

WORKERS' FIGHT

A Trotskyist Journal for members of the I.S. Group



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and

TRAGEDY ON
SUBSTITUTIONISM
by Tony Cliff

WORKERS' FIGHT
New Series No. 2
price 1s.

Why we joined I.S.

A year ago, in the first issue of Workers' Fight, we said the following:

"The need for a healthy revolutionary socialist - Trotskyist - movement in Britain has rarely been more obvious. Not for a decade and a half has there been such an opportunity as now to advance revolutionary politics. A Labour Government in a period of conjunctural crisis is putting the tight squeeze on the working class. Thus the necessity for a working class socialist alternative to the inept and treacherous social democratic politics of the Wilson government is felt by more and more people, hitherto beyond the reach of Marxist politics. ... We are in a situation of serious prospects for struggle and of great objective opportunity for fusing the revolutionary socialist movement and Programme with the burgeoning struggles of the class. The task of socialists in this situation is to participate in every way possible in these struggles...." *

Since then the struggles have sharpened, and the attacks on the class have become daily more vicious. A number of things have happened: international monetary crises, the great upsurge in France, and at home we have seen Powellism and the reverberating and apparently deepening economic crisis. The need for a revolutionary socialist party is clearer and more urgent than ever: and by this of course is meant a party guided by ideological clarity, steering by the Marxist method, a party whose members are conscious and clear and ready to act together under the leadership of the majority. We thought then, and we still think, that this in its fundamentals must be a Trotskyist party; one that absorbs and applies the codified lessons of the whole of working class history.

As we defined it then, "Trotskyism is the basic Marxist programme of the conquest of power by the international working class. It is the unfalsified Programme, method and experience of the Bolshevism of Lenin and Trotsky. It embodies the world experience of the workers' struggles, including the defence and development of Bolshevism by Trotsky and the Left Opposition in battle against the stalinist counter-revolution in the Soviet Union. ... It means reliance on the self-controlling activity of the working class, which it strives to mobilise on the Programme of Transitional demands as a bridge to the overthrow of capitalism and the attainment of workers' power. It is the Programme of the workers' revolution, organically linked with the practical struggle to aid its development. It is not only a programme, but the struggle to build a revolutionary party to fight for that programme. Its traditions are those of the Bolsheviks and the Left Opposition: workers' democracy, unremitting struggle for theoretical clarity, revolutionary activism, unbending hostility to and struggle against capitalism and those within the labour movement who stand for its continuation."

Considering the number of candidates for the 'alternative revolutionary leadership' and the 'Trotskyist Party' already performing in the ring, we felt it necessary to define our view of their inadequacies. We discussed then the two main Trotskyist groups: the MANANA Trotskyists of the RSL, and the EXCLUSIVE BROTHERS of the SLL. Of these, the Labour Party hibernationist position of the former hasn't changed and probably never will! The SLL has become even worse. Its abstention from the July 7th anti-fascist

* "For a Trotskyist Regroupment".

counter-march and hostility to October 27th are only the most blatant indications.

At that time, the IMG seemed to merit little more than an oblique mention as a group deeply immersed in the social democracy. But since then it has stopped attempting to substitute for a confused left wing Labour current and come up for air. In VSC they have done good work. However, the group's Third World one-issue-campaign approach in VSC threatens to cut off that movement's chances of playing a serious role in British revolutionary politics. In relation to the Labour movement in Britain it continues to be orientated more to the establishment and 'left' trade union bureaucrats than the rank and file.

In general this group is cast in the 'Pabloite' mould, of the VICARIOUS variety of 'Trotskyists'. Grouped in and around the USFI, these comrades belong to the international tendency which is so taken with the economic changes effected in China, Cuba, etc., that they are forever tending to lose sight in varying degrees and sometimes totally of the democratic socialist workers' revolution, of direct power exercised by the working class which must still be conquered in these countries. They are the flip side of the old-style sectarians and many state capitalists who deny altogether the progressive side of the developments in these countries. For us the essence of Trotskyism is first and foremost a reliance on the working class as the protagonist of history - and not on the bureaucracy (any bureaucracy) and its hangers on or on the various nationalist petty-bourgeois formations which spring up. This - the insistence on the need for a 'supplementary' workers' revolution (one with very deep-going social re-organisation which must accompany the smashing of the parasitic stalinist bureaucracy) is the revolutionary side of the workers' state designation. To deny it, or question it, or leave the question open, amounts to a capitulation to stalinism and is a complete mutilation of Trotskyism.

I.S.

The biggest change over the past year has been in IS. It has grown enormously, partly because of its centrist closeness to left social democracy and the imprecise revolutionary mood around VSC, and also largely by default of the 'hard Trotskyists'. The very rapid growth has forced the group to reconsider the whole question of the function of a sizeable group of socialists - party or not.

"Its deficiencies are amorphousness in ideology and organisation: it began by junking the Bolshevik heritage, method and tradition, and insofar as it has developed in a healthy direction this has consisted in re-adopting piece-meal elements of the politics of Trotskyism. We cannot say how far this process will go - and it is most unlikely that it will in fact go much further without a conscious internal struggle and polarisation. Possibly out of this will come some of the future forces for the Trotskyist regroupment."

That was a year ago, and events have developed faster than we anticipated. Last year when we called for a Trotskyist regroupment we expected to involve primarily ex-SILLers (seeing the SILL as the group which, in the late 1950s, came closest to being a Trotskyist party). Now we are faced with a situation of the increasing ossification of the 'Trotskyist' groups on the one hand; and on the other, the growth of IS as a left centrist current and the important changes taking place in it. At the same time an unprecedentedly sharp period of the possible class struggle demands the utmost of revolutionaries. This situation faced us with a vital question: should we preserve

a separate existence as a tiny group widely spread geographically and incapable of engaging in much effective mass work? A group our size, attempting to re-lay the foundations of some sort of Trotskyist movement, is necessarily faced with being first and foremost a propaganda group educating basic cadres and appealing to revolutionaries and socialists. This would mean little possibility of any serious participation in big struggles.

In many conditions there would be no principled alternative but to hold to this course. However, the development of a left centrist group seriously trying to come to grips with the job that needs to be done (though often in a manner we disagree with), which allows internal freedom of discussion and factions - the existence of this group offers another road: "fusion" with IS allows us to make propaganda internally and at the same time to participate in meaningful class action. Given freedom of discussion and propaganda within IS, together with a general identity of views on a wide range of activity (in fact, extensive previous practical joint work) not to join and take the opportunity of participating both in IS's internal clarification and its mass work would be absolutely sectarian.

True, unity as such is not a great all-saver. It can be harmful. The question is: unity of who, for what, on what basis? We need discussion, precision, and the organisation of factions. The tragedy of revolutionary socialism in Britain in the post-war period is that what are properly factions of one basic party have assumed the form of a hydra-headed monstrosity of division and re-division; where division leads to differing fields of work by small, small groups and the accumulated experience creates a sort of special coloration to the ideology of the group. We get sects - ie small groups, properly speaking factions, with highly distinct secondary characteristics which are primarily important to the groups' identities as sects; in extreme cases they are cultivated artificially even to the extent of grossly caricaturing and even lying about the positions and behaviour of the other groups (eg the SLL method). At this point there is a qualitative change....

Disunity, dead-end factional strife, becomes glorified. Individuals are regarded not on their intentions nor even on their actions - but on the relationship they bear to the sect - or "revolutionary party". Here we see the prophet system, and also the hate campaigns waged apparently on the basis of some idea of political original sin.

This has been and still is the predominant attribute of the movement in Britain. I.S. in many respects shared these characteristics (and was in fact the first sectarian group proper in the early 50s). But after all this bitter and fruitless experience, unity on a serious principled basis, without glossing over even minute differences and on the basis of a continual attempt to clarify these - this unity is a good thing indeed. That it needs to be said is the proof that it has been so long forgotten.

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We see the future for IS as needing clarification politically, shedding much of the past, and allowing a serious possibility of the emergence at the end of perhaps a 2-3 year process of growth (we hope) and clarification, of an organisation holding to the fundamentals of Trotskyism free from its recent derangements. In this event (the most favourable perspective) the Trotskyist Tendency would simply merge and dissolve in the transformed group. On the other hand, it must be said clearly that there is also a possibility in the current transformation and further transformations, of sharp struggles developing which could lead to splits in IS and the generation of new sects.

We cannot foresee. But we see our role as that of a loyal faction, functioning as part of the group in activity and in the process of discussion.

We think IS, to play the role which is vacant, must be utterly transformed in approaches and methods. We think a return to the fundamental positions and traditions of Trotskyism, spurned by the leadership of IS in the past and in practice mocked and caricatured by the British 'Trotskyists', is the necessary transformation. And not only a 'return', but a fusion of the revolutionary socialists with the class struggle in Britain. We must build up the group seriously and honestly on the basis of Leninist politics - which does not merely consist in methods of organisation! We must fight sectarianism without being opportunist in seeing sectarianism as a concern for clarity and principles. Revolutionary socialist unity in action - dialogue where there are differences.

Loyalty to decisions arrived at by the collective majority, and seriousness in action must be the precondition for IS f' - ours also. However, it would be less than honest if we pretend to have any political confidence in the leadership of IS. We don't. Their past practice precludes it; serious differences of principle which we have with them preclude it, and the obvious empiricism with which they react to the current situation precludes it.

We call now for a RETURN TO TROTSKYISM, for the regroupment of the healthy forces in the revolutionary left in Britain, and we believe that in the absence of an external force for cohesion and unity (such as the Russian Revolution was in the early 1920s), the only way out of the present impasse is by the development of a serious Leninist group free from the defects of the sects. We think IS, or a large section of it, could achieve this. This is why we have joined I.S.

The conditions of membership of the Trotskyist Tendency are:

- 1) Loyal activity in the organisation.
- 2) Agreement on the basic Programme of Trotskyism - the documents of the first four Congresses of the Communist International and the Founding Conference of the Fourth International.
- 3) We work to construct a Leninist Party, democratic decentralist in the real sense, not the centralised centrism proposed by the Political Cttee (although because we feel that even that is preferable to the ineffective looseness of IS's present, we support it now without illusions). To us democratic centralism is the organisational expression of the conscious Leninist conception of working class politics (a method which is utterly different from the IS leadership's past actions and attitudes and also from its current 'conversion' to the bare forms of democratic centralism). Democratic centralism relies on political clarity, a minimum level of development of members and a minimum level of activity: without these democracy is a farce, and without democracy effective centralism is impossible.
- 4) We stand for a defensist attitude towards all colonial struggles against Imperialism, and towards the stalinist states against Imperialism: this, in its original Trotskyist definition, does not mean support for the bureaucracies and their foreign policies, nor can it ever go against the interests of the world revolution or working class of the stalinist states. It is defense against reactionary parasitic Imperialism.

Why we Publish Workers' Fight

Workers' Fight is being published as an internal I.S. tendency journal, which will appear at irregular intervals. Its function will be to produce articles for discussion by supporters of the Tendency and other members of the Group.

These will naturally be propaganda or polemical articles written from the particular viewpoint of the Trotskyist Tendency. They will deal with subjects of especial interest to the Tendency - eg the history of the Trotskyist movement. We are aware of the need to define in detail our positions, and the ramifications that flow from our basic Tendency differences with the majority of the Group, and to measure these against specific IS ideas and traditional attitudes.

We also intend to deal with aspects of the history of the IS Group and its positions (at different times on various questions,) which have a direct bearing on the current situation. And we will produce a series of relevant reprints (see page 9, Cliff's 1960 article on the Party and Substitutionism).

As IS members, all the members and supporters of the Trotskyist Tendency have the right to contribute to the I.B., and also to the weekly paper and to IS journal. The publication of this journal internally does not mean that Trotskyist Tendency supporters will not contribute to these. It does mean that we feel ourselves to have certain needs - as any tendency in similar circumstances would have - which are not capable of being catered for within these channels. There is a serious limitation on length of articles for the IB. Many editorial considerations apply where the IS magazine and Socialist Worker are concerned - considerations quite legitimate in their own right - which place crippling limitations on a tendency which aims to combine internal argument for its own line with serious commitment to the external work of the Group.

The constitution of the Group allows the publication of tendency and factional documents. It is in line with this right that we publish Workers' Fight.

All correspondence etc. to Geoff Hodgson, 73a Forest Range, Levenshulme, Manchester 19

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ON REVOLUTIONARY CONSCIOUSNESS

For thirty years Marxism has been in partial eclipse. Its revival has been clouded by centrism and sectarianism in the socialist movement. These deviations, characterised on the one hand by contempt for the Marxist traditions and on the other by recitals of "Marxist" truths devoid of any attempts to apply them to practice, are alien to Marxism. Where empiricism and mechanical materialism masquerade for dialectics an attempt to revert to the Marxist method, firmly anchored in concrete conditions, is the only reply.

All truth is founded on practice, but this does not deny the validity of certain "traditional" or "antiquated" theoretical propositions currently in disfavour. Above all the postulates of Leninism have come under heavy fire, even from the socialist movement itself. The I.S. Group has been responsible for a large part of the attack. Has Leninism survived the onslaught? This article, in part, attempts to supply the answer.

Lenin upheld in "WHAT IS TO BE DONE" that the working class could only arrive at 'trade union' consciousness through day to day experience. Under capitalism the worker was concerned with better terms for the sale of his labour power, but he was not necessarily concerned with abolishing the system of wage labour altogether. This did not mean that the working class was incapable of retaining marxist theory, on the contrary, but that workers would not reach socialist ideas directly and mechanistically from their experience as workers. It is the role of the marxist party to ceaselessly 'combat' bourgeois ideas among the masses, promulgate socialist theory and fight for the leadership, the vanguard elements, of the working class.

In his book *RCSA LUXEMBURG*, Tony Cliff contests Lenin's conception. Quoting Lenin completely out of context at the time of the 1905 revolution as saying "the working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social-Democratic", Cliff asserts that the condition of the proletariat under capitalism leads to a striving of the workers for socialism.

The latter standpoint, however, is the reverse side of the coin to pessimism. Impatience for the proletariat to 'develop' its socialist consciousness may lead to pessimism regarding the revolutionary potential of the working class.

Lenin's position, unlike Cliff's, is a conscious break with mechanistic materialism. Socialist ideas are not produced automatically from the environment of the proletariat. Ideology is not simply a passive product of material conditions but an active weapon for changing those conditions. Secondly the revolution is not an explosion merely triggered off by external circumstances but a complete process, of which the building of a revolutionary organisation, even in periods of moderated class struggle, is an essential part.

Thirdly, Lenin's analysis puts maximum responsibility in the hands of the revolutionary leadership. Complete theoretical clarity, unceasing struggle against bourgeois ideas, and a high level of discipline in the revolutionary party, are essential. In a situation of revolutionary turbulence the working class may attempt to drive its action along a revolutionary socialist path. However, in this situation the petit bourgeoisie and other layers are thrown into the tumult, and without the cohesion and leadership provided by the revolutionary party, the assault by the proletariat to overthrow capitalism is blunted and inevit-

ably lost.

It is by no means certain that the working class will respond to every attack by the ruling class in the way of a counter attack. The importance of socialist propaganda among the working class therefore cannot be underestimated. Revolution is not an automatic response to a slump or a famine, but a conscious act of the proletariat.

Nevertheless it is necessary to complete a scientific explanation of the fact that the working class is not consistently revolutionary in consciousness, despite the maturity of the objective conditions for revolution. Lenin explained in his preface to 'IMPERIALISM, THE HIGHEST STAGE OF CAPITALISM' why reformist ideas were prevalent amongst the workers:

"Obviously out of such enormous super-profits ... it is possible to bribe their labour leaders and an upper stratum of bourgeoisified workers or 'labour aristocracy' who have become completely petit-bourgeois in their mode of life, in the amount of their earnings, and in their point of view, serve as ... the principle social (not military) support of the bourgeoisie. They are the real agents of the labour movement, the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class, the real carriers of reformism and chauvinism."

Tony Cliff argues that the above picture does not fit reality. He writes:

"And inevitable conclusion following upon Lenin's analysis of Reformism is that a small thin crust of conservatism hides the revolutionary urges of the mass of the workers. Any break through the crust would reveal a surging revolutionary lava. The role of the revolutionary party is simply to show to the mass of the workers that their interests are betrayed by the 'infinitesimal minority' of 'aristocracy of labour'". (T. Cliff, "ECONOMIC ROOTS OF REFORMISM", Socialist Review, June 1957).

Tony Cliff's misconceptions regarding working class consciousness and the revolutionary party may be traced in the

above quotation. There is a complete misunderstanding of the role of leadership and the role of ideology under capitalism. Firstly, Tony Cliff is using his own mechanical conceptions of working class consciousness already discussed in this article - and not Lenin's. There is no reason why 'revolutionary urges' should lie beneath the 'small thin crust', for, as Lenin argues, the working class normally only reaches 'trade union' consciousness as a response to its conditions. Secondly, where is the role of the bourgeoisie? Lenin said that the labour aristocracy was "the principle social ... support of the bourgeoisie". But this does not deny that the ruling class has other means of support, such as racialism. Above all the bourgeoisie holds most of the levers controlling ideology and propaganda.

Thirdly, the role and task of revolutionary leadership is largely ignored. This task is not "simply" to expose the labour aristocracy as traitors to the working class but, in addition, to build a revolutionary organisation, train militants as socialist cadres, develop an alternative means of propaganda, constantly attack the capitalist system and lead sections of the working class through struggle to a socialist consciousness.

Above all, the revolutionary leadership must develop a revolutionary strategy and a revolutionary programme for the working class, in practice and related to the specific conditions of the proletariat. Tony Cliff's caricature is far more akin to the Socialist Labour League, with their perspective of imminent collapse of capitalism, than Lenin.

The argument is continued by Tony Cliff in an attempt to show that imperialism "by raising general living standards ... diminishes differences between sections of this same working class." He shows that the gap between the wages of the skilled and unskilled workers has narrowed considerably. Thus imperialism is assumed to have benefited the whole working class, not just a minority. The conclusion follows that reformism has its base in the entire working class and not in its privileged sections.

It is not clear if it is implied that the labour aristocracy has never existed as a social force. However, sufficient data has been collected, as for example by Hobsbawm in "Democracy in the Labour Movement" (chapter on 'The Labour Aristocracy in 19th century Britain') to show that the Labour aristocracy existed as a distinct social grouping with a distinct political role. This data is completely harmonious with Lenin's description.

The rejection of Lenin's theory is based completely on data concerning wage levels. However, Hobsbawm draws up a far more realistic set of criteria for a labour aristocracy, which are as follows:

- 1) Level and regularity of earnings.
- 2) Conditions of work.
- 3) Relations with other social strata.
- 4) General living conditions.
- 5) Prospects of future advancement.

Hobsbawm states that the labour aristocracy changed quantitatively about 1914:

"The analysis of the labour aristocracy under monopoly capitalism must therefore proceed somewhat differently from that of nineteenth century capitalism. .. it may no longer be possible to make it simply an analysis of the best paid strata of the British working class."

It is probably true that the whole of the working class has benefited from the "crumbs" thrown from the imperialists' table. But despite this, reformist ideas do not spring directly and mechanistically from conditions of general economic prosperity. According to Tony Cliff we must wait until the wages of the working class are cut before revolutionary ideas may 'arise'!

In addition it is true that the difference in wage levels of both skilled and unskilled workers has lessened to a marked degree. Whilst stressing the comprehensibility of Hobsbawm's criteria it must be noted that firstly the labour aristocracy of the last century has in part continued to exist under state monopoly capitalism. Secondly the trade union and associated machinery has expanded considerably, moved towards integration with the state, and largely

split itself from the rank and file. Thirdly vast sections of bureaucrats, salaried, white collar and technical workers, have adopted an 'aristocratic' position in relation to lower layers of the proletariat. With the growth of the machinery of the state to gigantic proportions the labour aristocracy has gained a new mould.

Corresponding to the change in form of the labour aristocracy the reformist ideas peddled by the social democratic parties have changed considerably in content. The British Labour Party has, under the leadership of Wilson, severed its links completely with social democratic ideology. Its appeal is directed far more to the middle classes, especially the 'technocrats'. Above all, the role of the Labour Party has not been to gain social reforms, but to straitjacket the working class.

As Trotsky stated in 1940: "Monopoly capitalism is less and less willing to reconcile itself to the independence of trade unions. It demands of the reformist bureaucracy and the labour aristocracy who pick the crumbs from its banquet table, that they become transformed into its political police before the eyes of the working class. If that is not achieved the labour bureaucracy is driven away and replaced by the fascists. Incidentally, all the efforts of the labour aristocracy in the service of imperialism cannot in the long run save them from destruction." (TRADE UNIONS IN THE EPOCH OF IMPERIALIST DECAY, by Leon Trotsky.)

Trotsky was writing immediately after the Great Depression. However, the rapid expansion of capitalism in the 1950s and early 1960s has fully prepared the foundations for further instability and slump. In panic the bourgeoisie have ordered their 'labour lieutenants of the capitalist class' to spring to action. An attempt is made to impose the control of the labour bureaucracy over the working class. Despite the order for battle the battalions do not move in perfect formation. The labour aristocracy no longer has a secure social base. Its seismograph is sensitive to the earthquake tremors of capitalist crisis. It vacillates. Whole sections fall into line with the proletariat. Many, in desperation to preserve the capit-

to petty capitalism, to the peasantry - the NEP. However 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 subject which deserves a separate study.

*3: Nobody in Russia doubted that Trotsky's group alone - the Mezhrainsty - which in August 1917 had some 4,000 members was much too small to be able seriously to affect the march of events. Similarly one can understand Trotsky when in 1921 he referred to the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (KAPD) as being slight: "no more than 30,000-40,000" members (Trotsky, The First Five Years of the Communist International, London 1953, Vol II p26).

*4: Rosa Luxemburg put it thus: "Of course through the theoretical analysis of the social conditions of struggle, Social Democracy has introduced the element of consciousness into the proletarian class struggle to an unprecedented degree; it gave the class struggle its clarity of aim; it created, for the first time, a permanent mass workers' organisation, and thus built a firm backbone for the class struggle. However, it would be catastrophically wrong for us to assume that from now on all the historical initiative of the people has passed to the hands of the Social Democratic organisation alone, and that the unorganised mass of the proletariat has turned into a formless thing, into the deadweight of history. On the contrary, the popular masses continue to be the living matter of world history, even in the presence of Social Democracy; and only if there is blood circulation between the organised nucleus and the popular masses, only if one heartbeat vitalises the two, can Social Democracy prove that it is capable of great historical deeds." (Leipziger Volkszeitung, pp26-28, June 1913).

*5: Some cases of secrecy are justified and every worker will understand this. Just as factory meetings can be closed to the capitalists and their newspapermen and other agents, so there are moments in the life of the revolutionary party which have to be kept secret. But in all cases the party should be able to justify this to the workers and convince them that no basic decisions of policy are being hidden from them. (Reproduced from International Socialism 2, autumn 1960, entitled "The Revolutionary Party and the Class, or Trotsky on Substitutionism")

ON REVOLUTIONARY CONSCIOUSNESS (Continued from page 8)

capitalist system, turn onto the proletariat with increased frenzy. "Ban unofficial strikes!" is one slogan. "Imprison dissident union officials!" is another.

The labour aristocracy begins to rot and fall apart, but like a leper it still lives. The working class, anxious to proclaim it dead, may ignore it and later be stabbed in the back. Without a clear and consistent exposure of the labour aristocracy and its reformist ideology it will continue to shackle the working class. It is the role above all of the revolutionary party to break the working class from its leadership - the labour aristocracy - and place it under the banner of revolutionary marxism. The labour aristocracy is condemned to die but it is not yet dead. The revolutionary party is its executioner.

Geoff Hodgson

THE POLITICS OF IS

A contribution to the discussion by Sean Matgamna

INTRODUCTION: ONE HALF STEP FORWARD - TWO STEPS SIDEWAYS !

The explosion of political discussion in IS, ignited by the sudden change of line by Cliff in favour of building the embryo of a 'revolutionary party' seemed 6 months ago to be the most hopeful thing on the British left. (See editorial p.1, stencilled at the end of November). Many, seeing also the new-type IS positions on Vietnam and the Middle East - a radical break with the abstentionist attitude of the Group to this kind of struggle in the first 15 years of its existence - wonder whether the leadership might not even disavow other aspects of its past.

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

Democratic centralism was of course impossible given the level of consciousness and commitment in the Group. It was possible (just!) that the leadership intended to carry out a campaign to transform the members and methods of work. This question has in the last 4 months been answered decisively - in the negative. Those who last Autumn were making passionate speeches for 'democratic centralism' suddenly switched off the 'juice' once formal centralisation had gone through. A merely formal structural change had taken place in the Group, necessitated in the eyes of the leaders on technical grounds (1,200 to organise! - see Cliff's document of June '68 and presented in their usual style in a suitable demagogic sauce as 'Leninist democratic centralism').

But Leninism is much more than an organisational formula - and blind empirical turns (such as the one which led to the 'new line') are the very antithesis of Leninism. Moreover the leadership became terribly alarmed after the last conference by how seriously many of the members took the demagogy. Whether or not they ever intended other than a change of forms, they have moved noticeably backwards in the last 4 months as if startled by their own boldness in having moved forward at all. The Group has merely achieved a loosely centralised version of its old self, which doesn't in any sense approach democratic centralism. The methods of the leadership are adamantly anti-Leninist and remain what they were before the 'new turn'. (See end of this article) In fact the Group is still stuck in the centrist mud - and going backwards.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This issue of Workers' Fight reproduces Cliff's 1960 article for the information of comrades (p.9). The first part of the present article (pp26-35) is reproduced (edited) from an old Workers' Fight pamphlet (What we are and what we must become). Not because we think it's wonderful, but for 3 reasons: 1) convenience; 2) a desire to show that the "newly discovered" ideas on the party have been the very commonplaces of the Trotskyist movement (though not IS) for decades; and 3) because it is useful perhaps to make the point that we don't need to change our theory with quite such frequency as the leadership of IS. (It is better to maintain the basic ideas of communism than to play fast and loose with them).

Of course confusion on the Party question is by no means separate from the other theoretical positions of IS. The theory of state capitalism per se, however, does not necessarily lead to the type of organisation that IS became and is. If it has it is because of the abstentionist politics drawn from theory: politics which in our opinion were not the logical conclusion in the early 1950s from a marxist theory of state capitalism. Moreover, there were certain conclusions drawn by Cliff in face of stalinism (eg an explicit connection was drawn between Bolshevism and Stalinism) which did have an enormous bearing on the question of the party.

Part II (in the next issue of Workers' Fight) will deal with the politics which the IS Group leadership have drawn from the theory of state capitalism. The reason for the order is simply convenience related to the point of most immediate interest in the Group. While it is impossible to separate the IS Group from its particular shibboleth, it is entirely possible to discuss the Party question in its own right. It has the advantage of allowing us to look later at one of the main causes, or perhaps the other symptoms, of the centrist infection in the Group in full knowledge of the practical effects.

THE PROLETARIAT, ITS CLASS PARTY AND DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

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

(L.Trotsky: The First Five Years of the Communist International, Vol.II p.193.)

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

(L.Trotsky: Lessons of October. p117. Unwin Books Edn.)

THE CLASS PARTY OF THE PROLETARIAT

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

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

This is true even in the Great French Revolution, where the development of their struggle for power went beyond the aims of the bourgeoisie proper and fell into the hands of super radicals, leaders of that group, the sans culottes, standing nearest to the modern proletariat - ie the Jacobins. The fact that the bourgeoisie developed their own means of production, their own forms, under the old system meant that they had leisure etc. to generate their own class culture, and the possibility of sufficient education, independent of their feudal rivals, for the ripening of the objective conditions for their assumption of full power to be adequately reflected in

their collective consciousness (though not fully rationally or consciously and often clothed in mystical garb).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The growth and concentration of the means of production create the pre-requisite for working class power and also cement and organise the proletariat in gigantic concentrations, in a way impossible for example for peasants. The possibility thus exists for a transition to a higher stage, of the workers taking power. And the tidal movements, the crises inevitable because of the contradictions of capitalism,

time after time in different countries propel the workers into the streets in a struggle for power, more or less consciously conducted. This struggle too flows inevitably, organically, from the nature of capitalism.

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

THE PROLETARIAN IDEOLOGY - MARXISM

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

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

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

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

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

A MINORITY PARTY

The proletariat moreover is not a homogeneous class and even in the most favourable conditions only a limited section can become fully conscious. The Communist Manifesto, while pointing out that the Communists had no interests apart from the proletariat, also added: "The Communists are, practically, the most progressive and resolute sections of the proletariat of all countries. ... They have, theoretically the advantage over the great mass of the proletariat of understanding the line of advance, conditions and general results of the proletarian movement."

History, before the rise of the modern proletariat, had evolved that form

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

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

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

MARXISM AND THE BRITISH LABOUR MOVEMENT

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

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

Lenin's point about the ideological battle front being decisive can really be understood when we realise that the tremendous energy and decades-long activity of the British working class have resulted in no basic political gains, and the economic victories are built on shifting sand. The British working class, left to spontaneity through a peculiar combination of historical circumstances, has been utterly defeated ideologically. And this has conditioned everything else.

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

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very well: theory divorced from practice is sterile, and practice divorced from theory is blind.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let the anarchists bemoan this; let the ISites deny it; let Ted Grant take refuge behind the SLL caricature - history shows the need for a special type of revolutionary proletarian party, organised in a special way. Let those who want guarantees from history shudder in fear lest a highly centralised party aid 'degeneration' in an unfavourable future: the organisation of single cells into multi-cellular

bodies gave rise to the phenomenon of death. It also made life as we know it possible. Melancholics may bemoan that the organisation of the human body implies death: we content ourselves with observing that no body equals no life.

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

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

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

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

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

Neither was the degeneration in the USSR inevitable because the revolution itself was a world-historic accident hopelessly premature and inescapably doomed, with the degeneration being aided and speeded by the structure of the Bolshevik Party. Rather was it the absence of such democratic centralist marxist parties in the west, to fight the apparatus that was the product within the European labour movement of the past era of conservative accommodation to the status quo. This absence it was that ruined the European revolution, and left the successful revolution in Russia in isolation to degenerate and sink into the backward Russian mud.

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

That this has also meant a continual, indeed very rapid development of technology is also in the nature of capitalism. At the cost of proletarian blood and degradation in ever-increasing quantities, capitalism has survived and sometimes

'prospered' in the last 40 years. It is difficult to think of a likely situation of inexorable crisis out of which west European capitalism, the most dynamic system ever, couldn't possibly survive.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The revolutionary bolshevik party, existing here and now with all the pressures of capitalism must yet, if it is to perform its function, overcome the pressures sufficiently to enable it to have an active membership and a conscious democratic life. We must be able, by our consciousness of our responsibilities to create such conditions for ourselves, ahead of the masses of the class, or we will never lead

that class out of slavery. Only those who seriously devote their lives to socialism, who organise their lives around the single purpose of fighting for and with the class, can be revolutionary socialists of the vanguard. It is a hard logic - but one imposed by an equally hard reality. And it is this reality, with its tremendous pressures dragging us down to accommodation, that we must rise above and overcome.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The prerequisite of a revolutionary party is to break decisively, clearly with all bourgeois ideology. We must fight against all fully developed bourgeois ideology in general, and in the working class movement in particular we must fight that ideology which springs up spontaneously and which must be classified, after Lenin, as bourgeois - even when it includes elements of a naive 'socialism'. There are no half-measures here, no 'neutrality', no abstentionism. We either fight bourgeois ideology or we succumb to it. This fight is first conducted within the party. The party is the instrument for waging the struggle to break the ideological chains that help bind the proletariat to the bourgeoisie. The importance of this fight cannot be overstressed. It is the to-be-or-not-to-be for revolutionary politics.

.....

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

"... the presence of a revolutionary party, which renders to itself a clear account of the motive forces of the present epoch, and understands the exceptional role amongst them of a revolutionary class; which knows its inexhaustible, but unrevealed powers; which believes in that class and believes in itself; which knows the power of revolutionary method in an epoch of instability of all social relations; which is ready to employ that method and carry it through to the end - the presence of such a

party represents a factor of incalculable historical importance."
(Leon Trotsky: Communism and Terrorism, p18)

"... The great historical significance of Lenin's policy ... his policy of irreconcilable ideological demarkation, and, when necessary, split for the purpose of welding and tempering the core of the truly revolutionary party..."

(Leon Trotsky: The Permanent Revolution, p49) (Our emphasis)

CLIFF ON THE PARTY

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

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

"Reactionary epochs like ours not only disintegrate and weaken the working class and its vanguard but also lower the general ideological level of the

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

"Great political defeats provoke a reconsideration of values, generally occurring in two directions. On the one hand the true vanguard, enriched by the experience of defeat, defends with tooth and nail the heritage of revolutionary thought and on this basis attempts to educate new cadres for the mass struggle to come. On the other hand the routinists, centrists and dilettantes, frightened by defeat, do their best to destroy the authority of revolutionary tradition and go backward in their search for a "New Word

(L. Trotsky, Op. Cit. p4. New Park Edition 195

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

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

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

B) Cliff advocated an old fashioned social-democratic concept of the party - based on Luxemburg's ideas, 'Luxemburgist' in the worst and most unenlightened sense. Cliff abandoned, if he ever understood, the Leninist theory of the role of consciousness. And he distorted the experiences of history (Germany 1918) which underly the theory of the party.

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

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

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

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

he was right on the party and particularly on substitutionism.

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

A MINORITY PARTY? Cliff, 'Luxemburg' p.49:

"Marx's statement ('the proletarian movement is the self-conscious independent movement of the immense majority in the interests of the immense majority') and Lenin's, that revolutionary social democracy represents 'the Jacobins indissolubly connected with the organisation of the proletariat' are definitely contradictory."

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

What Lenin was actually in process of doing was to solve, to find in practice, the answer to a contradiction within the Communist Manifesto between the statement Cliff refers to and another, that 'the dominant ideology in any epoch is that of the ruling class.' A contradiction in real life also, because of the subordinate position of the workers. Lenin was in fact taking seriously another idea of Marx and Engels, that the class struggle takes place on the 3 fronts of economics, politics and ideology, and rigorously (in a Russia saturated with legal Marxism where everyone, even liberals, were 'marxists' and proletarian marxists needed exceptional sharpness and consciousness) building an organisation dedicated to this conception of Engels - an organisation which subordinated considerations such as size, and number of worker members to a clear revolutionary marxist line in the various types of circumstances that evolved; a small, elite, non-elective compact group with few workers when that was the only way to maintain the political line; and an expanded, open, mass elective group when that became compatible with maintaining a marxist line.

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

Thus Cliff - in 1959! - caricatures Bolshevism.

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

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

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

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

Cliff never conceives of the need to build a non-bureaucratic organisation to help ensure the victory of the mass upsurge against the bureaucrats. He never appreciates Lenin's role in building such an organisation. He ignores the fight of the Bolsheviks against Mensheviks and Liquidators, and its importance for the workers' victory in 1917. Instead he sees that victory as all a matter of autonomism, that the environment decreed it. Cliff criticises Luxemburg for underestimating the Labour bureaucracy - but at the same time he ignores and dismisses those who advocated a conscious fight for Marxist clarity against such forces; and adamantly defends Luxemburg from even a hint of criticism for not having built an anti-bureaucratic revolutionary organisation earlier.

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

"Emphatic as she was that the liberation of the working class can be carried out only by the working class itself, Luxemburg was impatient of all sectarian tendencies which expressed themselves in breakaways from the mass movement and mass organisations." (She failed to organise the fight because of her mechanistic conception of the armageddon that would raise the proletariat to clear out the social democratic Augean stables. Yet Cliff quotes Engels to justify her. He equates minority leadership with sectarianism. S.M.) "She insisted despite her conflicts with it that revolutionaries should remain in the social democracy. Even after 1914, and after Liebknecht's expulsion (1916) from the Parliamentary group, she and Liebknecht stayed on the grounds that to break away would turn a revolutionary group into a sect." She persevered in this view when the Spartakus Bund gained influence and was becoming quite a recognisable force as the war dragged on." Cliff approves! As the mass opposition movement, mass strikes with political implications, developed Luxemburg, despite the pressure from the ranks, advocated remaining in the SPD, to stay and fight and thwart the policy of the majority at every step. When the Independent Social Democrats split in 1917 she went with them. Only after the outbreak of the 1918 November revolution does the Spartakus Bund form the CPD.

Cliff, p.53:

"Rosa Luxemburg's reluctance to form an independent revolutionary party is quite often cited by Stalinists as a grave error and an important cause for the defeat of the German revolution of 1918. They argue that Lenin was opposed to the revolutionary lefts' adherence to the SPD and continuing association with Kautsky. There is no truth at all in this legend." * Luxemburg, he says, made a clearer assessment than Lenin of Kautsky - and much earlier.

Lenin, July 1921:

"We know the history of the Second International, its fall and bankruptcy. Do we not know that the great misfortune of the working class movement

This passage has been expurgated from the 1968 Edition.

Germany is that the break was not brought about before the war? This cost the lives of 20,000 workers..." Not only Stalinists considered it a grave error!

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

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

THE ROLE OF MARXISTS In line with his endorsement of Luxemburg's attitude and practice in Germany, Cliff in the 'Substitutionism' article reaches conclusions on the role of marxists which are legitimate only on 1) a conception of a mechanistic development of the whole class, and 2) complete abandonment of any conception of bolshevik-type leadership.

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

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

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

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

PARTY EMBRYO OR DISCUSSION GROUP ?

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

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

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

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

THE PARTY AND THE CLASS IDENTICAL ?

Cliff: "The party must be subordinate to the whole". He might as well have used the word 'identical' here. He advocates extreme open discussion of every issue before the mass of the class - without qualification: "The freedom of discussion which exists in factory meetings which aims at unity of action after decisions are taken, should apply to the revolutionary party. This means (why? the party is not the class. S.M.) that all discussion on basic issues of policy should be discussed in the light of day; in the open press. The mass of workers take part in the discussion, put pressure on the party, its apparatus and leadership." Thus the party is seen not as a freely selected group of opinion, but as the forum of the class. And Cliff's final position in this article is therefore based on a conception of an almost homogeneous working class (seen as the way to overcome the danger of substitutionism - would it be nice?) and of the possibility of some absolute condition of ripeness. "Let the mass of the workers ... put pressure on the party..." - this happened favourably in 1917 in Russia. But when there is a downswing in consciousness?

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

In conditions like 1940 America, when a reneging, capitulating petty bourgeois section of the SWP wishes to appeal to the general public to put pressure on the party, it is reactionary. This is what Cliff advocates in the 1960 article. In the long term the interests of the class and the party are identical. But they must be separate - or the party will cease to operate in the interests of the workers and will operate against their interests.

REVOLUTION - BOURGEOIS AND PROLETARIAN

necessary. (pp39-40, LUXEMBURG). Cliff cites the spontaneous beginnings of 1789 1905 and 1917 and their 'later' need for leadership. Amazingly he entirely ignores the cardinal difference between the bourgeois and proletarian revolutions in this juxtaposition of the French and Russian revolutions. For him the conception of the party is merely one of a technical necessity and therefore it is essentially the same for both types of revolution: hence he fails to differentiate between them. *

* The France pamphlet reproduces this section from LUXEMBURG on the need to go beyond spontaneity. Into it he interpolates a quotation from Trotsky to differentiate the French and Russian revolutions. Yet another belated change.

CLIFF DISCUSSES LENIN'S CONCEPTION.

Lenin, Cliff stresses, faced an amorphous labour movement, unlike Luxemburg who faced a bureaucratic one, and his views must be seen against this background. Faced with amorphousness in the labour movement Lenin stressed the need to supplement the flaring spontaneous workers' movement by "the consciousness and organization of a party". Socialist theory must come from outside and was "the only way the labour movement could move directly to the struggle for socialism". The projected party would be made up of a highly centralised band of revolutionaries. He quotes Lenin on the need to organize the party from above down - "from the congress to the individual party organization".

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

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

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

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

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

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

And now, when the fight for this organisation has long been won, when the seed has ripened, and the harvest gathered, people come along and tell us: "You exaggerated the idea of an organisation of professional revolutionaries!" Is this not ridiculous?

organisation is condemned to smallness -- and how they operate then is not unconnected with their prospects of serious growth in upsurges. The business with the quote from Lenin above shows Cliff as not able to see Lenin's point on the connection between the foundations and later development of bolshevism, between the fundamental cadre of a group and its looser flesh. Here he applied the same blindness to Britain, in what was meant as a rejoinder to the SLL. What his ideas implied was the most passive commentating and propaganda, while awaiting the class to move. The result of equating leadership with substitutionism -- as the ideas percolated into the group were drawn in IS journal 31 on ENV: the stewarts "were - quite rightly - afraid of being 'adventuristic', but adventurism is better than nothing. In a way the steward's legitimate fear of substituting themselves for the majority of the workers was, we feel, carried too far... at the most general level they saw only that substitutionism was a danger, but did not see that the theory of substitutionism (with which IS has often been identified) implies no rejection of the need for leadership" (Rossier and Barker.) Unfortunately that is what it was interpreted as implying in the Group's practice.

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

(LITERARY) REFORM OR REVOLUTION? IN Luxemburg, edition 68, Cliff is a changed man! Nowhere is the result more startling than in the final paragraph of the chapter on Luxemburg and Lenin:

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

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

Of course people change their minds. When marxists do so it would be good to know why and how. The important thing here too is method. A marxist exposition is based on an analysis of the real world to which he brings certain conceptions: his conclusions are drawn from this. Thus the train of thought is clear, the reasoning & considerations are designed to expound to convince. In this case there is a mystery: one and the same exposition (without supplement) leads to opposite conclusions. Why? How does Comrade Cliff reach his conclusions?

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

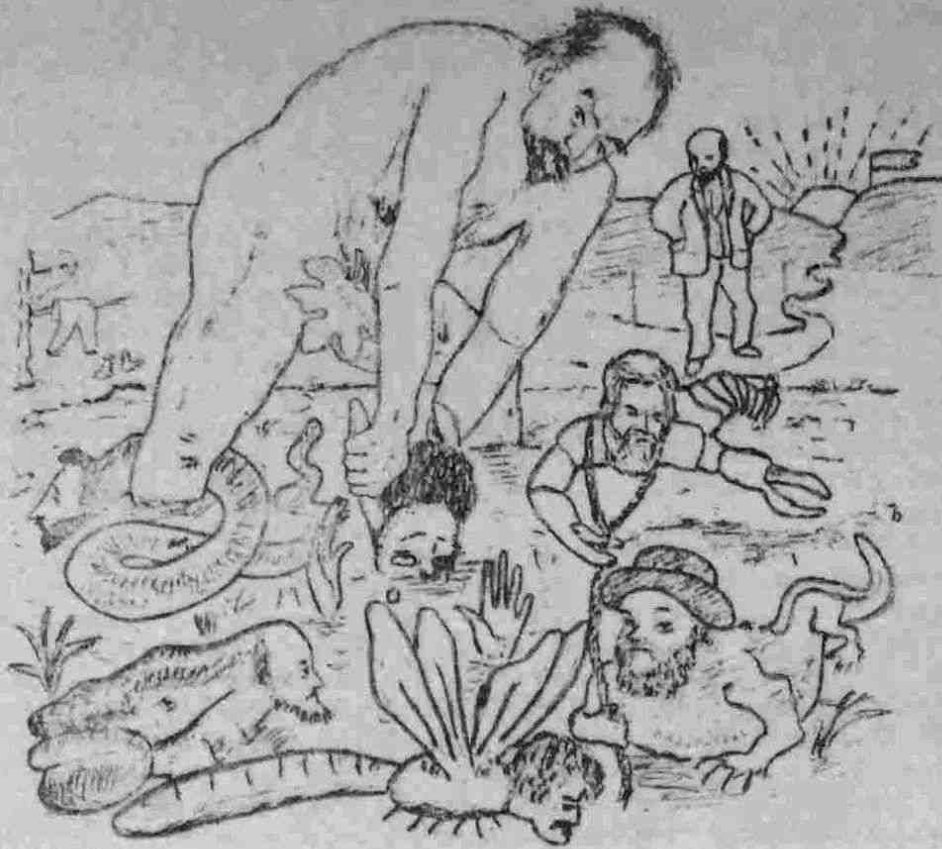
The current change - motivated allegedly on the May events in France but seemingly owing as much if not more to the happy co-incidence that the Group had just too many members to make federalism comfortable: after all, what conclusions were drawn from the Belgian General Strike in 1961 - has resembles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

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

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

If Cliff's confusion on substitutionism etc. in 1960 was - essentially - the result of casual eclecticism, the 'new approach' to the Party today is similar: an assemblage of various conceptions and approaches without consistency and in danger of falling between all the stools. Neither a loose left social democrat-type group big enough to survive beyond the revival of left social democracy itself (probable after Labour's defeat), nor a Bolshevik cadre group tempered and organised and capable of entering into and changing, or gaining from, events - including such a revival when it develops. The leadership does not have a clear conception of the party that needs to be built: "Whether the IS Group will, by simple arithmetic progression, grow into a revolutionary party, or whether the party will grow from a yet unformed group is not important for us." (Political Committee document, October 1968.) On the contrary it is vital. If the strategy is one which expects any big changes to come from the shift to come in the already organised labour movement (all experience in the past suggests that this is the likely way a real revolutionary movement will develop in a country like Britain) rather than by arithmetic accretion, then this decrees the need for us to build a cadre movement to be able to intervene. The lack of a clear strategy of the relationship of IS to the class and the organised labour movement is obvious. Consequently IS is being built as a loose, all-in type group. Lacking a strategy the leadership looks always for short cuts. Ironically the theorists of 'substitutionism' have in the last three years come close to substituting (as a fifth wheel) for the rank and file industrial movement, and now for a broad left social democratic one. This is only possible, however, in the absence of a genuine left social democratic grouping - ie for a very short period.

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



'A new Sisyphus'

This old Bolshevik cartoon depicts the complex relationship between Economism, Menshevism and Bolshevism during the turning period of 1903/4. The Economists in practice and sometimes in theory denied the need for immediate independent working class politics; they 'worshipped' the spontaneous movement of the workers, tailed behind it and seemed to abandon the struggle to mould it and refine it to revolutionary political consciousness. They were fought from 1900 to 1903 by the paper ISKRA, produced by Martov, Lenin, Flekhanov et al, which advocated a serious political organisation of the working class and a struggle for workers' independence against bourgeois ideological and organisational influence on the rising labour movement.

Then at the 'Second' Congress in 1903 the ISKRAites split - Martov, Axelrod, Dan & Co. recoiled from the harsh demands of consistently and rigorously applying the logic of the politics they, with Lenin and Flekhanov, had advocated. Simultaneously some of the Economists, like Martynov, recoiled empirically, in face of events, from their extreme one-sidedness and accepted the need for some sort of politics.

The backsliding inconsistent ISKRAites and the 'upsliding', only partly reformed Economists coalesced around an approach which owed more to the ideas of the Economists than to the ideas of the 1900-3 ISKRA. Thus was born Menshevism. The cartoon shows the reformed Economist Martynov pulling the Mensheviks down into the swamp, despite the vain efforts of Flekhanov (wearing fig-leaf marked 'Dialectics') to save them (long-eared Martov, crayfish Axelrod, snake Dan, frog Potresov and dragonfly Trotsky). Meanwhile Lenin stands on the dry ground outside the swamp, on the path to the rising sun of the workers' revolution.