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The Nature of the SWP

Part 1: STATE CAPITALISM

FROM THE EDITORS

THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY* is the largest organisation of the extreme left in Britain. On a whole number of the most crucial questions of the class struggle — total opposition to wage controls and the Social Contract, the struggle against the cuts, the fight against racism and fascism, support for the revolutionary struggles in southern Africa — it has positions clearly defending the interests of the working class and of revolutionary socialism.

Yet at the same time the SWP carries out policies — refusal to build real democratic opposition movements in the unions; refusal to agree on joint revolutionary

campaigns for elections, rejection of united front work in organisations such as the National Abortion Campaign and Working Women's Charter — which are a barrier to taking forward the class struggle.

Furthermore, its policies of suppression of internal democracy and expulsion of all oppositions are an absolute bar to that organisation itself building any mass revolutionary workers party or to it unifying the forces of the revolutionary left.

How to understand and combat this combination of correct positions and sectarian degeneration is therefore a

crucial question for the left. If the SWP follows the path of degeneration shown by the Workers Revolutionary Party then a significant obstacle to the construction of a revolutionary party in Britain will have been created and some thousands of militants lost.

If on the other hand the SWP could be turned to real revolutionary practices in the class struggle, and as a necessary precondition for this to the re-creation of internal democracy, then this would be the most favourable development through which to unite the left and take major steps towards the creation of a revolutionary party.

Because of the importance of this issue we have decided to devote two issues of *Battle of Ideas* to an analysis of the SWP. — THE EDITORS.

* The current which now forms the Socialist Workers Party has at previous points in its existence been known as the Socialist Review group and the International Socialists. For purposes of convenience it has been referred to as the SWP throughout this article.

INTRODUCTION

TO ANALYSE the Socialist Workers Party seriously it is necessary to briefly examine how any political organisation which claims to represent revolutionary socialism must be judged. The nature of the relations of Marxist, and therefore of revolutionary socialist, politics to the working class was scientifically spelt out in the Communist Manifesto:

'The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas and principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer.

'They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle.' [1]

The struggle for socialism is thus not merely something subjectively desirable but reflects the objective interests of one of the classes engaged in this struggle — the interests of the working class. Communists: 'have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.

'They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.

'The Communists are distinguished from the other working class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie

has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.' [2]

All the additions made to Marxism since the Communist Manifesto — the development of Marxist economic theory, the Leninist theory of the Party, the concept of permanent revolution and so on — do not and could not alter this fundamental scientific basis of communism. They have only identified more clearly, and shown how to defend in practice, the class interests of the working class. Any political phenomenon, including a political organisation such as the SWP, has to be defined above all in terms of the class interests which it defends. Thus, for example, social democratic reformist organisation serves the defence of the capitalist order. Social democracy is thus a bourgeois current within the workers movement. A revolutionary organisation serves and defends the interests of the working class. Centrist political organisations vacillate between reform and revolution, in class terms between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and constitute a petit bourgeois trend within the workers movement. [3] Any attempt to give an 'above class' or 'multi-class' definition of a political organisation is to abandon the terrain of Marxism. [4]

Furthermore, in determining how to define class character, Marxism itself uses a clear criterion which it applies to all analysis.

Marxist materialism asserts that the decisive criterion of any theory or phenomenon is practice. [5] The character of any political position, theory, or organisation can be determined not simply or primarily in relation to theoretical debate, or the form of words on paper, but in relation to its position in the living struggle of class forces. [6]

When we look at the SWP therefore, what has first to be judged is what is its relation to the most decisive events of the class struggle? Does it hold political positions which material historical experience shows will culminate in aligning itself with alien social forces, against the working class — for example support of Popular Fronts, entry into capitalist governments, belief it is possible to construct socialism in one country? These are the fundamental starting points for the analysis of any organisation — including the SWP.

All other questions, the points of theory, the various vacillations and hesitations, must be directed to establishing, and fitted within, this framework. To take any other course is to abandon Marxist materialism and class criteria for idealism and subjective sectarianism.

1. The Communist Manifesto — Section Proletarians and Communists.

2. Ibid

3. Further refinements can of course be made. Lenin for example talked of 'Right Communists' and 'Left Communists' — forces which remained politically within the defence of the interests of the working class but which showed definite adaptations and leanings in particular directions. (For example Bukharin was indisputably in the early years of the revolution one of the outstanding leaders of the Bolshevik Party but throughout that period he took a consistently leftist position on concrete questions, Zinoviev and Kamenev in 1917 only at the last moment were pulled to support of the October revolution and only by a hairsbreadth, known as support of the revolution, avoided the position of centrists such as the Martov of that period.)

4. This is why it is so absurd when, for example, an organisation such as the ICL claims that the Fourth International is simultaneously the mainstream of Trotskyism (proletarian) and centrist (petty-bourgeois). The concept of a multi-class political organisation would of course, correctly, be denounced as outright revisionism by the ICL. If it were applied to anything else. However in the case of the revolutionary left all the criteria of historical materialism apparently do not apply for the ICL.

5. To forestall possible sectarianism, it is evident that not all practice is of the same weight.

6. Naturally Marxism does not assert an immediate relation to practice. There is a relative autonomy of theory — there is no need for an organisation to directly participate in a Popular Front to know that support of Popular Frontism is incompatible with the defence of the working class. But to conceive of a purely ideological betrayal, or a purely theoretical centrism, unaccompanied by any failure to support and champion the working class in a major conflict with an alien social force is to abandon Marxist materialism and class criteria in favour of idealism and pure subjective sectarianism.

HISTORICAL ORIGINS

THE HISTORICAL origins of the Socialist Workers Party lie in the combination of two political currents. The first of these was the majority tendency of the Revolutionary Communist Party, the British section of the Fourth International from its foundation in 1944 to its demise in 1950 [1]. The second current based itself on the theories developed by Tony Cliff, now the SWP's chief theoretician, from 1947 onwards. Cliff argued that the social systems of Eastern Europe and the USSR were 'state capitalist'. These theories represented, as we shall see, a link with trends that had long been outside Marxism. [2]

The SWP and its forebears have always been marked by this contradictory combination. They hold positions which despite a nationalist, economist and sectarian tinge, are indisputably within Trotskyism. But they also maintain positions which break on the basic points with the Trotskyist programme and with defence of the interests of the working class. [3]

In this article we will concentrate on examining the nature and consequences of these contradictions. We will start by analysing the theory of state capitalism — the issue on which the SWP commenced its development as a distinctive trend.

Denying that the society which exists in the USSR represents, even if in a degenerated form, a workers state has a long history within the workers movement. From 1917 onwards the theorists of international social democracy, including the Russian Mensheviks, maintained that the October Revolution was only capable of ushering in a capitalist state. [4] According to them, the most that the Bolsheviks could achieve was to carry out the tasks of the bourgeois revolution in Russia — to abolish feudal relics in the holding of land, to industrialise the country, and to lay the basis for bourgeois democracy. [5]

Any attempt to go further than this, to expropriate the bourgeoisie and consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat, was utopianism at best and tyranny at worst. The task of the social democrats was to fight the tyranny and establish 'democracy'. Anything which appeared to take a step back from the attempt to build socialism, notably the New Economic Policy of 1921, was greeted with welcome as showing that order and sense might yet prevail.

In response to this cry of the social democrats the Bolsheviks, and for a time almost all those to the left of social democracy, had a clear reply. The Russian Revolution was not a capitalist but a proletarian revolution. Its goal was, through the extension of international



Free school dinners made way for famine.

ed. [7] It was necessary to make a second great revolution in Russia in order to overthrow the new capitalist ruling class and establish the rule of the workers. By the mid 1920s, not merely Russian anarchism, but certain people within the oppositions inside the Russian Bolsheviks had been won to these positions. [8] But the anarchists were not the last current to deny that a workers state existed in Russia. By the 1930s, under the impact of the Stalin purges and the Soviet-Nazi pact, a new theory of the USSR began to emerge. It maintained that the USSR was neither a workers state nor any form of capitalism, but instead a new form of class society termed 'bureaucratic collectivism.' This analysis, at first advanced inchoately by several thinkers, was developed by Bruno Rizzi, James Burnham and Max Shachtman. They did not specify whether this 'bureaucratic collectivism' was more progressive than capitalism and was destined to replace it. Neither did they maintain that it was more reactionary and had to be opposed. [9]

The fourth wave of those who denied the existence of the workers state in Russia



Red Army machine-guns turn their guns on Kronstadt.

revolution, to build a socialist society. This was not to be accomplished through the establishment of bourgeois democracy, but the fight for the democracy of workers councils, whose authority constituted the dictatorship of the proletariat. [6]

But even by 1921 the initial joys and hopes of the masses in the Russian Revolution had begun to fade. All parties other than the Bolsheviks had been banned, 'one man management' had been installed in the factories, all major decisions were taken not via discussion in the Soviets but through decisions of the Bolshevik Party. Finally at Kronstadt the Red Army had been turned not against capitalists and foreign invaders, but against the sailors of the workers state.

Through its reaction to this process of apparent degeneration a second major historical current in the workers movement defined its relation to the USSR.

The anarchists and syndicalists who had originally hailed the revolution now denounced its outcome. They asserted that Lenin and the Bolsheviks had restored capitalism in Russia, or had prevented real workers democracy ever being establish-

came with the break-up of Stalinism itself. Temporarily the Titoists, and then, in a more pronounced and prolonged way, the Maoists, both joined the swelling ranks of the splits from the 'Communist Movement' who announced the capitalist and even imperialist and fascist character of the USSR. In this case the reasoning is so crude that it barely justifies talk of 'theory' at all. [10]

It is not necessary here to examine all the different theoretical positions taken to justify opposition to the view that the USSR is a workers state. That any view of the USSR as 'state capitalist' or 'bureaucratic collectivist' is incompatible with Marxist economics, with historical materialism, and with a scientific theory of the state has been demonstrated frequently enough and we need only refer the reader to the relevant literature. [11] Here we want to examine merely the political conclusions which have been drawn from these positions and what general theoretical systems they are associated with.

The single largest group of adherents of the 'state capitalist' position is probably social democracy. Ever since 1914 inter-

national social democracy has been one of the main props of international capitalism. Its role is that of reaction. In every major test of strength and clash between the classes it sides with the interests of capitalism. Its defence of 'Western democracy' against the USSR is merely one aspect of its defence of the ruling class. Social Democracy is a bourgeois current within the workers movement.

Anarchism as an organised force also long ago demonstrated its class character. From Bakunin, through the Paris Commune, the revolutionary struggles in the 1870s in Spain, right up to the Spanish civil war, anarchism has shown its complete inability to take the proletariat to victory. [12] Under the test of great revolutionary events, anarchism typically disintegrates, with its left wing moving towards the revolution and its right wing finishing up in alliance with the bourgeoisie. [13] This incoherence and differentiation, with its extremes finishing up supporting diametrically opposed social classes, identifies anarchism as a petit-bourgeois current within the workers movement.

The character of Maoism is also clear. No matter what its role in China, the counter-revolutionary character of Maoist policy on an international scale has been revealed in everything from the Bandung principles through to the betrayals of Ceylon and Bangla Desh to its present open cavorting with the most counter-revolutionary politicians of the bourgeois world. [14] Maoism as an organised current represents the interests of the privileged bureaucracy of the Chinese state — although some of the positions of individual 'Maoist' organisations are more complex. (Frequently, centrist organisations which have a Maoist coloration do not at all necessarily actually carry out the line dictated by the Chinese bureaucracy [15].)

Finally, the trajectory of most 'bureaucratic collectivist' trends of the world is quite obvious. James Burnham finished up as a supporter of the most extreme right wing section of American imperialism. [16] Shachtman, after a period of vacillation, moved to giving critical support to social democratic bureaucrats against Stalinism and eventually to supporting imperialism itself — welcoming the Bay of Pigs invasion and supporting the Americans in Vietnam. [17] Most of those who supported the theory of 'bureaucratic collectivism' took a similar road. [18]

Not only are all these theories anti-Marxist and incoherent, their adherents take positions in the class struggle which at best are centrist and at worst openly counter-revolutionary. The conclusion appears obvious and logical. Non-Marxist theoretical positions lead to the practical abandonment of the class interests of the proletariat.

However this conclusion would be mistaken. Unfortunately for those who believe that any theoretical deviation inevitably leads into the camp of the bourgeoisie we need only recall Karl Liebknecht who thought that dialectical materialism was rubbish and his comrade in arms Rosa Luxemburg who had thoroughly wrong positions on such questions as nationalism and imperialism.

Similarly despite the positions of those we have discussed above the denial of the fact that the USSR is a workers state does not in itself lead to an abandonment of the interests of the working class. It is not equivalent to theories like Popular Frontism which do lead directly to renegacy.

Shachtman may well have supported the Americans in Cuba and Vietnam, but others split with him because he did. Kuron and Modzelewski, the Polish dissidents, may have thought in their famous Manifesto that Russia was not a workers state but the programme they advanced was indisputably proletarian and revolutionary [19].

Neither Trotsky nor the Fourth International have considered that in itself the denial that the USSR is a workers state places a current outside revolutionary Marxism. [20] James P. Cannon, leader of the American SWP, stated in 1961:

'The recognition of the Soviet Union as a workers state, and of the obligation to defend it against imperialist attack, was a central principle of our international movement all the time. This characterisation and this attitude was challenged time and time again, year after year, and freely discussed without expulsions or threats of expulsion'. [21]

That membership of Trotskyist organisations and the Fourth International was not excluded by, in itself, denying that the USSR was a workers state was explicitly reaffirmed in the Second World Congress Resolution of 1948.

This position was not merely a verbal one. Art Phillips, a holder of a state capitalist analysis of the USSR, was for some time a member of the National Committee of the American SWP — which while not organisationally part of the Fourth International has the same political position on membership. Various sections of the Fourth International had, and have, state capitalist supporters within their ranks.

Such a position is a grave error and deviation, but one that can, in certain circumstances, still be contained within a framework of proletarian revolution. The real question concerns what general system of politics is associated with a particular theory of the USSR? Most important of all



JAMES P. CANNON



MAX SHACHTMAN

what practical positions in the class struggle have the adherents of a particular theory adopted? In order therefore to examine the character of the SWP we have to go beyond its theory of the USSR and consider what positions it has adopted in the most decisive issues of the international class struggle.

1. For some notes on the politics of the RCP see The Rise of Gerry Healy in the Battle of Ideas supplement to Red Weekly [7 October 1976].

2. Cliff had his origins in Hebrew society in Palestine and not in Britain, but it was the RCP that he first acquired political prominence.

3. The problem of defining this relation to Trotskyism has always been a problem for the SWP even at an ideological level. In the 1950s and early 1960s the relation was somewhat vague — Luxemburg and Serge being among the chief members of the SWP pantheon. In the late 1960s the identification with Trotskyism was very close with it being essentially asserted that state capitalism was really the thing needed to 'complete' Trotskyism — International Socialism 38/39, for example, was solely devoted to writings of Trotsky. In the 1970s opinion has veered against Trotsky with Lenin being exalted as the superior 'alternative'. These ideological shifts in general reflected, as discussed below, the shifts in political positions.

4. For example the classic social democratic analysis of the Russian Revolution, Kautsky's Dictatorship of the Proletariat, was clear that:

'In a number of industrial states the material and moral prerequisites for Socialism appear already to exist in sufficient measure But Russia is not one of these leading industrial states. What is being enacted there now is, in fact, the last of the middle class, and not the first of Socialist revolutions.' [p.97]

5. Thus on agriculture Kautsky concluded that: 'The Revolution has only achieved in Russia what it effected in France in 1789 and what its aftermath achieved in Germany It has strengthened private property in the means of production and in the produce, which are conditions from which capitalist production will constantly arise' (ibid p.116)

On industry the nationalisations of the Bolsheviks were seen as merely the expression of the latest trends in capitalism itself:

'It is reasonable to anticipate that the nationalisation of many branches of industry, for which the Soviet Government has paved the way, will persist, even if the Soviet Republic should be destroyed This is all the more probable, as it is part of a movement which is going on in all modern states, even if they are capitalist. The needs of the war were responsible for it — we remember the nationalisation of the American railways — and the needs of peace will ensure its continuance.' [ibid p.126]

On democracy: 'Had the Constituent Assembly succeeded in strengthening democracy, then, at the same time, all the advantages which the industrial proletariat might have acquired by its agency would have been consolidated.' [ibid p.134]

6. Following 1917 not merely proto-communist but also anarchist and syndicalist forces rallied to the revolution — for example the Spanish CNT and the American IWW considered joining the Third International.
7. See for example N. Walter, *Anarchism in Russia* in *Anarchy* November 1967.
8. Trotsky's *Our Differences with the 'Democratic Centralists'* is a reply to this position whose best known advocate was Smirnov.
9. Trotsky's *In Defence of Marxism* is the classic reply to these positions.
10. The most famous 'Titoist' book on this is *The New Class* by Djilas. The official Maoist position consists rather more of political abuse than analysis but to the extent any coherence exists it may be traced in *The Polemic on the General Line of the International Communist Movement* [Peking 1965]. Livio Maitan's *Party, Army and Masses in China* analyses some of the arguments

- notably in pp198-239. The 'unofficial', and more 'sophisticated' Maoist line is chiefly represented by Bettelheim. A critique of his positions may be found in Mandel's *The Soviet Economy Today* in *International Socialist Review* June 1972.
11. See *Readings in State Capitalism* published by the IMG.
 12. The classic analysis is Engels' *The Bakuninists at Work*.
 13. In Spain the trend known as 'The Friends of Durruti' evolved towards essentially revolutionary positions while that led by Oliver finished up in the government with the bourgeoisie.
 14. See *Valer Imperialism and Permanent Revolution* in *International* vol.3, no.4.
 15. Typical examples of this are the *Organisation Communiste des Travailleurs in France*, and *Avanguardia Operaia in Italy*

16. Burnham edits the extreme right wing *National Review* in the United States and in the 1950s actively participated in the McCarthyite witch-hunt.
17. Shachtman finished up in the right wing of the *American Socialist Party* as an advocate of cold and even hot war.
18. Probably the most left wing surviving bureaucratic collectivist current outside Eastern Europe is that of the *American International Socialists*. Even this however has not risen above centrism — refusing to call, unlike the British SWP, for the victory of the NLF in the Vietnam war. This organisation however suffered a major split and the evolution of the 80 or so strong minority supporting the British SWP, and this current's political positions are not known at the time of writing.
19. Kuron and Modzelewski not merely opposed the Stalinist bureaucracy but called for support to: 'The revolutionary wars in Vietnam, Algeria

- and Cuba' [Open Letter to the Party, p.64] called for an end to the situation where 'the bureaucracy suppresses revolutionary movements at home and uses its influence over foreign official Communist parties to impede the development of revolutionary movements in Latin America, Asia and Africa.' [Ibid p.67] and stated: 'Our ally against the intervention of Soviet tanks is the Russian, Ukrainian, Hungarian and Czech working class. Our ally against the pressures and threats of imperialism is the working class of the industrialised West and the developing colonial revolution.' [Ibid p.68].
20. Even before the 1940 struggle in the SWP, when he opposed a split, Trotsky was engaged in polemics inside the movement for the Fourth International on the question of the nature of the USSR — see for example the article *Not a Workers and Not a Bourgeois State?* of November 1937 [Trotsky — *Writings 1937-38*, p.60]
 21. Cannon — *Letter to the Political Committee of the SWP*, 22 May 1961.

CLIFF AND SHACHTMAN

Considered from a theoretical point of view there is no doubt that Tony Cliff's theory of state capitalism is one of the most incoherent analyses ever put forward on the Soviet Union. It is not a theory of state capitalism at all. According to Cliff the Soviet Union is based on a mode of production which is directed towards the production of use values. [22] Such a society is not, and never could by definition be, a capitalist society.

Marx deals with Cliff's theories in his critique of Ricardo:

'Ricardo says here: wealth consists of use values only. He transforms bourgeois production into mere production of use values, a very pretty view of a mode of production which is dominated by exchange value. He regards the specific form of bourgeois wealth as something merely formal which does not affect its content.' (23)

Cliff believes that a new form of exploiting class society, qualitatively different from capitalism, exists in the USSR. This view is generally consistent with a bureaucratic collectivist position. It is not a state capitalist theory at all.

In recent years the SWP have been very keen, with good reason, to distance themselves from the chief theorist of bureaucratic collectivism, Max Shachtman. However, not merely are most of the arguments Cliff uses in his *Russia: A Marxist Analysis* borrowed from Shachtman (right down to identical quotations and so forth), but at its origins the SWP was not nearly so fussy about its relations with the Shachtmanites. For example the article on the Korean War reprinted in *The Origins of the Interna-*

tional Socialists to demonstrate the SWP position on that conflict was in fact reprinted from Shachtman's *Labour Action*.

But if Cliff has no serious analytic difference with Shachtman the difference at the level of political conclusions is very profound. A consistent theory of bureaucratic collectivism involves an immediate overturning of virtually all Marxist political conclusions. Marxism does not believe that classes arise 'accidentally' but from profound and necessary stages of the development of the productive forces.

The entire objective possibility of socialist revolution rests upon the conclusion that the next stage of development of the productive forces is ushered in by proletarian revolution providing the basis for constructing a socialist society. Severed from this premise, socialist revolution reverts to mere utopia. The appearance of a new mode of production and of a class society corresponding to it, one which was not that ushered in by the dictatorship of the proletariat, would therefore render the prospect of the proletarian revolution utopian, negate the revolutionary role of the working class and render inoperative any conception of a Leninist Party oriented to the construction of working class political power. (25)

If the bureaucracy in this new bureaucratic collectivist society were the bearer of a superior mode of production to capitalism then critical support must be given to it. The role of the working class would be to extract the best possible reforms from the bureaucracy until its world wide domination was established. Such a position leads directly to the capitulation to Stalinism



TONY CLIFF

[26]. If, on the other hand, the new mode of production represented a regression from capitalism, created, for example, by the ruin of contending classes, then obviously critical support must be given to capitalism against the USSR — a position leading

directly to capitulation to imperialism (27). But the world operates by real social forces and not by mere logical consistency. It might just conceivably be the case that some forces holding a bureaucratic collectivist position could remain within the defence of the interests of the working class. But in practice the contradictions of bureaucratic collectivism with Marxism are so evident that virtually every bureaucratic collectivist current has gone over to non-Marxist positions in the class struggle. (28)

22. 'The Russian economy is directed towards the production of certain use values.' [Cliff — *Russia: A Marxist Analysis*, p.161].

23. Marx — *Theories of Surplus Value*, vol.3, p.54.

25. Cliff was quite aware of these consequences and, as noted in the article *The Theory of Bureaucratic Collectivism — A Critique* [reprinted in *The Origins of the International Socialists*, p.79] it constitutes his first argument against Shachtman.

26. This was the argument advanced in the late 1940s by Bettelheim.

27. See note [17].

28. This of course does not mean that many individuals, and even some whole currents, may not come over to Marxism from such positions. In the late 1950s for example a number of supporters of Shachtman joined the American SWP. Today a split from the American IS, The Revolutionary Marxist Committee, has voted in favour of fusion with that organisation also.

STATE CAPITALISM

In contrast to bureaucratic collectivism the upholders of the state capitalist analysis the USSR at least have the possibility to retain intact Marxist political positions. Certainly state capitalism cannot explain the nature of the epoch — if capitalism has been able to carry through a bourgeois revolution in countries such as China, Cuba and Vietnam, then the objective basis of the theory of permanent revolution collapses.

This has helped to allow the vast majority of the adherents of the capitalist/state capitalist position (social democrats, anarchists, Maoists) to maintain their policies of collaboration with the bourgeoisie.

However these types of problems are of a lesser order than those posed by the theory of bureaucratic collectivism. For the state capitalist no new mode of production has arisen. The fundamental choice still remains between capitalism and proletarian revolution. It can be theorised that all that has occurred is some sort of unexpected 'delay' or 'detour'. (29) On this basis some state capitalist currents have been able to

save much more Marxism in their political positions than have the bureaucratic collectivists. (30)

The Second Congress of the Fourth International noted of these non-anarchist and non-social democratic state capitalist currents that:

'The adherents of the theory of state capitalism try on the whole to maintain their views within the framework of the general Marxist conception of our epoch. They maintain in its entirety the Leninist strategy of the proletarian revolution. They doubt neither the revolutionary capacity of the proletariat nor the possibility of building a revolutionary party by relying, first and foremost, on the class struggle and the experience of the workers' struggles.' (The USSR and Stalinism)

It must also be noted that the particular variant of the theory of state capitalism held by the SWP marks them out from the vast majority of those forces in the world holding a terminologically similar analysis of the USSR. As already noted above, the overwhelming majority of those forces

holding a state capitalist position on the USSR are consciously and explicitly anti-Bolshevik and anti-Leninist from an anarchist or social democratic framework. The position of the SWP differs crucially from either of these camps. They assert that the triumph of state capitalism occurred not in 1917 or shortly thereafter but only in 1929 with the institution of the first Five Year Plan. (31)

This question is not just one of dates but of the whole perspective and significance of the Russian Revolution and of Leninist politics. If the establishment of state capitalism is conceived of as happening in 1917, or 1918, or 1923, then, as noted, it is the Bolshevik leadership itself and the policies and methods it pursued which were vehicles of counter-revolution. The conception that state capitalism only triumphed in 1929 however means that the victory of counter-revolution occurred not via Bolshevism but through the destruction of Bolshevik policy, Bolshevik methods, and Bolshevik cadres. (32)

At least at a superficial level a direct

contradiction and clash is therefore avoided between the positions of the SWP and of Leninism and Bolshevism. (33) An uneasy equivocal relation is made possible whereby non-Marxist conclusions of the theory of state capitalism are able to exist simultaneously with affirmations of many of the most central points of Leninism — the theory of the party, the theory of the united front, the rejection of socialism in one country, the concept of permanent revolution. By these conceptions the positions of the SWP are able to remain much closer to those of revolutionary Marxism than any anarchist or social democratic concept. To judge what the real significance of the positions held by the SWP is, it is necessary to go beyond the 'Russian question' to consider the actual applications of state capitalist theory.

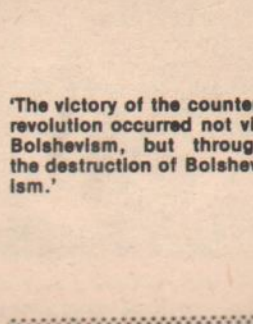
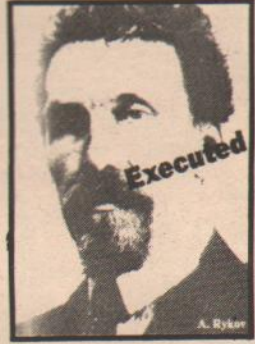
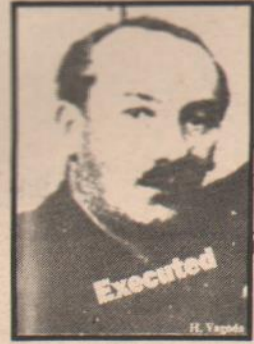
29. Hence Cliff's 'Deflected Permanent Revolution' [International Socialism, no.12, p.20] and Kidron's conclusion that Lenin was faced with not imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, but instead Imperialism, Highest Stage but One [Reprinted in Kidron, *Capitalism and Theory*].

30. This is reflected in the curiously mutated political terms listed in note [29].

31. '... the Five-Year Plan signifies the Transformation of the Bureaucracy into a Ruling Class.' [Cliff — *Russia: A Marxist Analysis*, p.106].

32. The 'standard' SWP account of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, Chris Harman's *How the Revolution was Lost*, simply presents a standard Trotskyist account of the mechanisms of the victory of Stalinism.

33. It is true that the SWP did play around slightly with support for anti-Bolshevik currents — for example the Autumn 1960 issue of *International Socialism* promised 'much more anon' of the spontaneist *Socialisme ou Barbarie* [p.36] and the Spring 1961 issue of the same journal printed Paul Cardan's *Socialism and Capitalism* [Cardan is one of the chief inspirations of the explicitly anti-Leninist Solidarity current]. Furthermore Cliff himself noted in Trotsky on Substitutionism that 'the question of Kronstadt as well as the different opposition groups which existed prior to Trotsky's going into opposition and which in 1923 joined him under his leadership is a fascinating study which deserves a separate study.' [International Socialism, Autumn 1960]. However at the same time Cliff was quite unequivocal in relation to Kronstadt itself: 'The main aspect of Kronstadt was a peasant and semi-peasant rebellion against the towns.' [Ibid p.28].



'The victory of the counter-revolution occurred not via Bolshevism, but through the destruction of Bolshevism.'

KOREA, YUGOSLAVIA, CUBA.

When the theory of state capitalism was first put forward by the proto-SWP in 1947 the political conclusions to be drawn from this position remained thoroughly ambiguous. Certainly at that time no perspective of breaking with the general positions of Trotskyism was advanced. [34] Furthermore, in the first great test of the class struggle to which this theory was subjected, the Stalin-Tito split, positions were taken by the Cliff tendency which did not in the slightest flow logically from state capitalist analysis.

Confronted with the split in the 'Communist Movement', Cliff not merely advocated the defence of Yugoslavia against the Soviet Union, a position adopted by the whole Fourth International, but considered as quite acceptable the possibility of entryism into parties following the line of the Titoist Yugoslav Communist Party i.e. entering a party whose leading stratum was the alleged ruling class of Yugoslavia. (35) Such a position which, according to Cliff's ideas, would be equivalent to entering the Tory Party in Britain, is very far from being a 'logical' extension of any serious theory of state capitalism.

The fact that such conclusions could be drawn from a state capitalist theory showed not merely its inadequate character as a tool of Marxist analysis, but also that far from being used to derive positions counter to the interests of the working class, the theory of state capitalism was being severely twisted by its authors to remain on a terrain of conclusions corresponding to the interests of the working class.

The difference in political conclusions which existed at that time between Cliff and the majority of the FI on the question of Yugoslavia centred not on a defence of the Yugoslavs against Stalin but whether the CPY was reformable or not. An honest presentation leads to the conclusion that Cliff's position was more correct than that of the FI as it was codified in 1951 and 1954 which was that the perspective for revolutionaries should be the reform of the CPY.

As for the other differences which separated the proto-SWP from the Fourth International majority at that time, notably the question of the post-war boom, no-one, including the Cliff group, considered that they were incompatible with membership of the same organisation. Even in 1950, when it had been expelled from the Fourth International in Britain by Healy, the Cliff tendency stated that it wished to affiliate to the Fourth International. (36)

If in the Tito-Stalin split the Cliff tendency took a position compatible with the interests of the working class, a very different situation developed in the case of the next great test to which the proto-SWP was subjected — the Korean war.

This conflict broke out in a period of profound downswing and demoralisation of the working class struggle, major disorientation in the ranks of the Fourth International, and administrative anti-democratic action by the Healy leadership against all minority forces of the Fourth International in Britain.

Under these circumstances the theory of state capitalism was used to justify a position that the war in Korea was an 'inter-imperialist struggle' and that support could therefore not be given to North Korea and China in the war against US imperialism. By taking such a position the SWP was



US Marines advance over the body of a Korean peasant.

beginning to give a real material content to their theory of state capitalism which led away from revolutionary Marxism.

The SWP positions on Korea soon began to affect the entire character of the organisation and the total range of its positions. The SWP abandoned support for a Leninist conception of the party in favour of a 'Luxemburgist' one, (38) moved towards a position on economic crisis and imperialism having nothing in common with a Marxist and Leninist one, (39) had abandoned organisation based on democratic centralism in favour of federalism (40) and had dropped any reference (except hostility) towards the Fourth International. (41)

While it is not chronologically speaking correct that the theory of state capitalism was put forward under the pressure of the Korean war, nevertheless it is indisputably

the case that the Socialist Review group, the forerunner of the International Socialists and later the SWP, acquired its distinctive political character under the impact of the position it took on the Korean war.

The SWP of course continues to insist that its positions were not formed under the influence of the Korean war. Ray Challinor, for example, states:

'Some of us had rejected, for some considerable time, Trotsky's views on the Soviet Union. I had, for example, written an article in the socialist discussion journal *Left* (November 1947) in which I suggested that Russia was state capitalist. The following year Cliff published a long internal document advocating the same position in a more detailed way.'

Challinor however misses the point. Even as late as the founding of the Socialist Review group in September 1950 the

proto-SWP still considered itself as merely developing Trotskyism and supporting the Fourth International. It was the impact and working out of its position on the Korean war which led to the emergence of the organisation as it existed from the 1950s to the mid-60s.

This character was confirmed in the positions which the Socialist Review and International Socialists took throughout the 1950s and early 1960s on many of the most decisive class struggle questions — we may note for example its positions on the MNA and FLN in Algeria [42], its refusal to support China in the war with India of 1962 [43], and an extremely ambiguous attitude towards the struggle of the late 1950s and early 1960s between the forces led by Castro and US imperialism (with the title of one article being 'Yanqui NO! Castro NO! Cuba SI!') [44]

There were even in this period, as we shall discuss in the next issue, important constraints on the positions taken by the SWP. But in the 1950s and early 1960s the proto-SWP was taking positions in the contemporary class struggle and adopting conclusions in theory which were clearly contrary to the interests of the working class. It had become on the whole a centrist organisation.

The question which will be discussed in a second issue of *Battle of Ideas* is whether, and if so by how much, this situation altered in the new period of rise of the class struggle which commenced in the mid-60s.

ALAN JONES

34. The founding conference of the Socialist Review group, the precursor of the SWP, resolved:

'That being a Trotskyist tendency, and believing that our position on Russia rounds off Trotskyism to the needs of our epoch, we shall fight for the building of the Fourth International as a genuine Trotskyist organisation.' [Cited in *The Origins of the International Socialists*, p.3].

35. Cliff stated:

'Trotskyists must, while being tactically flexible [under certain conditions not excluding entry into a Titoist party as a faction], stick firmly to their principles: against 'Socialism in one country' as a counter-revolutionary conception, for Soviet democracy, etc. etc.' [Cliff — *The 'People's Democracies' in The Origins of the International Socialists*, p.60].

36. The founding conference of the Socialist Review group resolved: "We shall apply for membership of the Fourth International." [Cited in *The Origins of the International Socialists*, p.3].

37. The article which the SWP themselves choose to explain their position states:

'While the victory of North Korea will mean the elimination of the landlords and capitalists, it will at the same time reduce Korea to the bureaucratic pattern of Soviet Russia — i.e. without popular control of nationalised industries and socialist democracy. At the same time the immediate result of the victory of Stalinism in Korea would be the liquidation of the independent socialist movement and the disorienting of the socialist vanguard.'

'The war is, therefore, not going to bring the liberation of Korea — although it may lead to the country's unification. Korea even though unified by the victory of either government will be still further removed from independence.'

'We can, therefore, give no support to either camp since the war will not achieve the declared aims of either side....'

'Our Third Force position — 'Neither Western Capitalism nor Stalinist Totalitarianism' — demands that we lend no support to either camp in Korea. Instead our solidarity is with the Koreans in their struggle against both war camps and for national independence and democratic socialism.' [The War in Korea in *Origins of the International Socialists*, p.78].

38. This position was continued right up to the late 1960s. Its classic formulation was in the 1959 edition of Cliff's pamphlet *Rosa Luxemburg* which stated:

'For Marxists in the advanced industrial countries, Lenin's original position can much less serve as a guide than Rosa Luxemburg's' [p.54].

This may be contrasted to the present positions taken in Cliff's biography of Lenin.

39. The classic formulation is in Kidron's *Imperialism, Highest Stage but One*.

40. This was only formally altered in late 1968.

41. It was at this time that the type of concepts of building an international which were later to be expressed by Hallas as:

'To develop a real current of internationalism — and without such a current all talk of an international is a self-deception — it is necessary to start by linking the concrete struggles of workers in one country with those of others; of Ford workers in Britain and Germany for example, of dockers in London and Rotterdam and so on.' [Hallas — *The Way Forward in World Crisis: Essays in Revolutionary Socialism* edited by Harris and Palmer.]

42. It supported the MNA and not the FLN. The MNA finished up in alliance with French imperialism — although the SWP broke with any support for them before this occurred.

43. The position of the SWP was that: 'Socialists the world over could have no allegiance to either side in their cold-blooded, power-political Himalayan joust. On both sides of the border, the masses could have had and can only have one interests it serves, to break both Peking and Delhi and build an international socialism.' [Editorial in *International Socialism* no. 11, Winter 1962-63].

44. The major article on Cuba in *International Socialism* no. 7 [Winter 1961] for example announced:

'No support should be given to a totalitarian regime which is not progressive since it increases the alienation of Cuban society and denies progressive human values in its political repression. Outside 'critical support' would objectively help Castro precisely in the task of suppressing all opposition including any positive political alternative which may originate in the country.' [Yanqui NO! Castro NO! Cuba SI! p.26].



Mass rally in Havana greets the birth of a new workers' state.