crisis: the Tet offensive, Powell's speech, the May events, Czechoslovakia, the great October 27 demonstration, not to mention the flowering of sit-ins in the most unlikely colleges up and down Britain. From the international point of view, Britain's '68 may seem mild, even insipid, but for those involved the impact was **overwhelming**.¹⁶

For IS, Powell's speech, and the dockers' support for him, was a critical moment. Even Birchall, for whom IS's history is generally an extremely orderly progress, admits it was "a stunning shock for the left."¹⁷ IS had been working around the London docks during the struggle over decasualisation. It responded well, with its slim resources, at the level of anti-Powell propaganda, but the reaction was stronger than that. IS issued a call, under the exaggerated heading "The Urgent Challenge of Fascism", for revolutionary unity around four basic **points**.¹⁸ This call quickly took on greater significance, as the revolt across the Channel made clear the momentous changes which were taking place in the political prospects of revolutionaries. IS's unity proposal was not therefore a well thought-out "first step" on the road to a revolutionary part, but something of a panic response. It was however a vital initiative, and showed the healthy non-sectarian instincts which were deeply inbred in the group. The refusal of the SLL to take it up was predictable enough, but that of others, such as the semi-marxist "Solidarity" group (quite close to IS at the time), or the newly-formed International Marxist Group, was not automatically expected. The opportunity to form a united organisation, which would, for example, have been able to build much more solidly than any one group on the gains of VSC, was lost. The fault lay with groups such as IMG who were unwilling to risk their new political existence in a united project. The failure greatly strengthened IS's belief, well nourished by previous experience of the SLL, in the inherently sectarian character of "orthodox" trotskyism.

Of course, any united organisation, involving mainly the new student generation brought into revolutionary politics in 1968, would have faced enormous problems. Greater political agreement than that represented in IS's four points would undoubtedly have been needed for it to work: there was the danger of degeneration into sectarian squabbling which was the early fate of the Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation, a super-

unitary body set up at the height of the euphoria of **1968**. IS's failure to clarify the basis of unity sufficiently in advance did in fact lead to problems with the one tiny sect, Workers Fight (an orthodox trotskyst group previously expelled from both the SLL and Militant), which did accept the unity call. The position of this group, which operated its own organisation and discipline within IS, was to cause immense problems in the next three years, hardening many of the IS leaders against allowing any organised opposition in the group.

IS's problems in **1968**, although they centred on organisational questions, were in fact political. Although they can be seen as the trials of transition, from a small group to an embryonic party, they also brought into question the theoretical and practical traditions of the group. IS's acknowledged leader, Tony Cliff, had been responsible for veering away from orthodox leninism, towards a looser conception of revolutionary organisation as the servant of the mass movement. As a reaction to the caricatural vanguardism of the SLL, this had been a valid response, and it had many positive aspects—the emphasis on open political discussion, before the class, for example. But the failure of the May events to lead to revolution, together with the confusion caused by rapid growth in IS itself, led Cliff to turn right back to Lenin. The lesson was the need for a revolutionary party, not substituting itself for the working class, but formed from its real vanguard, and fighting for leadership of the class.¹⁹

This lesson was so radical for IS that it eclipsed all the others which should have been drawn from the unique events of **1968**. To understand how sharp the turn was, we can note the overwhelming rejection, in **1967**, of the proposal merely to include the *aim* of building a revolutionary party in the list published in the group's paper. The paper itself was still called "Labour Worker" until the summer of **1968**, which implied a continuing orientation to that party rather than the building of an independent revolutionary alternative. But after May, the idea of a party suddenly became viable. There was no pretence that IS was the party, or even its *nucleus*. But it could be built, and with the failure of the unity proposals IS came very gradually to treat itself as a *de facto* nucleus. The old federal structure of the group, with an Executive Committee based on delegates from branches and a loose conception of national discipline, was challenged by Cliff. Instead, he proposed the election of a National Committee by Conference on a political basis, with a smaller EC to run the group from day to day.

The proposals provoked a most intense debate, with several factions springing up. These ranged from "libertarians" opposed to the changes to "democratic centralists" who felt that their political basis should have been more clearly developed, since Cliff himself tended to explain them in practical rather than theoretical terms. The most coherent argument in favour of democratic centralism was made by Chris Harman, in a published

article, arguing via Lenin and Gramsci for an organisation based on collective political appraisal of members' activity; but Harman like Cliff did not join or declare a faction.³⁰ The proposed changes were adopted, and gave IS both the forms and some of the substance of democratic centralism. Full rights of internal discussion were guaranteed, factions were freely allowed and possessed the right of representation on the NC (this was exercised by Workers Fight), and central discipline was understood tentatively, in the light of a two-way flow of experience and ideas (of which, indeed, there was a great deal in the next few years).

It is certain that the general political basis of the new "democratic centralist" constitution was not fully understood, either by many of the pre-1968 members on whom it was suddenly sprung, or by the new recruits whose first experience in IS had been the hectic six-month debate. More important, however, was the specific rationale for the new structure which Cliff in particular began to develop: the "turn to the class." It was the inexperience of the majority of the new members, especially the large number of students, which made a need for more central direction apparent. Cliff's central idea was the need to turn this new membership towards the working class, to use as a base for beginning to recruit workers themselves on a larger scale. The gap between the experience of the leadership and that of the "1968 levy" was to play an important part in the subsequent development of IS.

II. *ON A RISING TIDE – BUILDING IN THE WORKING CLASS, 1969-1973*

Very great opportunities for building a revolutionary organisation, which would represent a small but significant minority current in the working class, existed in Britain in the five years after 1968. For the first time since the 1920s, massive struggles erupted across a wide range of industries. Like those immediately after the 1914-18 war, they marked the onset of a serious crisis in the British economy. But the crisis did not develop so sharply and potentially disastrously, and it took new forms: unemployment moved steadily upward instead of shooting through the roof, and was for the first time accompanied by serious inflation. The working class, too, was stronger, with more workers in trade unions, and more established, confident shop-floor organisation. And there were other significant advantages for revolutionaries—the opposition between the rank and file and the trade union bureaucracy was well established in key industries; while the Labour Party was in decline and increasingly discredited.

These main features of the situation were ones which IS, more than any other force on the left, generally understood. What is more, there were a number of specific reasons why IS's position was promising at the end of 1968. It had grown to around 1,000 members, which gave it some sort of base in nearly every large city and many smaller towns; the membership

was young and energetic; the results of the 1968 debate had generally been positive, giving the organisation more coherence, and few had left over the changes. The Communist Party, by contrast, despite its much larger paper membership, was partially paralysed by its close relationship to Labour's left and the new left-wing union leaders, and was convulsed by disagreements over Czechoslovakia. The SLL, although the daily paper and the "party" were still to come, was playing itself out as a serious force. The much smaller IMG had failed to recruit from VSC, and was still trying to gain an initial cadre from the student movement. Militant, in the Labour Party as always, could make very limited gains while the Labour Government continued not just to disillusion trade unionists and young people with itself, but to drive them away from the Party as well.

IS entered the period after 1968 with confidence, and to a real extent this bore fruit. Five years later the organisation was much larger, and much more working-class in composition. But problems had developed, and there was an unease among some of the more experienced members which was soon to erupt into open conflict. This period of great opportunities and considerable success must be the main focus of our history.

1. Industrial struggle and emerging political dilemmas

Just as disillusionment with the Labour Government had provided the greatest spur to IS's growth from 1965-68, so the experience of Tory government created the conditions for its even more dramatic expansion in 1970-73. The difference, however, was that whereas the first period had seen isolated, "fragmented" working-class struggles, the second was to be marked by great mass, often political struggles, in which class-wide generalisation was dramatically easier. And while the growth of IS in 1965-68 had not, by and large, actually occurred in the fragmented workers' struggles, but in the student and Vietnam movements—seen by the IS leadership as something of a "windfall"—in 1970-73 the main politicisation shifted to the arena IS had always seen as central, the industrial class struggle.

In one sense, therefore, IS was very well prepared for this new challenge. Its leaders knew well that the real test of the new upsurge would be when the political focus passed from the students to the industrial working class. They had highlighted the threat of laws to control shop stewards, three years before Labour's "In Place of Strife." They had observed the rising level of industrial conflict before it reached boiling point at the end of the 1960s, and had attempted to orient IS towards it. In 1968-70, they had particularly fought for IS, with its largely student composition, to make a "turn to the class." By the time the Tories were returned, IS members had considerable experience, if mainly from the outside, of the new wave of struggle: in the dustmen's

strike, the textile strikes, and the battle at Pilkington's, to give some of the most important examples.

In these struggles, IS's politics had fitted well. At a most basic level, the "revolt of the lower paid" in 1969-70 conformed to the classic pattern of the struggles of the 1950s and '60s. They were spontaneous, unofficial actions, in which the union bureaucracy was the enemy as much as the employers themselves. What was new and exciting was the awakening of workers who had been passive for decades: their strikes were bigger, longer, less predictable, more politically provocative than the well-practised walk-outs in the engineering industry. They were more reminiscent of the mass strikes of May 1968, or indeed of Russia in 1905, than of the staid pattern of British trade unionism. In the argument about "In Place of Strife", too, it seemed that the difference between the TUC and Labour was over how to control the shop stewards, not whether they should be controlled. The rank and file opposition—May Day 1969 saw the first political strike for decades, and an unofficial one at that—was the crucial feature of the situation.

But for the same reasons that IS was politically well-prepared for the struggles of 1969-70, the change in the situation once the Tories were ejected posed crucial problems. IS's whole analysis had stressed the convergence between Labour and Tory parties.²¹ In the 1970 election, there was a strong "plague on both their houses" faction, and although the organisation as a whole called for a Labour vote "without illusions" (the case for IS candidates was perhaps too lightly dismissed), much of IS's propaganda was of the "Tweedledum-Tweedledee" variety. A sharp turn had therefore to be made, in understanding the importance that the change of government made, and launching into "anti-Tory" campaigning.

Even more important, the role of the trade union leaders changed with the Tories in power. The rising wage militancy and legal threats to union independence had already begun to force them to lead some struggles. The removal of the political loyalty which they owed to a Labour government gave this tendency a big impetus. The big strikes, like the postmen's in 1971 and the miners' in 1972, became official strikes. The political struggles, against the Industrial Relations Act and other Tory policies, were officially led by the union leaders. Of course, they did not develop the struggles as they might, strikes were sold out, and the political campaigns dampened down. The official leadership of some struggles did not rule out action by the rank and file—on the contrary it encouraged it, not just because a spur to the union leaders and a fight against betrayals were always needed, but also because rank and file initiative was all the more viable when some official backing would be forthcoming. It is easy to see the early '70s in terms of the stage battles of the big battalions, but there was a host of other struggles. The wave of closures and redundancies in 1971-72, accompanied by the rise of unemployment

over the million mark, gave rise to the factory occupations, of which UCS was only the most famous. Here again industrial struggle went way beyond its "normal" methods.

To a large extent, IS's leadership was capable of adapting to the new conditions. The problems arose, again, from the speed with which changes had to be made. For not only did tactics have to be adapted; the previous one-sided political emphases, in which little distinction had been made between basic analysis and propaganda, had also to be corrected. The membership could be carried, obviously, to campaign to "Kill the Bill"; but not so easily for a Labour vote, or an anti-Common Market campaign. There was little inclination, moreover, among the leaders to produce the kind of generalised analysis of the new situation which it had made in the early sixties—although this might have given more coherence to the changes of line. The "permanent arms economy" remained the official explanation of modern capitalism, but it had the appearance of dogma, not living theory.²²

The most important change of tactics was that away from independent, spontaneous rank and file action towards the conception of "rank and file movements", fighting within the unions as well as at the grass roots. IS as a whole never made the mistake of, for example, some of the Italian far left, of arguing for organisation outside the unions, nor did it support the idea of breakaway unions, raised by the Pilkington strike. IS was too well rooted both in the political traditions of Communism and in the experience of the British labour movement. From these, indeed, came the idea of an eventual national rank and file movement, modelled on the Minority Movement of the Communist Party in the 1920s.

There was also limited practical experience which could be generalised. Although the main body of IS students and white-collar workers had been engaged, in 1969-70, in a "turn to the class" which involved mainly regular factory leafleting from the outside, a few IS teachers founded a teachers' journal called "Rank and File" which within two or three years had a readership of several thousands. (They included very experienced activists such as Duncan Hallas, a founder member of Socialist Review who rejoined IS in 1968 after 14 years absence.) A supporters' group which was established involved hundreds of activists, the majority of them outside IS, and soon became the major left-wing force in the newly radicalised NUT. Rank and File played a leading role in teachers' strikes in London, and eventually had two of its members elected to the union's executive.

Early in 1970, IS's main industrial intervention was still around the plant-level "employers' offensive" of productivity deals, through the very effective propaganda of Tony Cliffs book, an impressive compilation based on contact with industrial workers up and down the country.²³ But by 1972, there was a serious attempt to set up rank and file papers and groups, consisting of non-members as well as an IS nucleus, not only in

other white-collar unions like NALGO, ATTI and the CPSA, but also among hospital workers (NUPE and COHSE), miners, carworkers, and other manual workers. These groups were genuinely open, in some cases involving members of other small left-wing groups as well as Labour Party and even CP members. Although some collapsed quickly, a number won considerable minority support in their unions for several years. The main successes were, however, among white-collar workers; among manual workers the complexity of shop-floor and union organisation, the slower pace of radicalisation, and the strength of the Broad Left in the AUEW, all combined to weaken the impact.

The basis of the rank and file movements was the willingness of potential supporters to fight against the employers, the union bureaucracy and the government, rather than for any particular programme of demands. In practice, in this period of rising struggle, the demands tended to set themselves: for higher wages and against government controls; against anti-union laws; against unemployment (35-hour week, etc.); for union democracy; and (in the public sector especially) against cuts. Although the rank and file groups were supposed to have more limited programmes than the revolutionary organisation, IS itself propagated roughly the same demands: there seemed little need to go further. The demand for "a sliding scale of wages", i.e. index-linking against inflation, a classical slogan raised by "orthodox" trotskyists inside and outside IS, was particularly resisted.

The new rise of struggle under the Tories offered great opportunities to IS, but they also raised major questions. The size and scale of the industrial battles made it clear that even a rapidly growing IS could have only a slight influence on events. In the most decisive confrontations, such as the miners' strikes, IS—however much its solidarity work gained it the respect of the rank and file—remained basically an outside force. IS could grow in the groundswell, but the outcome of this phase of—highly political—class struggle would be determined independently of IS. What this outcome would be, what IS should say and do about it, raised deeper political questions than IS's leaders were willing to ask. In the end, they were to contribute to a major political crisis from which the organisation has still not recovered.

2. *New left or old?*

While IS's industrial strength advanced slowly, but nevertheless convincingly, in the early 1970s, in most other "areas" the group encountered increasing problems. Indeed, the segregation of the "industrial" from all other political questions, and the absolute priority given to it over all else, was the root of many of these. The IS leadership understood one key question, that a largely student and white-collar organisation, in a period of mounting workers' struggle, must attempt to root itself in the

manual working class. But it is hardly unfair to say that they understood little else. This fundamentalism brought some definite gains, but it had its price, which was quite a serious one for IS, and was a major factor in the crisis to come.

We have already seen that the growth of IS before and during 1968 rested on the paradox, that it was not its central perspective, but factors distinctly secondary and even, in a sense, accidental to it, which were responsible. This remained true, although in different ways and not always so obviously, in the early 1970s. It was certainly the case that in the crucial moments of the class struggle, the traditionally militant sections of the working class played a decisive role. The engineers fought the Industrial Relations Act far more consistently than any other section of workers; the shipyard workers fought at UCS; the dockers, with the printers, freed the Pentonville 5; the miners brought down the Heath Government. To this extent IS's perspective was completely justified. But we have seen that behind these "stage battles" lay a much more diverse pattern of struggle. The "revolt" of the lower paid had not ended in 1970, but had merged into a general movement. Vast new sections of workers—white collar, women, service workers, as well as less militant workers in many manufacturing industries—were brought into the strikes and occupations of these years. Struggle outside the factory, over housing, rents, and services, continued to flourish. Students remained an active and occasionally explosive force. It was the involvement of all these sections which gave the battles against the Tories much of their mass character, and it was from them, rather than the traditionally militant unions, that most of IS's recruits came.

IS's leadership had, therefore, peculiarly contradictory attitudes to the majority of its members who were not male, manual workers in the traditionally militant industries. It was glad to have them, since without them the organisation would have looked very thin, and little of the necessary work could have been done. It promoted rank and file work among white collar workers, in particular. But politically, it dismissed them in all different degrees, and devalued their particular activity.

Similarly, the leadership refused to recognise the *other* lesson of 1968, that the struggle which was unfolding in the Western world was cultural, ideological, and political in the specific sense, as well as economic. Very many people continued to be drawn to IS for these sorts of reasons, and to raise these sorts of issue in the organisation. This was another source of major conflict.

A great deal of activity outside the "traditional" sectors of the industrial working class was actually carried on, since members would naturally work where they were or around issues they were particularly interested in. To a large extent, initiative was encouraged, or at least allowed to develop unhindered. But in a number of key areas a line was

fostered or defended by the leadership, which directly restricted IS's intervention, and discredited its attempt to create a new socialist organisation.

Probably the most important single set of challenges to which IS failed to respond adequately were those posed by the women's movement and sexual politics in general.²⁴ The women's movement in Britain could trace itself back to the campaign of the Hull fishermen's wives, and the equal pay strike at Ford's Dagenham plant in 1968, both of which IS had naturally supported. But the movement as such, responding to similar movements in America and Germany, grew out of groups formed in 1969 by women around the student left, and really took off from a conference in Oxford in early 1970.²⁵ The issues were first raised at an IS Conference in March of that year: a motion supporting "independent women's organisations", calling for IS to be involved in women's liberation groups, for members to practice equality, and for a national sub-committee on the women question to be set up, provoked fierce opposition from the leadership, and was narrowly defeated. A more acceptable motion was passed, emphasising the militancy of women workers and avoiding the issue of support for the women's movement. But even the recommendation of this motion, for a coordinating committee to be set up, was not acted upon. By 1971, however, IS women were meeting among themselves, a newsletter was being published, and Conference gave its "general support to the women's liberation movement", as well as demanding that a women's committee functioned. "The official attitude in IS", Sheila Rowbotham noted, "has shifted from joking incredulity to grudging support."²⁶

"Women's work", and the organisation of women involved in it both locally and nationally, were, however, to remain highly problematic. The underlying reason, not always recognised by women themselves in their desire to reconcile their activity with the line of the organisation, was that the basic political attitudes to women's liberation were never fully clarified. As David Widgery was to complain in 1975:

"For the last 5 years, we have been toing and froing in IS about our attitude to the Women's Liberation Movement, about how we organise women at work and at home, about the weight revolutionaries should put on questions of the family, marriage, children, homosexuality and the other non-industrial aspects of women's oppression."

The "EC's informal line for years" had included "complete isolation from the Women's Liberation Movement in all its forms" and "explicit rejection of work with housewives" (i.e. with women outside the work situation).²⁷ Politically, the leadership simply refused to recognise women's oppression in its totality. As Widgery recorded on another occasion, a leading member of IS "was responsible for the classic line 'I.S. does not have a line on what

you call sexism and has not found it a phenomenon which exists in the working class.' ²⁸

It was, in fact, the question of gay liberation which bared this political contradiction. It was possible to conceive of women's struggles in terms of the economic battle for equal pay, and indeed this was a vital part, but only one part, of any struggle for women's liberation. It was also possible to criticise the main women's movement for failing to involve itself actively with women in the workplace. These issues could be used to confuse the debate, and divert attention from the questions of sexual oppression as a whole and support for the women's movement as a movement against that oppression. On the gay question, there could be no such compromise with the workerist, economic line of IS. The attempt to set up an IS Gay Group between 1972 and 1975 met, therefore, with consistent opposition from the leadership. Its harassed existence in those years makes "A Grim Tale", as one of the participants was later to describe it. ²⁹

IS women did do some good work among women workers, which few sections of the women's movement managed, although many others were of course working politically with working-class women over cuts, battering, abortion, etc. They maintained a paper in various forms and kept the issues alive in IS. But the general conclusion must be that there was an unnecessary divorce between IS, the main organised current of revolutionary socialism, and the women's movement, in a period which was crucial for them both. IS was certainly gravely weakened by its failure to relate successfully to what was, after the rank and file movement in industry, the most important social movement of the period. And the women's movement, too, reacted against the failures of IS (and other groups) by insulating itself against organised revolutionary socialism. Only recently has a strong "socialist feminist" current revived, in which revolutionary ideas have a real place.

In many cases, the failure of the left to respond to the women's movement might be put down simply to sexism, and of course that was not lacking in IS. But IS's failure raises other problems. The group had previously shown itself highly flexible and responsive to movements outside the framework of its theory and perspectives—particularly to the student movement of the late sixties, which had far less potential for working-class appeal than the women's movement. It was clearly the particular re-assertion, in this period, of a narrow and fundamentalist approach to socialist politics and the working class, which was responsible for the situation. Indeed IS's attitude ³⁰ students also changed. The idea of support for a student movement, and intervention in it, was replaced, particularly in 1971-73, by the idea of recruiting individual students "to work at the factory gates." It was as if the late sixties had never happened: IS leaders took their ideas of students from Trotsky and

ignored IS's own experience and analysis of more recent years.³⁰

These trends did not represent just a strategic error, or a series of tactical misjudgements, but a political failure. It was a failure to recognise that the social crisis which was developing had more than economic and industrial dimensions. It was a failure to respond politically to the situation as a whole. A particularly crucial index of this weakness was IS's record of response to the situation in Ireland. When the civil rights movement first erupted, IS had responded with solidarity action, and in 1969 tried to develop a mass Irish Civil Rights Solidarity Campaign, which it saw as a successor to VSC and an important bridge to the Irish working class in Britain.³¹ The escalation of the conflict in the North quickly led, however, to a situation in which "solidarity with civil rights" was overtaken. The border, it was soon clear, was still a crucial issue. The sending in of British troops, too, provoked a critical debate within and around IS: the organisation's reluctance to call immediately for their withdrawal—although based on a tactical case, and certainly not the betrayal of principles of which IS was accused by other trotskysts³²—fuelled suspicions about IS's commitment to the struggle in the North. Certainly, after this early phase, IS's interest waned: its involvement in the various solidarity organisations, like that in VSC, was uneven, and even on a propaganda level IS often played down the issue. It is true that, particularly after the Provisionals' military methods came to dominate the struggle in the North, the possibilities of mass solidarity action diminished. No one has been able to develop a viable mass movement around Irish issues. But IS tended, in the early '70s, to see them as a diversion from the possibilities of industrial struggle, and abdicated much of its responsibility to maintain an opposition to Britain's war in the North.

IS's wider political weaknesses contributed to dissent and disillusionment among sections of the membership. But while IS continued to grow, these often appeared as isolated problems, and the oppositions which focused on them were tiny minorities. At the same time, it is important to note that the IMG, while lacking a serious approach to or experience of the industrial struggle, grew rapidly in the early 1970s largely because it developed a more principled political response to the issues of sexual politics, Ireland, etc. It grew, particularly among students, at the height of IS's "workerist" phase. In 1968, the only other far-left organisation of any size was the ultra-sectarian SLL; by 1972, the IMG was a noticeable rival to IS in some fields and localities.³³

3. *The organisation and its life*

The years 1968-69 had seen a new pattern emerging in IS. It ceased to be "The International Socialism Group" and became "The International Socialists"; if not yet a party, it was no longer a mere group but a definite "organisation." For the first time IS had a weekly paper, *Socialist Worker*,

which was expanded **step-by-step** from four pages to sixteen, between **1968** and **1972**. For the first time it had a full-time staff, ludicrously small in **1968** but rapidly expanded in the following years. The new constitution, with the nationally elected political leadership, radically altered the shape of IS. Although there was no growth in membership until **1970**, the year or so after **1968** saw a real consolidation of the enlarged membership and its activity. From this base, further rapid expansion took place under the Tories, to **2,351** in **1972** and **2,667** in **1973**.³⁴ Within this membership, only a few dozen had experience from before the mid-sixties; the real core of the organisation was a couple of hundred or so activists recruited mainly in **1966-68**. Many of these were, of course, ex-students; the contradictions between their experience and the demands of IS's industrial strategy, as defined by the leadership, were a critical factor in IS's development.

The "leadership" of IS, to which we have so far referred without explanation, was itself changing. Before **1968**, there was no elected national leadership, but the group was informally led by Tony Cliff, whose ideas and initiatives were very much the basis of IS's success. The looseness and openness of the group had enabled its members to respond flexibly to events, and given IS's small size had posed little problem of political cohesion. Only in the two or three years of "working in the fragments" had some difficulties arisen, as fragmented activity led to some political divergences which were not always articulated.³⁵

The changes of **1968** led, both formally and in practice, to a more collective leadership; not only in the National Committee of 40, which included quite diverse representatives of both the older and newer generations, but also on the Executive Committee, the sub-committee which effectively ran the group on a day-to-day basis. Although the EC was very much a working group, it included the effective political leadership. And even if Cliff was still the most important figure, he was now much more the first among equals, with other members of the older generation, particularly Duncan Hallas and Jim Higgins, playing key roles. On the EC and NC, these comrades, together with others such as Chris Harman (always a very close collaborator of Cliff), Roger Protz (editor of *Socialist Worker* from **1968** to **1974**), and John Palmer, tended to provide a balanced leadership. Cliff's imagination, and his enthusiasm for a key project, together with his tendency to see matters in purely industrial rather than political terms, were often complemented and corrected by other members of the EC. This leadership was able to provide much of the positive direction the organisation needed for its decisive growth after **1968**, despite the very serious weaknesses which we have noted.

The leadership was more stable than the rest of the membership of the NC, among whom many of the "late sixties" generation were replaced—sometimes rather arbitrarily—by the new industrial militants. And indeed,

the organisation itself was in constant flux, mainly because its growth posed new problems all the time, but also because organisational solutions tended to be sought for political problems, at local even more than national level. A thoroughgoing anti-formalism was very powerful in IS, and was rooted in its rejection of "orthodox" trotskysm, with its tortuous concept of "the degenerated workers' state" and plethora of international apparatuses. (It also reflected the strong anti-authoritarianism of the student upsurge, and the rank and file rejection of bureaucratic procedures in the "official" labour movement.) The consequence, however, was not the rejection of organisational forms but a principle of constant flexibility. This belief in flexibility was strongly held by the leadership, particularly Cliff, and was to prove a useful means of controlling the membership.

The units of IS organisation were the local branches, but during the early seventies, with the growth of the industrial membership and of rank and file organisations, there was a serious attempt to construct a parallel system of industrial "Fractions". These consisted of all the members in a particular industry or union, and were generally organised on a national basis. Where, however, there were several members in a locality in the same union, industry or better still workplace, a cell would be formed within the local branch. Indeed as the branches in the larger cities often had over **50** or even **100** members by **1972-73**, cell organisation became normal, even where branches divided. A cell would often consist of an industrial worker together with a few students, ex-students or white collar workers who were collaborating with him in working "around" a particular workplace or industry. Cells were rarely stable and were the focus of endless local reorganisations.

IS's rapid growth in **1971-73** was urged on by "membership campaigns", recruiting drives aimed mainly at workers, using big public meetings (Bernadette Devlin was a frequent speaker). These reflected the fear of the leadership, and particularly Cliff, that local branches led by the members recruited in the sixties and accustomed to the consolidation of the year or so after **1968**, would be "conservative" in their attitude to the new generation of rank and file workers coming into the fight against the Tories. Aware of the real possibilities for growth inherent in the great industrial upheaval, Cliffs overriding worry was that the organisation would be insufficiently daring and imaginative to take advantage. In a sense he was right: but political imagination was lacking, as we have already seen, among the leadership as well as the members—indeed in his own approach. And the recruitment campaigns themselves, with the inevitable rapid turnover among new members, caused disillusionment among some of the membership who saw them as a diversion from the more serious, long-term tasks of building in the workplaces and unions. They led to what David Widgery later called the "supermarket mentality",

a purely operational concept of "building the party." Those who criticised them or failed to show the necessary enthusiasm were called "conservative, backward-looking elements", and castigated for their "small-group mentality." Full-time organisers who were appointed in the major industrial areas were charged with stepping up the recruitment; many of them came on to the NC where they tended to reinforce the leadership's, and especially Cliffs, impatience. The organisers were generally ex-students, but frequently developed the worst "workerist" attitudes towards others from the same background.

It is clear in retrospect that the consolidation of the "apparatus"—the full-time leadership together with the network of local full-timers and the fast-expanding centre, based on a viable commercial printshop—posed serious dangers for IS. None of these developments were exceptional in themselves, and indeed they made big contributions to the effectiveness of IS's national intervention. But for them to play their proper part presupposed effective political control by the membership as a whole. This in turn required that the organisation, as Chris Harman had pointed out in his article on "Party and Class", should be based on a membership "willing to seriously and scientifically appraise their activity and that of the party generally."³⁶ This would have meant an organisation of "worker-intellectuals", trained not just scholastically but by the practice of constant debate, attempting to apply marxist analysis to problems of political practice. IS was failing, however, to create this sort of organisation. The reasons were not just the lack—which continues to this day—of any serious "formal" education in marxism, but a specific downgrading of serious political discussion.

When IS was a small propaganda group it had placed a good deal of emphasis on political ideas and discussion. In 1966-68 it had attracted to it, partly for this reason, large numbers of students (and others) who were educating themselves in marxism, both generally and through IS's ideas. In 1968 it had had the most varied political debate which, however inconclusive in some ways, was generally felt to have been a positive experience. There was, therefore, a developing tradition of internal discussion, and in the 1968 debate everyone took it for granted that this was an essential part of the life of the organisation. But five years later this tradition was somewhat soured, and it was soon to become clear that it could not be assumed.

There were certainly important specific disagreements within the leadership and the general membership of IS in this period—over wider political issues such as the attitude to Labour in the 1970 election, the Common Market, and women, as well as organisational and tactical issues such as factory branches (to which we shall return). By and large they were debated openly, with active involvement of the members. The tradition of branch resolutions, which were voted on by the NC, was

strong for several years after 1968, NC and EC minutes were issued to all branches, and a more or less regular internal bulletin was maintained. But there was always a reluctance on the part of some of the leadership to commit themselves on paper to explain their ideas, the feeling being that articles in the paper for the outside world were far more important than purely internal documents. This division between public and internal discussion was in fact fairly strictly maintained—not by strict control of ideas but because part of IS's general reaction against sectarian trotskyism was the belief that workers were not interested in the often petty and obscure disagreements that occurred among revolutionaries. On occasion, however, articles reflecting the more political differences were published in IS journal, and this remained a constant aspiration.³⁷

The general eschewing of public debate, while not seriously harmful in itself, was however indicative of a tendency to devalue discussion which was strengthening in this period. The belief was strong among many of the leadership and the local activists that the possibilities were great and the need was to "get on with the job." IS's theory, developed in the early sixties and before, was seen as a key which could now be used to open the door to the working class; there was no need to refine it further.³⁸ The theme was, "We've got the ideas, now let's get the worker-membership to put some flesh on them." Political discussion could easily be seen as an impediment to this task, particularly when criticism was general and wide-ranging, and where it was linked with a different theoretical tradition. This was the case with successive opposition factions, which were eventually expelled from IS. The leadership, and some of the members, complained of the "disproportionate" amount of time which was spent in discussing the differences. In the end, it was the effects of the conflicts on IS which were truly disproportionate to the significance of the particular oppositions.

There were two main factional battles before 1973. The first concerned Workers Fight, the tiny trotskyist group who had fused with IS (it was universally agreed without proper preparation). Workers Fight viewed IS as "centrist", i.e. not fully revolutionary, and therefore maintained their own organisation within it. While this gave them a generally "entrist" view of their role in IS—i.e. they saw their task as building their own group within the wider organisation—they attracted a number of members by their emphasis on a clearer political programme and criticism of the narrow "economism" of IS's industrial work.³⁹ There was a certain ambiguity to Workers Fight's entrist—it claimed it genuinely aimed to reform IS, and some members certainly believed in this—but the decisive factor was the series of disruptive clashes in the branches where Workers Fight existed. Pragmatic splitting of these branches in 1969 was followed by a commission in 1970, whose recommendations formally limited the rights of factions to hold private meetings and to express their disagreements publicly.⁴⁰ In 1971, after a lengthy discussion, a Special Conference

was held which "dissolved the fusion" between IS and Workers Fight, asking Workers Fight supporters to choose between the two.

The second battle involved an even smaller group, who refused to declare themselves a formal faction but were labelled the "Right" faction because of their emphasis on a propaganda orientation to the Labour Party. This group was particularly concerned with theoretical and programmatic correctness, and their leading figure David Yaffe argued that Kidron's arms economy theory was *unmarxist*.⁴¹ A series of debates, some of them on technical matters of *marxist* economics, took place in the internal bulletin in 1972-73. Again it was the apparent disruption of local activity which most concerned the leadership, and led them eventually to expel the leading members of this group.

The legacy of the Workers Fight conflict had been to greatly strengthen the *suspicion* among the leadership of factional opposition. The "Right faction" affair increased this still further, and seems to have created some difference among the leadership about the amount of patience which should be exercised with "marginal" critics of this kind (the "Rights" never made any serious impact on the membership). But these matters were important, not mainly because the oppositions, including another group, the "Left faction", articulated a little of the unease at IS's workerist politics, but because they coincided with a particularly crucial point in the organisation's development along this line. IS's growth in 1971-73 led the leadership to envisage a major transformation of the organisation into a small party with a significant minority audience in the working class. They looked back to the early British Communist Party as a model, and while one influential perspective was that of a new Minority Movement (a rank and file opposition based on the trade unions), they saw the need to repeat first the "bolshevisation" process which the CP had undergone in 1922-23.⁴²

The main single change was the move towards the setting up of factory branches. For the leadership, this was an essential part of IS's transition to a "combat organisation", organised in the class struggle rather than in abstract geographical units. But while the early CP was "almost exclusively proletarian in character",⁴³ IS was not mainly composed of manual workers, let alone workers in large factories. More than 70 per cent of IS members were *white-collar* workers, students, unemployed, housewives, etc.⁴⁴ The proposal for factory branches was resisted on the grounds that it would split off a minority of manual workers (indeed the section of them most involved in industrial struggle) from the majority of members. The latter would be left in the sort of geographical branches IS had in the late sixties, with no direct links with industrial struggle. Secondly, there was the fear of some critics of IS's economism, that the divorce between industrial struggle and the struggle against wider aspects of oppression would be strengthened. And thirdly, those who noted the

growth of the apparatus saw in the move a danger that the leadership, by direct control of the factory branches, would insulate the worker-membership from views emanating from other sections of the members.

There were indeed grounds for these fears. There can be no objection in principle to functional units based on a particular area of struggle, nor to such units playing a direct role in the internal life of a socialist organisation. But if the setting up of branches in factories or indeed in town halls, among teachers, in colleges, etc., was not to result in distortions, a number of things would have been required. There would have needed to be, first, a balanced politics, which placed the particular struggle in the context of wider political struggle; secondly a strong tradition of political discussion, which ensured that members thought about the tasks of the organisation as a whole; and thirdly concrete organisational forms which brought together manual and white-collar workers, students, etc. But in IS, in **1972-73**, the first and second were increasingly being weakened, and as for the third, there was no more than lip-service. Non-industrial workers were seen by many of the leadership as having a role within the organisation which was not just different from that of workers, but inferior. Some of them, especially students and those who had been students in the late sixties, were actually suspect, as a layer of members resistant to change, and the main locus of potential opposition. The aim was partly to create a new, dynamic sector of the organisation, the factory branches, not "held back" by the rest.

Factory branches were hotly debated and in fact defeated at the **1972** Conference, and only agreed in March **1973**. The perspective adopted spoke only of "at least **10** factory branches" in the following year, and an Organisation Commission was established to pursue the implications of factory branches.⁴⁵ Even among the critics of factory branches, there was no general mood of despair; among the majority there was great optimism. The National Secretary, Jim Higgins, wrote in his report that "This conference was the most serious, committed and representative gathering in the history of the group. . . a firmly based springboard for the organisation to make considerable advances in the next **12 months**."⁴⁶

IS did indeed grow in that period: to **3,310** members in **195** branches, with **368** of them in **38** factory branches, before the September **1974** Conference.⁴⁷ But it was to be the last period of growth until **1977**; indeed within four months of the **1973** Conference came the first signs of a crisis which was to tear IS apart. The hectic pace of IS's growth and the impatience of some of the leadership to consolidate a "workers' organisation", free from factional opposition, led in August to what can only be described as a *coup* in the Executive Committee. Cliff's mistrust of "conservative elements" finally caught up with his colleagues in the leadership itself. Arguing that they did not understand the mood of the workers in the factories, he persuaded the National Committee to replace

almost all the existing members of the EC with a number of provincial organisers. In one fell swoop, out went Higgins, Protz, Palmer, Hallas—even Nigel Harris—all those who had provided some sort of balance in the leadership. Only Harman remained, with Cliff, and to them were added several comrades based in the North and Midlands, some of them good local organisers, but none of them of national political standing in IS. One of these, Dave Peers, was for the next year the National Secretary; but the most significant addition was that of Jim Nichol, the National Treasurer, who had built up the printshop and IS's finances.

The first noticeable result of this change was that the Internal Bulletin failed to appear for more than six months—which with a previous decision to stop issuing EC and NC minutes, on security grounds, meant that information and discussion on a national scale more or less dried up. Thus for the first time, democracy became an issue for a large section of the membership—a situation exacerbated in some localities, such as Liverpool and Hull, where local organisers created extremely centralist organisations. The new leadership itself, although known as the "leading areas" EC because the provincial members were supposed to represent the experience of major growth areas, was extremely centralised. Cliff was the only source of political initiative left, while organisationally the provincial members could obviously have little day-to-day influence. Peers as National Secretary was new to the centre, and the most important role devolved to Nichol, who before long took over the secretary's post himself.

This ultra-centralised EC was of course responsible to an NC which still included all those who had been pushed out of the leadership. Very soon, its failings and inefficiencies were to require some modifications. But the locus of power had shifted decisively from the collective leadership of the previous five years, to a new and politically unstable axis centred on Cliff and Nichol. Some of the "old guard" were to fight back, but unsuccessfully: the struggle only hastened the consolidation of a much more centralised and undemocratic regime.

III. POLITICAL CRISIS AND CRISIS OF IS, 1974-76

As IS's official historian has noted, while IS was debating factory branches, "events were moving quickly in the world outside also."¹⁰ In fact the struggle against the Heath Government was coming to its climax, the second official miners' strike. It was also, of course, a turning point in the history of the post-war capitalist economy, as the oil crisis precipitated the first world-wide recession for 45 years.

IS's strategy was predicated on a continuation, indeed a further escalation, of the industrial struggle of the previous five years. It argued, correctly, that while there was unlikely to be a catastrophic slump as in 1929, capitalism—especially British capitalism—had no way out of the

pattern of deepening recessions and mounting inflation. It argued, too, that the British working class was undefeated (indeed in 1974 it was victorious), and that despite the more serious challenges facing it in the mid-seventies there was unlikely to be a decisive defeat such as that suffered in 1926. The conclusion was, therefore, that there would be more, and bigger, and more political struggles in the coming years.

This assumption was, we can say with the benefit of five years hindsight, fundamentally wrong. True, capitalism has by no means found its way out of its long-term difficulties: the reduction in inflation rates has been no more than would be expected in a cyclical pattern, and unemployment has hardly diminished at all. The working class has not, moreover, suffered historic defeats. But the mass struggles of 1969-74 are a thing of the past. Clearly there has been a whole period of a different character, in which factors to which IS gave little weight have played—for the time being—the decisive part.

As we have seen, there has been a consistent tendency for IS to see politics purely in terms of industrial struggle. And of course it is true that nowhere has the economic class struggle, and the role of workers and trade unions, been of such central political importance as in Britain in the last fifteen years. But IS has failed to understand the impact of politics on industrial struggle itself. In 1970 it tended to underestimate the effect of the Tory victory in escalating the struggle; in 1974 it underestimated the effect of Labour's success in dampening it down.⁴⁸ When the new battles failed to appear, it was conceded that the perspective had been "telescoped", but this excuse eventually appeared lame. It is not just that IS underestimated Labour's traditional base, as some trotskyst critics maintain, but that it failed to see how the period of "confrontation" would itself have major political effects.

Throughout much of Europe, the upsurge of student and industrial unrest in the late 1960s and early 1970s has been followed, as the economic crisis has developed, by the consolidation of new reformist politics. The changed expectations, the costs of industrial conflict and the experience of inflation have all had permanent effects on people's attitudes. In countries such as Italy, France and Spain they appear to have produced a fairly radical rise in the position of one or other of the reformist parties—Communist or social-democratic. In Britain, Labour's governmental role has ruled out any such development of left social democracy, while the Communist party has been too weak to offer a focus. The political and ideological changes have therefore been less radical and more diffuse—on the one hand, the "historic compromise" of the trade union leaders with the Labour Government, on the other, the electoral fragmentation which has produced the Nationalists, the Liberal revival of '74, even the National Front's modest but menacing growth. And the underlying pattern has been an ideological swing to the right, with effects not just in the Tory

party, but among Labour politicians (both right and left) and the union leadership.

IS's strategy remained formally the same throughout this period: to proceed towards the foundation of a new revolutionary socialist party and rank and file movement. In defiance of the more difficult circumstances in which it found itself, it proclaimed a policy of "steering left" and sticking to its goals. But what this meant, in the new circumstances, was that the distortions and dangers of the previous period were to be exaggerated until the organisation and its goals were radically deformed.

1. The rank and file movement and the revolutionary party

By 1973 IS had developed a number of viable rank and file movements, particularly in white collar unions, and had won a small but significant number of bases among manual workers, although these were not generally converted into functioning rank and file bodies. It had long been the intention of the organisation to build these at some stage into a national movement, across industries and unions, which would function as an opposition within the trade union movement as a whole, as the Communist Party's Minority Movement had in the 1920s. Of course, the situation was not quite so simple as that which had faced the early CP, since the modern Communist Party itself possessed a superior base, particularly in major manual workers unions such as the AUEW, EEPTU and TGWU, and in key industrial centres such as Glasgow and Sheffield. What is more, there was a left current in many of these unions, the Broad Left, which was centred on the CP; and the CP possessed a national body, the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions, which had played a leading role in mobilising protest strikes against "In Place of Strife" and the Industrial Relations Act. IS had always realistically acknowledged these strengths and appreciated they would not simply disappear.

In the early seventies, however, there were good reasons for noting an improvement in the balance of industrial forces between IS and the CP. In some major white-collar unions, such as the NUT and NALGO, IS had won the leadership of the left, and industrially it had begun to provide some effective competition. More generally, the CP's conflict of loyalties between the rank and file and the left-wing union leaders (such as Jones and Scanlon) seemed to be causing it increasing problems. The Liaison Committee was ceasing to act as an effective focus, and the support mustered by IS and other leftists at its conferences was causing its CP leaders to resort to heavy-handed measures to keep control. Towards the end of 1973, the time seemed ripe to attempt to start an alternative focus for trade union militants. It was decided to organise the first National Rank and File Conference, sponsored by the various rank and file papers, in March 1974.

Although this conference, and the second held later in the year, each

attracted around 500 delegates from around 300 sponsoring bodies (mainly union branches, but with some shop stewards committees), a viable movement was not created. Obviously, the early downfall of the Heath government brought about a change in the tempo of class struggle which could hardly have been predicted. But at the same time, the conferences were essentially composed of IS members and their periphery, rather than representative of the militant left-wing of the trade union movement in general. They indicated IS's real and growing influence, but also the still very modest nature of its strength, especially in the manual unions. A determined effort would have been required, to reach out to militants generally, and those influenced by other sections of the left in particular. An exaggerated emphasis on the rank and file movement's independence of IS, and encouragement of others to take their responsibility for it, was needed. In fact, the National Rank and File Organising Committee was established, and quickly became an all-IS body, with hardly any existence independent of IS's Industrial Department. Its initiatives, some of them deliberately modest ones such as support for the families of the imprisoned Shrewsbury pickets, and for Chilean refugees, came effectively from the IS centre. Its real base was quickly reduced to IS itself, and its existence served less to widen support for the individual rank and file movements, than to *narrow* it by placing them much more under central IS control. This was particularly true when in 1975-76 the NR and FOC ran out of steam and was liquidated into the Right to Work Campaign. All the rank and file papers were expected to tie in with the central campaign: indeed for a while some of them appeared to be exclusively concerned with "the right to work." The idea that a rank and file grouping involved a wide layer of trade unionists willing to fight for more militant and socialist policies in their particular union, democratically deciding their own policies, was quickly being lost. Many of the rank and file groups became, and were seen as, little more than extensions of IS, controlled centrally by it. Even the first and strongest, Rank and File Teacher, was the victim of manipulative control by IS; many members of other left-wing groups and independent radicals pulled out and formed a new group, the Socialist Teachers Alliance, which by 1977 clearly possessed a wider base of support in the union. "

This decline in support was put down to "the period", which itself was seen as a temporary lull. The period certainly had something to do with it: it was a time when patient, united work might have established a minority in the unions politically opposed to the wage-cutting of the "social contract", but IS now had little time for that. Indeed the rank and file movement itself ceased to be the main preoccupation of the IS leadership, for the launching of IS as the new "revolutionary party" began to be mooted as a short-term aim. The aim of creating a new party had, of course, been a constant one for IS since 1968, and realistically so since

a small minority current in the working class, to the left of the Labour Party, was definitely developing. In addition, the aspiration to unity of the far left, repeated unsuccessfully for several years after 1968, had been dropped in 1972. IS had regarded itself as the nucleus of a party, and its own growth as the main means for creating one. But it had always been assumed that a qualitative breakthrough in working-class influence would be necessary; the organisation would need to grow strong roots.

The situation in which "the party" became an immediate issue was in fact one of a downturn in IS's fortunes, not one of major advance. Between 1974 and 1976 membership fell, the factory branches collapsed and the rank and file papers and movement were in many cases reduced to IS rumps. For a considerable period, IS conducted very little activity or propaganda under its own banner, or indeed that of the National Rank and File Movement: everything became the Right to Work Campaign. This campaign was in some ways an imaginative and useful venture: it was for a time virtually the only public protest at the monstrous rise in unemployment, and the only nationally based movement to organise the unemployed. Had it been launched on a wider basis, with a stronger orientation to organised workers, it could have been more successful, with more positive results for IS. As it was, the campaign was narrowly controlled and served mainly as a means of recruiting unemployed youth to the organisation. The effect on IS was to turn it away from serious ongoing work in the trade unions—and the women's and student movements—and from wider political campaigning against the policies of the Labour Government. IS had become a single-issue campaign, but it was clear that once this tactic produced any number of recruits, the real aim of declaring a "revolutionary party" would surface.

The first attempt to float the "Socialist Workers Party"^m—the name was presented from the start as a *fait accompli*, never put up for discussion by the membership—came at the end of 1975. In a flush of optimism for the Right to Work Campaign, the leadership—still recognising that an IS of fewer than 3,000 members was hardly sufficient for the "revolutionary party"—proposed a massive recruitment of "Socialist Worker supporters." The argument was that a larger number of workers read *Socialist Worker* than were members of IS, and would therefore take out SW cards but not IS ones. These readers were also more working-class than the actual membership, and so would prove the sound basis for the new revolutionary party—the theory of "the conservatism of the membership" was once again rearing its head. The next stage, therefore, would be to merge IS and the SW Supporters into the "SWP."

There was, however, no radical politicisation in this period, and the recruits of unemployed youth did not offset the losses of trade unionists, both manual and white-collar. The "SW Supporters" simply did not materialise, and by the time the 1976 Conference met, six months later,

the aim of establishing the SWP was not even in the leadership's perspectives. But by this time, a new issue was rearing its head: racism and the growth of the National Front. IS took to the streets against the Front, and issued a stream of anti-racist propaganda. As the furor over immigration increased in the summer, IS leafleted on a massive scale with the slogan "They're welcome here." The issue was a godsend, since the media (and the membership) were tiring of repeated long-distance marches for the Right to Work.⁵¹ IS's propaganda was undoubtedly effective, enabling some inroads to be made with Asian youth, and even the membership started to rise for the first time since 1974. One feature of the anti-racist campaign, moreover, was a series of campaigns in by-elections against the National Front. The leadership then decided that these negative election campaigns needed to be turned into positive campaigns with Socialist Worker candidates; in this context the "SWP" idea was resurrected. Without a real discussion, without even a founding conference, the Socialist Workers Party was born on 1st January 1977.

2. *"Workerism" and the politics of IS*

In describing above IS's politics between 1968 and 1973, the term "workerism" was frequently used to describe the leadership's almost exclusive preoccupation with the economic struggles of male manual workers in industry, and its tendency to interpret all other issues in terms of them. This workerism did, however, proceed from a realistic appraisal of the isolation of the revolutionary left from the mass of the manual working class, and a sense of the possibilities in that period of intense industrial struggle. It enabled IS to make major advances—to achieve by far the most serious growth of a revolutionary organisation in the working class since the 1920s. At the same time, it was a major factor which fostered a gap between the leadership, who assumed a special knowledge of workers born of long experience, and the "cadre" of ex-students from the late 1960s. It also helped to undermine the level of politics and discussion in the organisation. In these ways it assisted the degeneration of IS's internal life, and prepared the way for the opportunistic, unrealistic and sectarian politics which IS was to adopt in the new political period which opened in 1974.

IS's workerism was double-edged: so, therefore, was the development beyond it which occurred from 1973, and particularly from 1975, onwards. Certainly, there were signs of a real recognition of the one-sidedness of IS's politics, and the harm this had done to the organisation's development outside the traditional industries. It began to be seen that, as Birchall tactfully puts it, there had been "an over-emphasis on certain turns."⁵² The first sign of this came in 1973-74, when it was realised that the "factory gate" approach was badly affecting IS's intervention in the student movement. A new policy was adopted which gave much more

emphasis to the students' work inside the colleges, and led to the setting up of the National Organisation of International Socialist Societies. But there were still signs of heavy-handed workerism, for example in early 1975 when the Rank and File organisation rejected delegates for a conference of women trade unionists because they came from white-collar union branches! And 1973-75 was the period in which the IS gay group was suppressed.⁵³

The most marked movement beyond a narrow workerist approach came after the 1975 Conference, which also marked the turning point in the consolidation of a highly undemocratic internal regime, as described below. There were, of course, good political reasons why crude workerism was no longer viable. For example, racism was becoming an increasingly serious issue, requiring a general political and ideological response, and some black workers were being drawn into activity on a political rather than trade union basis. Similarly, abortion rather than equal pay was becoming the major issue among women; if IS had stuck to its economic approach, and refused to recognise the wider, non-industrial aspects of women's oppression, it would have been woefully irrelevant to many women. The wider political and ideological crisis which was unfolding under Labour was catching up with IS. But at the same time, in its determination to "build the party", IS was abandoning its emphasis on serious, long-term work at shop-floor and union level. The loss of this valid, indeed vital aspect of IS's "workerism" was the other reason for the wider political stance which IS was adopting.

It was the "build-the-party" approach which determined the application of IS's politics in practice. IS's anti-racist work was very much a propaganda drive aimed at recruitment, and this method applied to black workers led to the rapid exit of the "Black caucus" shortly after it was formed in 1976.⁵⁴ IS's support for the National Abortion Campaign was grudging and highly conditional, bringing it into immediate conflict with the majority of the activists, and accompanied by a constant tendency to call demonstrations in opposition to NAC whenever a disagreement on tactics arose. In short, IS showed little concern to build a united anti-racist movement, or to support meaningful black organisations in the localities; let alone to support the women's movement as a whole, or even to unite the socialist feminists within it. IS's work was aimed at recruitment, building the black membership, and building groups around "Women's Voice", its women's paper. Just as with the Right to Work Campaign, the main emphasis was not on building a united movement, and trying to win that movement to IS's distinctive politics, but on counterposing IS and its fronts *organisationally* to the rest of the movement.

IS had indeed ceased to be clearly identified with a distinctive politics. True, it had never had a formal programme, but in the sixties it had

developed a coherent analysis of the situation, and as we have seen its practice was partly at least an attempt to influence working-class struggle as a whole in line with its understanding. Even in the early seventies, the rank and file movements were not seen as party fronts, but ways in which militants could be grouped together and the struggle advanced. And despite the workerism of that period, there had been an attempt to draft a political programme for IS (quietly abandoned after 1974).⁵⁵ But in the mid-seventies, IS's politics became a function of its particular tactics for recruitment; in 1975-76 IS was content to be identified simply with the "right to work", in 1976-77 with militant anti-racism. The changes of political profile were swift and sharp: the only continuity was the theme of "the party."

The paradoxical relationship between IS's workerism in the early seventies, and the sectarian "party-building" of the later period, undoubtedly confused many IS members who, like the present writer, came to criticise both. Certainly, there was no good reason why a revolutionary socialist organisation should not combine a serious, sustained approach to workers in the factories and the trade union movement, with a principled politics which fights against all forms of oppression. It was a question of general politics, of understanding that socialism is about more than economics, together with the way in which economic, cultural, ideological and political factors are inter-related in the current crisis. It was also a matter of particular analysis, of understanding the real weakness of the far left in the working class, the situation which was developing after 1974, and the need to build up a socialist movement by creating united opposition—within the trade union movement, and other movements such as those of women, black people. But neither of these points were widely grasped in IS in the mid-1970s. In the conflict which developed, opposition to the "party-building" of the new leadership was mainly based on the workerist politics which had played such a contradictory role in the previous period.

3. *Internal democracy and the consolidation of the "party"*

The "coup" of July 1973 was only the first step in remodelling the leadership of IS so that it would step up the pace of change in the organisation. As we have already noted, the new EC had to contend with an NC which included most of the former leadership. What is more, many of them still occupied crucial posts in the organisation. In particular, Roger Protz was still editor of *Socialist Worker*, which he had built up from a circulation of a few thousands in 1968 to one of 30,000 in 1974 (with a peak of around 50,000 during the miners' strike of that year). *Socialist Worker* was undoubtedly one of the big successes of IS—a popular socialist paper with a genuine audience among rank and file trade unionists, built with the dedicated efforts of a few professional journalists and

thousands of IS members and other supporters who sent in local reports as well as selling the paper. Its circulation was twice that of *Tribune*, and roughly equal to the British daily circulation of the *Morning Star* (although *SW* was only a weekly, it lacked the national commercial distribution of the *Star*). Whatever criticisms might be made of the paper, it had real achievements to its credit (and indeed its 1974 circulation has not been surpassed). It had been largely through *SW* that IS had extended its influence over the previous few years.

There was not, so far as we can know, a plan to drastically change the paper and its editorial team, once the new EC had taken over. It was rather the logic of Cliffs belief that the leadership and cadre of IS were too "conservative" to reach out to new layers of workers, which led him next to challenge the paper's editor and its approach. Indeed it was the failure of the EC change—both its inefficiency, due to the removal of key people and their replacement by provincial members who could not play an active role, and the suspicions it aroused among many of the experienced members—which led to this further step. Cliff enlisted the support of Paul Foot, who was the paper's other mainstay (with Protz), to argue that the paper was not a "workers' paper"^w—it was not written *by* workers. It should include more short articles by workers about their experiences. The assumption was that there was an emerging mass audience for *SW*, beyond the "advanced militants", which the paper was not reaching.

The brief debate which ensued in April 1974 brought out the basic differences which were to divide IS in the next two years. On the one hand, Cliff, who was already writing his study of Lenin, saw IS reaching out to the mass of workers in the factories, and the paper as directly reflecting their daily lives, as Lenin's *Pravda* had tried to do.⁵⁶ In his view, and that of his supporters, the decline of the mass reformist party created an opportunity for direct mass influence, and the growth of IS made it poised to achieve this. On the other hand, Roger Protz, and his supporters who included Hallas, Higgins, and Palmer, while not disputing the *relative* decline of reformism and growth of opportunities for IS, did not believe that there was yet a serious mass audience. IS's roots and size were still too weak to enable it to generally influence more than the advanced activists. The mass of workers still supported Labour, and the election of the Labour Government would require a serious political critique to be explained in *Socialist Worker*.⁵⁷

Protz clearly believed that only a modest effort to increase direct workers' involvement in the paper could be made, and that political analysis and features written by "professional journalists" were essential. The real danger was not a "workers'-diary", but was indicated in the resolution he proposed. "Any attempt to dilute the politics of the paper, over-simplify arguments and shift the balance of the paper to exposure journalism and over-kill picture display could seriously damage the paper's

relationship with [the] key section of the readers", the "politically more advanced sections of workers."⁵⁸ This statement was highly prophetic, as SW in future was not noted for its workers' contributions, but for its often shrill and sensational journalism, combined with a crude politics. Over the next few years, it was an adjunct to IS's campaigning over the Right to Work and similar issues, rather than a serious "political weekly", as Hallas described it in 1974.⁵⁹

Of course, no one at the time, not even the most cautious, foresaw the extent of the downturn in industrial struggle after 1974, and the decisiveness of the change of period. Set against the advances of the previous few years, Cliff's "two-year perspective of building circulation to 70-80,000"⁶⁰ did not seem quite so unrealistic as it does in hindsight. But there is no doubt, in retrospect, who had the surer understanding of the balance of forces in the labour movement, and the problem of the strength of reformism which had to be confronted. And there can be no doubt, too, that IS would have been better to have built surely on the foundations which had been constructed over the previous five years, than to risk them in a pursuit of "change" against the odds of political reality. The costs of this course over the next few years were very great.

The decision on the paper had been taken, as Duncan Hallas and Chris Davison wrote in a critical appraisal, "after a single discussion on the NC without the membership as a whole even knowing about it."⁶¹ The decision was forced through against the wishes of the editor, who in consequence was asked to resign; Jim Higgins, who had moved to SW after being replaced as National Secretary, was also sacked. This sudden removal of two long-standing leaders produced "more than 80 resolutions from branches. . . the majority of which expressed concern over the way the dispute had been handled without consultation with the membership."⁶² The Industrial Organiser, Andreas Nagliatti, resigned, and Hallas sharply attacked the way decisions were being made. In proposing a series of changes to strengthen democratic decision-making, he insisted that "At the heart of this is the question of democratic centralism. Why are we not in favour of five people running the organisation? Because the whole tradition and experience shows the organisation cannot lead unless it has healthy internal life and there is debate on issues and feedback from that debate."⁶³ The EC was censured and a new election took place in which Hallas was restored to the leadership.

The effect of this upheaval appeared to be a restoration of internal democracy and a more balanced leadership. An organisation commission was established which was to look into all the problems of organisation which had emerged in the functioning of local and factory branches as well as at a national level. The 1974 Conference, postponed from the late spring until September, finally took place amid a continuing reaction to the arbitrary actions of the EC over the paper. Seven members of the NC,

including Higgins and Palmer, produced a critical document for it around a number of issues raised by the dispute. They argued that IS was still a small organisation, which would grow by consistent work rather than "gimmicks and sensations"; that the rank and file movement should grow in the localities, not through central campaigns; that the mass audience of raw young workers was a myth; that the building of white-collar and student branches was a "diversion" from work among manual workers; and that a balanced leadership was necessary, in which "Cliff's great abilities" would be incorporated and "his excesses" disciplined.⁶⁴ These ideas had a considerable impact, but Palmer (narrowly) and Higgins failed to get re-elected to the NC (there was no provision now for minorities to be represented, and in any case they had not yet formed a faction). The new leadership was confirmed, and most important of all, the main issues, which centred around problems of organisation, were postponed to the 1975 Conference with the NC given power to take interim decisions.

Events in the next nine months showed that any new "stability" was illusory. The difference of perspectives for rank and file work came to a head in a crucial area, in the AUEW in Birmingham, where IS had its strongest base of engineering workers (who included a number of experienced shop stewards and convenors), organised in several factory branches. The engineering union was not like, say, the teachers' union, where all issues were concentrated in the union branch and it was easy to translate grass-roots support into support in union elections. On the one hand, IS members were heavily involved in some shop stewards' committees, combine committees and industry-based rank and file papers (such as "The Carworker"), but not on a scale to create a real national presence in the union as a whole. On the other, members in Birmingham had worked consistently in the Broad Left electoral organisation and gained some influence there. This had been national policy, but only in Birmingham had IS gained enough strength to make some impact with it. This was one of the problems; indeed in order to give coherence to their scattered AUEW membership the IS leadership proposed to set up their own election organisation, called the "Engineers Charter", to stand an IS member for a National Organiser's post. The pretext was the fact that the Broad Left was beginning to lose ground in AUEW elections, which IS interpreted as creating an opening on the left. (In fact, the ground was being lost mainly to the right, and this swing has culminated in 1978 in the election of a right-wing president to succeed Hugh Scanlon). The Birmingham IS members were not convinced of the reasons for independent candidates, and refused to give up their positions in the Broad Left, which brought them into head-on conflict with the leadership throughout 1975.

The Birmingham engineering workers now became one of the main bulwarks of an opposition led by former EC members such as Higgins and Palmer. The points which had been argued in 1974 were expanded into a

fuller "Platform of the IS Opposition." The extreme workerism of the earlier position—the exclusive emphasis on manual workers, and the omission of any reference to women—was moderated. Indeed some of the growing dissatisfaction among IS women, who had been fighting a long battle with the EC for regular publication of *Women's Voice*, was reflected in the platform which called for IS not only to campaign for women's right to work, but also to reject the "narrow perspective that sees women only as workers" and to engage in "non-industrial work." The main points were, however, internal democracy, the independence of the rank and file movement, and a more coherent political approach to the Labour Government, reflected in *SW*.⁶⁵

The issue of internal democracy now came squarely to a head. Indeed, the Organisation Commission report drastically shifted the ground of that discussion, by proposing fundamental changes in the national leadership, local organisation and conference. The NC of 40 was to be replaced as the authoritative body between conferences by a small Central Committee (the old EC) of nine members. There was to be a purely advisory National Council, held infrequently, to which districts would send representatives. The district, made up of a number of branches, was to be the main unit of local organisation. Finally, a conference was to be based on delegates from districts, not branches, with one delegate per thirty instead of one per fifteen, and observers were no longer to be allowed. Most crucial of all, the proposals on districts and conference delegates were to be given *immediate* effect. That is to say, branches were to be amalgamated into districts for the purpose of electing delegates to the 1975 conference. This decision was only taken, by a narrow majority, at an NC meeting in March, barely two months before the Conference, and after the formation of the IS Opposition.

District organisation in itself was not opposed, indeed it was widely accepted that some such organisation was necessary to overcome the distortions likely to arise from the isolation of factory branches from other branches in an area. But some 89 per cent of IS members were not in factory branches,⁶⁶ and a large proportion of these were in branches relatively isolated from other areas. To create "districts" everywhere in a couple of months was not only artificial, but amounted in the circumstances to gerrymandering. In a number of areas, branches supporting the ISO and the Left Faction (another opposition group) were combined with other branches to prevent opposition representation. The new 1:30 ratio for delegates was also part of the manoeuvre, and unjustified by any increase in the membership (which was stagnant), since it prevented representation of minority positions in many "districts" which had now only one delegate. By these means, a very large minority, supported probably by at least a third to two-fifths of the membership, was reduced to barely 15 per cent of the delegates. At the same time, a scare was

created about "security" which was used to justify excluding all but the 100 delegates (and the full-timers) from the conference. In this atmosphere, the full-time Central Committee was not only approved by conference, but reduced to six members so as to provide an even "stronger" leadership. And at the last minute, a "closed slate" system of election was introduced, which prevented Conference from varying the composition of the CC. Only one slate was proposed.

The 1975 Conference was undoubtedly a turning point for IS. Faced with a strong political challenge, the leadership had changed the rules and made itself into a self-perpetuating, exclusive and virtually monolithic body, whose discussions were not even reported in any detail to the membership. From now on major decisions, such as the launching of the Right to Work Campaign later in 1975 or the move to the "SWP" in 1976, were received by the membership as *faits accomplis*. Discussion took place in the Council, and later in the branches, on implementation of policy, but not generally on policies themselves before they were decided. After 1975 the leadership was, as one long-standing member described it, "unassailable."⁶⁷ It was simply not conceivable that the membership could change it in any way, and any alterations would have to come from the top.

By the end of 1975, the CC was moving to force its defeated opponents out of the organisation. First to go, victim of a rule which banned factions from continuing after conference decisions, was the small "Left Faction." Then a number of the Birmingham engineering workers, who refused to accept the decision to stand against the Broad Left in the AUEW, were also expelled. Finally, the steering committee of the IS Opposition were expelled under the same provision against "permanent" factions. The Opposition had decided to re-form after the conference, both to defend their supporters against disciplinary action and to campaign against the turning of IS into the Right to Work Campaign and the proposal to proclaim the "party." Neither of these policies had even been mooted at the conference, and the ban on opposition to them showed the danger of the rule against "permanent" factions which derived from the battles of the early seventies. These policies, as we have noted, took IS further away from a serious and realistic appraisal of the situation in the working class. Without the possibility of effective opposition to them, only outside pressures could change IS's direction.

These pressures were real enough, but for the time being they had little effect on the leadership. As we have noted, the massive increases in IS membership and SW circulation proved to be figments of Cliff's imagination; indeed IS's industrial influence was waning. In this situation, with only small, short-term campaigning gains to point to, the CC decided in late 1976 to declare IS with its 3,000 or so members to be "the revolutionary party", the SWP. There was no protest except from isolated individuals.⁶⁸ A "Faction for Revolutionary Democracy" had come and

gone earlier in the year, its general half-heartedness well summed up by one supporter who explained that with the leadership unassailable, "Whether I or anyone else wants to challenge them at the moment is irrelevant."⁶⁹

CONCLUSION

The degeneration of IS represents, to a considerable extent, a squandering of the potential for a new socialist movement in the generation of students and workers drawn into the upheavals of the late sixties and early seventies. It is precisely because IS achieved real success in mobilising this potential at the time, that its subsequent failures are of such concern. And for the same reason we must reject the explanation that if IS had had some other ready-made politics—be it more "Leninist" or less, more "Trotskyist" or less, or whatever—it would have avoided all these problems. There were other socialist currents: the well established Communist Party, which stagnated throughout this period; and many other small groups, none of which were as successful as IS in breaking out of the sectarian milieu. These alternative standpoints may be able to offer some useful insights into "what went wrong", but none of them can be accepted as a simple "package."

The basic causes were nevertheless political, as I have tried to show. At the most general level of theory and politics, IS's leaders devalued a consistent political response to all forms of oppression, in favour of a one-dimensional "fundamentalist" stress on economic class struggle.⁷⁰ More specifically, there were two major features to IS's failure. On the one hand, IS failed to get to grips with some of the "new" features of the situation—the "lessons of May", the women's movement and sexual politics, the changing nature of the working class. On the other hand, there was the fatal underestimate of that very "old" obstacle, the strength of reformist ideas and organisations, and indeed its renewed influence on organised workers as a result of the crisis. It was one thing to know that there was a tendency for Labourism to decline, quite another to understand how and at what pace it would do so.

The most critical of all the political failures, perhaps, was the failure to understand and create the sort of socialist organisation which was required. Formally, IS's critique of stalinism was the most thorough-going of any socialist group's, and IS's break with "orthodox" trotskyism had been over the latter's compromise with stalinism.⁷¹ Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, there had been the object-lesson of the SLL to remind IS of the need for consistent internal democracy and the avoidance of regular expulsions in the building of a socialist organisation. But the looseness of organisation, which was IS's response, proved inadequate to the demands of an enlarged grouping with wider political interventions. There was a period after 1968 in which IS might have consolidated serious democratic

organisational forms, and some interesting articles were written on the general theory of the party.⁷² Among all the reasons why this did not happen which we have indicated, the leadership of Tony Cliff and his theory of "Leninism" is obviously a crucial factor.

Political criticism on the left is often unnecessarily personal, but there is also a reaction against this which underestimates individuals' roles in favour of abstract political analysis. In the case of IS, it is impossible to ignore the role of Cliff, the acknowledged leader since the foundation of Socialist Review. As the one critical attempt to appraise his influence noted,

"Cliff has great and probably indispensable strengths, a generosity of his time and considerable talents without any thought of personal reward. The theoretical development of the group is almost entirely his work. Most, but not all, major developments in the group have been the result of his intuition and experience."⁷³

But as we have seen, the major turns in IS in the mid-seventies were also very much his work, and their effect was to consolidate him as the indisputable centre of initiative. Not only were most of IS's political weaknesses which we have noted Cliff's weaknesses, but the conception of organisation and leadership was particularly his responsibility.

Since Cliff rediscovered Lenin and the revolutionary party in 1968, he has devoted a good deal of his time to a mammoth biography of Lenin.⁷⁴ Critics have noted that he has defined Lenin's political life in terms not of a particular politics, but of a certain gift of understanding the working class and its struggle. Lenin's supreme characteristic in Cliff's eyes was his ability to "bend the stick", to alter course rapidly according to changes in class consciousness. It is this method which Cliff has claimed as his own.⁷⁵ His identification with Lenin as leader, rather than with his politics, has been part-motive and part-justification for the catastrophic changes which he initiated in IS in the mid-seventies. It is an identification which is dangerous in principle, not only because Britain in the 1970s is not Russia in the early 1900s, but also because all the experience of the socialist movement since 1917 should have made us all aware of the need for collective responsible leadership and scrupulous observance of socialist democracy within our movement. And of course it is also dangerous in practice since Cliff is no Lenin, and his undoubted talents "are accompanied by a number of less desirable traits."⁷⁶

The process of "intuition", which Peter Sedgwick has noted "is, at its worst, impressionism mingled with emotion,"⁷⁷ has marked IS's leadership off very clearly from that of most other trotskyst sects. There is no absolute political dogma, although Cliff tends to draw directly on the Russian Revolution for historical analogy. There is no terrible demonology of revisionists and betrayers, although particular critics have frequently

suffered fierce condemnation. There is no general withdrawal from work with other sections of the left, although principled cooperation is frequently refused for more specific opportunist reasons. In all these ways, although it is tempting to compare IS's degeneration to that of the SLL, it fails to conform to the traditional model of the trotskyist sect. The "party" which is left is much more flexible; indeed the growth and well-being of "the party" itself, rather than any fixed ideological position, is the constant principle of the organisation.

The SWP is in fact much more sensibly compared to the CP at various times in its history than to the modern WRP (successor of the SLL). Ideologically, of course, it is still anti-stalinist and revolutionary socialist, but there is a close resemblance to stalinism in the way "the party" itself has become the central ideological reference point for all work. Politically, there is a similarity in the way the SWP works in wider movements—its participation in united campaigns ranging from full participation, through nominal and grudging involvement, to sectarian withdrawal, according to the gains to be made—and its own fronts, where control varies from the very tight to the minimal according to the balance of forces. But it is in organisational terms that the similarities—with the CP today rather than in its classically Stalinist days—are the most striking. Central political control, affecting the decisive areas of work, is firmly entrenched in the hands of the small Central Committee. But greater licence is being allowed to members working in less "central" fields—to the women, and now to the intellectuals—although the amount of freedom allowed can naturally be curtailed. This particular combination of organisational hardness and flexibility, together with the political flexibility which is now the SWP's hallmark, seem now to be enabling the organisation to consolidate again its small minority position on the left.

The SWP lacks, of course, the sort of fixed certainties which stalinism gave to British Communism between the thirties and the fifties. There were no world-historic events, like the Hungarian revolution, to precipitate the departure of most of its established membership. If the tragedy of 1956 has been repeated, it has been as pathos—and occasionally as farce. The main IS Opposition group formed, on leaving, a small "anti-sect", the Workers League, whose members have concentrated on deliberately modest, small-scale, work in industry and the community. Although it expected to quickly double its original 150 membership with further refugees from the SWP, it failed to project itself as a political alternative and in fact recruited very few. Its leaders were initially committed to the "workerist" politics of IS in the early '70s, although very slowly as their membership declined a re-valuation of some key questions began to take place.⁷⁸ Very many more IS members left as individuals, rather than with the ISO. Among the intellectuals, there were a number who were critical of the organisation's degeneration, but it was here perhaps that there entered an element of

farce: there was no concerted protest, and a number left as individuals while others made their peace with the leadership.⁷⁹

The main effects of IS's crisis have, in fact, been to assist the growth of other political currents. The Communist Party has recovered a good deal of the ground among students and intellectuals which it lost in the late 1960s; indeed its "Communist University" and other forums have acted as pace-setters for the far left.⁸⁰ The International Marxist Group, which grew mainly among students in the early 1970s, has emerged as the main alternative to the SWP on the revolutionary left, around which other groups such as Big Flame and Workers League have eventually been attracted. This sort of alliance has had significant effects among students, where the Socialist Students Alliance has become the main alternative to the Broad Left leadership, as well as in white collar unions such as the NUT. The IMG and Big Flame have also initiated the Socialist Unity campaign to create a united revolutionary socialist intervention in elections: the first time a significant electoral strategy has been developed by any of the British far left. The SWP have refused to date to join Socialist Unity, preferring to run their own candidates because they see the main aim as direct recruitment of members. Socialist Unity's candidates have had some very modest successes, beating the National Front and (on the left) the Communist Party fairly consistently in a number of local elections.⁸¹ They have also polled more votes than the SWP in every case, but the division has been damaging and the far left has lost a number of opportunities to develop a united presence as a small but serious minority force.

The revolutionary left in 1978 has lost much of the momentum which it possessed before 1974,⁸² and there is a slowly growing recognition of the opportunities which have been lost due to our own political immaturity and often senseless divisions. The disorientation which the IS experience has produced among many socialist activists is still far from overcome, but there are some signs of change. Within the SWP, the leadership itself is belatedly recognising that some of the triumphal "we are the party" propaganda has been counter-productive, and has made a "turn" towards "left unity." There is little sign of a real self-criticism, but the change of mood is indicative.⁸³ Elsewhere on the far left, tentative moves towards a new united organisation are under way.⁸⁴ It is undoubtedly the case that a serious core of the far left has survived. Partly because of the weakness of the other sections of the left, the Labour left and the Communist Party, we have a role in British working-class politics that probably exceeds our small numbers. Capitalism has not solved its problems, any more than we have solved ours. There is a long struggle ahead and revolutionary socialists, provided we have a more developed, principled politics and a realistic understanding of the possibilities, have a vital part to play in it.

NOTES

(Place of publication London unless otherwise stated).

1. David Widgery, *The Left in Britain 1956-68*, Harmondsworth, Penguin 1976, p. 47.
2. "Natalia Trotsky breaks with the Fourth International", Appendix to *The Fourth International, Stalinism and the Origins of the International Socialists, Some Documents*, Pluto Press 1971, pp. 100-104.
3. John Walters, "Some Notes on British Trotskyist History", *Marxist Studies*, 2, 1, Winter 1969-70, pp. 45-48. This article, by a participant who was not a supporter of Socialist Review, refutes the commonly repeated accusation that SR "capitulated to anti-Communism" or to "the pressure of imperialism." It is truer to say that the Fourth International, and Healy in particular, capitulated to Stalinism in this period.
4. I am preparing a longer companion article, "The Marxism of International Socialism: A Critique", the first part of which deals with Cliffs work.
5. Ian Birchall, "History of the International Socialists", Part I, *International Socialism*, 76, March 1975, p. 18. (Hereafter referred to as Birchall I.)
6. There is a lack of information on this period which Birchall does not fill. (His approach is also ahistorical in some respects—for example, in presenting the "permanent arms economy" theory as an issue in the 1950 split.)
7. The fullest and most accessible presentation of Kidron's argument is in *Western Capitalism since the War*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1968; see also my article, "The Marxism of IS."
8. For an excellent critique of the SLL, see Duncan Hallas, "Building the Leadership", *International Socialism* (hereafter *IS*) 40, Oct.-Nov. 1969.
9. Tony Cliff, "Trotsky on Substitutionism", in Cliff et. al., *Party and Class*, Pluto Press n.d. (1971).
10. Birchall I, pp. 18-20, is generally adequate on this.
11. Tony Cliff and Colin Barker, *Incomes Policy, Legislation and Shop stewards*, London Industrial Shop Stewards Defence Committee, 1966.
12. Birchall I, p. 24. Birchall in fact resigned from IS on this issue at the time: see IS Group Bulletin, Nos. 1 & 2, Feb. and March 1967.
13. Figures in Birchall I, confirmed by internal reports.
14. Cf. Kidron. *op. cit.*, Revised Edition, Harmondsworth, Penguin 1970, ch. 8.
15. Chris Harman, Dave Clark, Andrew Sayers, Richard Kuper, Martin Shaw, *Education, Capitalism and the Student Revolt*, International Socialism 1968. The present writer recalls superimposing an analysis of the political and ideological contradictions on the essentially structural, socio-economic framework of this pamphlet.
16. In this sense, while David Widgery's chapter on the student left ("Make One, Two, Three Balls-Ups") generally understates its impact, his self-consciously messy chapter on 1968 accurately reflects the feel of that year—if it also evades the tricky job of tracing its course in Britain. (Widgery, *op. cit.*)
17. Birchall I, p. 23. (An example of Birchall's distortion in his suggestion that IS made a "phased withdrawal" from the Labour Party; in reality it was hardly so smooth. *Ibid.*, p. 22.)
18. See Birchall, "History of the International Socialists, Part 2", *IS* 77, April 1975 (hereafter Birchall 2), p. 23, for details of these points. (Characteristically he omits to mention the inflammatory reference to "fascism" in the way these were presented.)
19. Tony Cliff and Ian Birchall, *France: The Struggle Goes On*, International

Socialism 1968. (It is surprising that Birchall, as co-author of this pamphlet, should now fail to stress how much May 1968 changed IS's thinking.)

20. Chris Harman, "Party and Class", *IS* 35, Winter 1968-69, reprinted in Cliff et al. op. cit. There are close similarities between his approach and the more recent article of Norman Geras, "Lenin, Trotsky and the Party", *International* (Theoretical Journal of the IMG), 4, 2, Winter 1977.
21. Kidron, op. cit., ch. 6; for a critique see my article, "The Marxism of IS."
22. This became evident in the debates with David Yaffe et al in 1972-73 (see below). Kidron has now disowned the theory altogether; cf. "Two valid insights don't make a theory", *International Socialism* 100, July 1977.
23. Cliff, *The Employers' Offensive: Productivity deals and how to fight them*, Pluto Press, 1970.
24. Symptomatically, these are not even mentioned in Birchall's "History."
25. Sheila Rowbotham, "The beginnings of Women's Liberation in Britain", in Michelene Wandor, ed., *The Body Politic*, Stage 1, 1972, pp. 91-102.
26. Ibid., p. 99. Sheila Rowbotham was a member of IS in 1968-69, having joined as a result of the unity call, but had left before the women's issues were properly raised in IS.
David Widgery, "The Women's Question", *IS Internal Bulletin* (hereafter *IB*), May 1975, p. 53.
28. Widgery, document, *Gay Left* 1, Autumn 1975, p. 14.
29. Bob Cant, "A Grim Tale: The IS Gay Group 1972-75", *Gay Left* 3, Autumn 1976.
30. Jim Higgins, then National Secretary, was particularly responsible for this line; for protests against it at the time, see Martin Shaw, "Which Way for Student Revolutionaries?", *IS* 56, March 1973, and "Intellectuals and Workers: A reply to comrade Trotsky", *IB*, March 1973.
31. Strangely, Birchall 2 fails to mention the ICRSC, although it was IS's only serious attempt to build solidarity with the oppressed minority in the North.
32. Birchall 2, pp. 25-26, gives details of what IS actually said on this issue. In general, I accept his account.
33. The IMG had 40 members in 1968, 400 in 1972, and 800 by 1978 (*Socialist Challenge*, 2 Feb. 1978).
34. "Membership Report 1973", presented to 1973 Conference. The same report suggests that only 312 (1972) and 467 (1973) had been members for more than 3 years.
35. See above (and footnote 12).
36. Harman, loc. cit., in Cliff et al., p. 59.
37. For example, Roger Protz and Peter Sedgwick, "Two views of an election strategy for the left", *IS* 43, April-May 1970; Chris Harman, "The Common Market" and Ian Birchall, "Rejoinder", *IS* 49, Autumn 1971.
38. There was a general absence of theoretical development in IS after 1968, not only on economic matters, but particularly on the new issues which were being posed for marxists. For example, no theoretical writing on women was published, from Hal Draper's imported account of Marx's views (*IS* 44, 1970) until 1977.
39. Two of their more talented recruits have since achieved some fame as spokesmen for a rejection of classical revolutionary ideas: Geoff Hodgson, a Labour candidate and author of *Socialism and Parliamentary Democracy* (Nottingham, Spokesman 1977), and David Purdy, advocate of incomes policy in the CP.
40. Peter Sedgwick resigned from the NC after these proposals were adopted, claiming that they made "a hollow mockery of everything for which IS used to stand" (Letter to NC, 23 May 1970).

41. Some of Yaffe's general views at this time are contained in "The Crisis of Profitability: a Critique of the Glyn-Sutcliffe Thesis", *New Left Review* 80, July-Aug. 1973. Yaffe was a former member of the old propagandist sect, The Socialist Party of Great Britain, and seems to have carried over much of its attitude to theory into his later politics.
42. For a description, see Hugo Dewar, *Communist Politics in Britain*, Pluto Press 1976, ch. 2, "The Party of a New Type."
43. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
44. "Membership Report 1973", *op. cit.*
45. "Interim Report of the Organisation Commission", *IB* Pre-Conference Issue 1974. This report makes frequent comparison with the "bolshevisation" of the CP.
46. "National Secretary's Report", *IB*, April 1973, p. 2.
47. "Report of the National Committee to Conference", *IB* Conference Issue 1974.
48. *Birchall* 2, p. 28.
49. A point even *Birchall* notes, although he fails to draw any more general conclusions (2, p. 28).
50. *Red Weekly*, March and April, 1977, *passim*.
51. There was a brief moment of transition in which the CC argued for the Right to Work Campaign as the medium for anti-racist work (*IB*, June 1976). Shortly, however, the decline of the RTWC was recognised, and IS campaigned openly on racism.
52. *Birchall* 2, p. 25.
53. *Cant*, *loc. cit.*
54. Independently, this group published a paper for Asian workers, *Samaj in 'a Babylon*, for 18 months after they left IS.
55. The fate of the programme, much debated in 1973-74, is a mystery. Although apparently adopted (1974 Conference Report), it has never been heard of since.
56. *Cliff, Lenin* Vol. 1, Pluto Press, 1975, ch. 19 "Pravda".
57. The NC debate on the paper was outlined in the National Secretary's Report, April 1974.
58. Resolution for NC, April 1974.
59. Quoted in National Secretary's Report, April 1974, p. 2.
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Duncan Hallas* and *Chris Davison*, "Reforming the Regime", *IB* n.d. (May 1974), p. 19.
62. National Secretary's Report, April 1974, p. 3.
63. "NC Report", *IB* Pre-Conference Issue, 1974, p. 4.
64. *Ken Appleby*, *Rob Clay*, *Jim Higgins*, *Ron Murphy*, *John Palmer*, *Wally Preston*, *Granville Williams*, "The International Socialists—Our Traditions", Pre-Conference document, 1974.
65. "The Platform of the IS Opposition", *IS Pre-Conference Documents*, April 1975.
66. "NC Report", *IB* Conference Issue 1974.
67. *John Phillips*, "Laying the National Committee Ghost", *IB* April 1976, p. 18.
68. *Peter Sedgwick*, "The SWP Fraud", *SWP IB* 1, Feb. 1977, p. 8; *Martin Shaw*, "An Open Letter to the CC of the SWP", *Red Weekly* 200, 26 May 1977.
69. *Phillips*, *loc. cit.*
70. See my article "The Marxism of IS", forthcoming, and "Back to the Maginot Line: *Harman's* New Gramsci", *IS* (new series) 1, July 1978.
71. On the need for marxism to go theoretically beyond trotskyism, as well as Stalinism, see *Martin Shaw*, *Marxism and Social Science*, Pluto Press 1975, pp. 117-118.

72. Cliff et al, *Party and Class*, op. cit. Although widely circulated in IS this collection did not stimulate further debate, until the crisis erupted in 1974. The contradictions between the positions of the three IS writers (Cliff, Harman and Hallas) were not brought out at the time.
73. Appleby et al, "The International Socialists—Our Traditions", op. cit.
74. Cliff, *Lenin*, Vols. 1-4, Pluto Press 1975, 1976, 1978 and forthcoming.
75. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, esp. c h 14.
76. See Appleby et al, op. cit., for an accurate description.
77. Peter Sedgwick, "The SWP Fraud", *SWP IB* 1, Feb. 1977, p. 8.
78. The Workers League's paper, *Socialist Voice*, has recently shown a welcome awareness of issues such as sexual politics and energy. Some of its earlier leaders, including Jim Higgins, have now withdrawn.
79. Meetings were held in 1976 involving a number of fairly well-known IS academics and writers, but the only outcome was a document written by the present writer together with Richard Kuper, *Political Problems of Revolutionary Socialism Today—The choices facing the International Socialists*. Of those involved, Kuper, Peter Sedgwick, Julian Harber and I eventually left IS, while David Widgery remained.
80. In reaction to IS's theoretical stagnation and the conversion of *IS* into a monthly review, a number of people campaigned in 1975 for a theoretical journal to be set up. This was blocked by the CC, on the ground that it would be a "road out of IS" for a number of intellectuals. In the event, this policy only assisted the flight. Only in 1978 have the leadership, with severely depleted intellectual forces, allowed a theoretical journal (the new series *IS*) to be published.
81. *Socialist Challenge*, 45, 11 May 1978.
82. Cf. David Widgery, "Ten Years for Pandora", *Socialist Review* (new series) 2, May 1978.
83. "The Next Six to Nine Months", CC document 11.1.78.
84. Initiatives towards revolutionary unity have been made by the IMG around *Socialist Challenge* and Socialist Unity. One consequence was a Conference of International Socialists on Revolutionary Unity, partly initiated by the present writer, which has begun to draw together some of those who have left IS/SWP over the years.

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