

The "IS-SWP tradition" 5

The experience of the left

THE SWP is, despite everything, the biggest self-styled revolutionary Marxist organisation in Britain today. More than that: there are a lot of ex-members of the SWP (called IS before 1977) around.

It is now what the Healy organisation was in the late 50s and through the 60s — "a machine for maiming militants."

Politically, it has assumed the traditional role of anarchism. It is a movement of incoherent militant protest living politically from moment to moment, with no strategy and not much in the way of stable politics. It has one goal only — to "build the party": the party conceived as a fetish out-side of politics and history, cut off from the real working class and its movement.

As an organisation it is a rigidly authoritarian variant of the Stalinist model of a party. It is organised around a pope, Tony Cliff, who has the power to loose, bind and eject. In terms of the organisation of its

intellectual life it is pre-bourgeois, in fact medieval.

Like the Healy organisation before it, the SWP leaves most of its ex-members politically bewildered and disoriented.

To help traumatised ex-members of the IS-SWP get their political bearings and to establish before younger readers its history, we publish the symposium that follows. There will be other contributions in subsequent issues. We invite contributions. The discussion is completely free. Should representatives of the SWP wish to participate, they will be welcome.

Some of those who participate in this symposium have moved a long way from the politics they had in the IS-SWP, and from the politics of *Workers' Liberty* now. Nonetheless, at the end of this discussion we — and the thinking left in general — will be better equipped to formulate the lessons of the IS-SWP experience.

How the SWP narrowed into a sect

By Steve Jefferys*

IT'S A little over eleven years since the SWP EC phoned up to secure a statement from me that they could use to expel me. It was only later they learned I had resigned a month earlier. I had finally given up all hope in protest at their sectarian denunciation of Arthur Scargill in the weeks before the 1984 miners' strike and at their pursuit of that sectarianism in the first months of the strike. They criticised miners' support groups for collecting groceries rather than politically-correct (to pay for flying pickets) cash. My partner, Joan Smith, who had joined the IS in 1963, and was one of the main theoretical figures behind the *Women's Voice* initiative of the 1970s, had left after being arbitrarily suspended six months earlier for "failing to sell the paper" (which she had always been rather vague about for all the previous 21 years).

Since then I have barely given the SWP another thought. I played a relatively important role in the student movement at the LSE between 1965 and 1968 and in the IS/SWP between 1969 and 1979 but my current political activism doesn't extend much beyond membership of the Lipman-Miliband Trust and giving some money every month to the Labour Party. Why

should I now go into print in *Workers' Liberty*? The answer is largely personal.

I now find I am having to explain (even justify) the way in which I spent my political life to my daughter who is involved in human rights issues. And when socialist and industrial militants whom I respected and respect like Jim Higgins, Vic Collard and Mike McGrath make some good and effective points about controversies I was involved in, I think I owe it to them and to a wider audience too (if one exists) to give my account.

The only serious question to be posed of the experience of Britain's left-of-Labour politics over the last 25 years is: could it have done better? It's my strong belief that it could and that some of the missed opportunities occurred because the IS/SWP failed to break free from the narrow sectarian Trotskyist view of the relationship between revolutionary socialists and the much wider minority of politically discontented, angry and concerned people who, however inconsistently, wish to see significant progress made towards an egalitarian and non-racist and non-sexist society.

Consider the tremendous wave of politicisation that swept through both students, trade unionists, feminists and blacks during the 1960s and early 1970s. Now, 20 years later, there is no Communist Party left, but neither is there any replacement. For while the CPGB *built* on the activism of the

period between 1935 and 1945 to create an enduring organisation that linked a kernel of political and industrial militants over the following thirty-year period, the SWP hasn't. Its construction is entirely on moving sands: a demonstration here, a picket there, the mass production of placards to exaggerate their presence... and absolutely nothing of any lasting significance or coherence among militant trade unionists, left feminists, black nationalists, poll tax rebels, green activists, animal rights activists or any of the other social movements which ebb and flow in Britain's politically muddy waters.

Further, and also unlike the CP at its height, the SWP can claim not the slightest influence or relationship with Labour's troubled left-wing conscience. What matters is not whether a group has members, but whether these members together create and carry political weight within the wider movement. The SWP's membership does not.

Was it inevitable that the broad mix of industrial and political activism that was in and around the IS 25 years ago should have disappeared without significant trace? How much difference could a different leadership and different policies have made? What went wrong? There are, of course, the objective external circumstances. The American defeat in Vietnam was sensational for the Vietnamese; but that war's end saw the passing of an internationally politicising experience. World capitalism was rocked by the oil crisis of 1973-4, but it survived. At a national level the defeat of the miners in 1985 dealt a serious blow to any who saw the socialist project in terms of a link between industrial and political militancy. Times were and are hard, but then again, when haven't they been for those arguing against the stream?

The failure of the IS/SWP to play a more significant role in establishing and/or organising a more durable left opposition to both Labourism and Conservatism has both organisational and political explanations. Joan Smith has always suggested that the problems started when a big-hearted member and friend from the LSE received a big legacy which he largely passed on to the financially-struggling IS. The printshop machine that this created soon enabled a full-time bureaucracy to exist that could be maintained for whole periods independently of the members' wishes and financial support. It distorted the relationship between leadership and led and created the financial basis for the SWP's turn to Stalinist organisational solutions in the 1980s.

This argument has some truth, but does not, in my view capture all of it. What happened during the 1970s to permit those bureaucratic distortions and to first limit and then destroy the opportunities which existed, was that those who had a broader

*Steve Jefferys was a full-time organiser for the IS/SWP for seven years between 1972 and 1979.

view of socialist traditions and directions than Cliff were purged. In retrospect it's clear that they had to be if an individual like Cliff was to survive as leader. For that end, the personal domination of a tiny pond in the shape of a mini-"revolutionary party", Cliff was prepared to sacrifice a generation of talent and destroy any independent initiative.

Was this planned by Cliff? I don't believe it. I don't actually believe (after six years' experience in weekly and even more frequent meetings with him) that he is a strategic thinker. His own political instinct for survival and domination, which he (and it has to be admitted several others) genuinely considers is for the good of the socialist endeavour, is about as strategic or principled as he ever went. His short-termism explains the number and the variety of temporary alliances and different political positions he adopted. I'm sure there is a quote from Lenin somewhere justifying such expediency. The post-1975 Cliff would know it by heart.

The process of purging the IS took about ten years of factional activity during the course of which *all* those who either had a base independent of Cliff and/or who brought non-time-serving intellectual or industrial credentials into the group were expelled, isolated and/or persuaded that Cliff's version of the socialist endeavour was not for them. The two most independent 'insiders' who 'survived', Duncan Hallas and Chris Harman, did so at a high price. Nigel Harris, who lingered on a little longer, was finally excommunicated because he was prepared to say that Third World newly-industrialising countries *were* actually newly-industrialising, rather than maintain the First World focus of his (and the SWP's) 1960s version of the permanent revolution.

How did Cliff achieve the right balance between growth and purge consistent with building a tiny sect into a larger one? The question takes me back to the heterogeneous IS of the 1960s. By 1965-67 the IS's brand of Luxemburgist sanity had succeeded in bringing together a broad church of socialist activists ranging from the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre and the indomitable libertarian Peter Sedgwick to Roger Rosewall and other believers in "discipline" and "democratic centralism."

The stuffing of the group at that time, however, was a combination of serious independent intellectuals like Nigel Harris, industrial militants like ENV convenor Geoff Carlsson and POEU activist Jim Higgins, Young Guard Socialists like Peter Bain and Ross Pritchard who had cut their industrial teeth in the apprentice strikes of the early 1960s, and, increasingly, student activists like myself, with ten years' prior political activity in the YCND and Committee of 100. From 1967 many of these student militants were involved in mobilising large numbers of their fellow students. The IS perspective that attracted me most at the time was that "The true revolutionary is the consistent reformist", but my suspicions of Cliff, who always appeared to me

to be constitutionally factional, kept me from joining until 1968 when I left the LSE and went to work in CAV Acton, under the industrial tutelage of Roger Cox, a young AEU activist.

In response to the demand for a more open non-sectarian approach to left unity, the IS had just launched a "unity" campaign against the urgent (!) menace of fascism. Cliff, perhaps, wasn't too upset when, as Jim Higgins explained in an earlier article, his only unity 'catch' was Sean Matgamna. For Cliff would not have stomached any genuine left unity that might have eroded his influence over the "Cliff-group." But the impression of openness the move gave brought me and several hundred other committed 1960s militants into the IS.

In 1969 when I was based in Glasgow, five of us, including Joan Smith and Mike McGrath, organised the "micro-faction" (a Sedgwick appellation that stuck). This successfully argued at the six-monthly conference (all the membership was encouraged to come) for a clear open socialist political statement of aims (it was never produced), in an attempt to 'fix' the orientation of the IS away from the sectarian sub-culture that always bothered me and towards the wider working class and socialist movement.

In Glasgow we worked with Sinn Féin and IMG members in the Irish Solidarity Campaign, campaigning in the teeth of Orange violence for Irish civil rights. Then, from the one-day strike against Labour's 1969 White Paper, *In Place of Strife*, the opportunities for socialists to identify with and participate in significant industrial struggles, and to recruit from them, exploded. Thus the fine (non-Communist) Glaswegian electrician militants, George Kelly and Tommy Kilpatrick, joined us. Modelling ourselves on the French Lutte Ouvrière example that had influenced several of the LSE Socialist Society activists in 1966-67, we started distributing *Rootes Worker* bulletins outside the factory where I was working.

Over the next six years, essentially under the political influence of Jim Higgins before he was sidelined and before my own influence began to wane, IS launched several rank-and-file organisations and papers loosely modelled on the CP's Minority Movement. These were originally genuine attempts by IS activists to establish broad organisations of militants among teachers, local government white-collar workers, civil servants and a much smaller number of manual industries. Through these movements and papers the aim was to try and reach a wider audience of trade union and workplace militants. At the time Cliff never openly opposed the building of 'open' organisations midway between the IS and the broader working-class, but he always saw it as just another tactic. While the "rank and file perspective" of the group was useful in recruiting some terrific industrial fighters, like Cardiff's contracting spark Billy Williams, and dedicated student socialists, like Dave Lyddon who became editor of the *Car Worker* while working at Cow-

ley, Cliff was in favour. But when *Rank and File Teacher* risked passing out of IS hands, and hence losing its recruitment element, Cliff would rather exclude non IS elements or close it down altogether.

As Jim Higgins has already related, Cliff was always ready to sacrifice patient long-term industrial work for short-term gains. The Rank-and-File Conference became a Rank-and-File Rally, and, at the first hint of political controversy, Cliff manoeuvred with his then close collaborator, Rosewall, to mobilise the 'new' (read 'young') recruits against the 'old' Jim, John Palmer and Roger Protz. From the outside, however, this fight seemed largely personal and Jim met me and Joan to persuade me to move from Glasgow to London to work on the Executive Committee as Industrial Organiser while he went to work on *Socialist Worker*. I agreed, on condition that the EC take on more industrial and political weight. Over the next two years I helped persuade two long-standing and experienced DATA/TASS activists, Jimmy McCallum and Ken Appleby, to join the EC (I do apologise!). Being parachuted into a factional minefield was something neither of them deserved. In my innocence, and in my defence, I can only argue that like most of Cliff's other collaborators, I mistakenly believed that Cliff could be controlled if only the EC became more political, more connected to the wider labour movement, and if capable members like Chris Harman and Duncan Hallas could display more backbone.

This belief had genuine credibility in the early 1970s, when the 200 or so individuals who were elected to the group's various monthly 40-strong National Committees included a good proportion of members from political or industrial backgrounds which represented a net input *into* the IS from flourishing independent strands of militancy and activity. There was, briefly, a real feeling that if only that relationship between the socialist project and industrial militancy could be generalised, then there could be a major left advance in Britain.

It was this feeling which convinced me that the time was ripe, shortly after Labour's return to government in 1974, to attempt a big stride forward. This was to try and effect a serious unity offensive on the thousands of *Socialist Worker* readers we had come into contact with during the previous five years. By becoming the SWP and opening ourselves out from a sect into a much more open party, I felt it might just be possible to build a serious socialist alternative to the left of the Labour Party. With the same logic, and in retrospect clearly making the same mistake of over-optimism, I argued for an election strategy, challenging Labour at parliamentary by-elections.

As with the question of the rank and file movement, Cliff never openly criticised the launch of the SWP or this electoral strategy at the time, although my enthusiasm for them was regularly used against me in arguments we had in the later 1970s. Having used Paul Foot at *Socialist Worker* to finally force Jim Higgins from any full-time position, Cliff probably felt it was more

opportune to go along with the launch of the SWP than not. But he was not going to see his dominance undermined. Thus when some of us were arguing for building outwards upon the integrity, humour, activism and humanitarianism of *Socialist Worker*, established over six years largely by three excellent socialist journalists, Roger Protz, Paul Foot and Laurie Flynn, Cliff was beginning to write his truly dreadful three-volume *How to be like Lenin: a sectarian's handbook*. Democratic centralism was on its way.

The change from a Cliff-influenced democracy to a Cliff-dominated centralism took, however, several years. Most of the 1975 members were still too sensible, and with too many roots in the wider movement, to allow an overnight conversion to such a totally inappropriate and potentially Stalinist form of operation. But when it appeared right to me, an insider with a reputation for independence, to stop taking (and thus distributing) EC minutes because they had a habit of getting into the wrong hands, then it was very also difficult for others to understand that this was a step towards the closure of democracy. Likewise I agreed at the time with the quite crucial shift of constitutional control from a monthly broad, representative National Committee, to an annually elected "political" slate of full-timers without even any serious obligation to consult a larger advisory National Council. After the nasty experience of seeing Jim Higgins dumped by Cliff just two weeks after the old NC had expressed its confidence in him, that old structure seemed pretty ineffectual. An EC (now CC) whose members were directly accountable only to Conference appeared to me at the time to have more chance of

guaranteeing independence for those like myself who were never part of any Cliff faction and who distrusted his control over the full-timer apparatus. Yet this change was another brick in the Leninist/Stalinist wall of sectarian management Cliff was determined to introduce. And CC members with reputations for independent judgements, like me and Jimmy McCallum, allowed ourselves to be used as 'democratic' fig-leaves, to cover up Cliff's objective of securing total control without ever having to leave his front-room.

Paradoxically, the Portuguese Revolution also played a part in the Stalinisation of the group. Cliff's enthusiasm for it was unparalleled, to the extent that he even wrote a political document about it, his only attempt in print to analyse current political events. Apparently Portugal could only go in one of two directions: back into fascism or forward to a socialist revolution, and whether you were Portuguese or read any of the other languages in which it was printed, the real answer was to build an organisation that was politically in line with the SWP(!). How wrong can you get? For over a year we kept a full-timer in Portugal and CC members like myself were sent out to meet anyone who would meet us and to give them the line. The pamphlet, *Portugal at the Crossroads*, had been translated and printed in at least eight different languages and later became known at Cottons Gardens as "Portugal in the Basement", as thousands and thousands of copies remained there entirely unread.

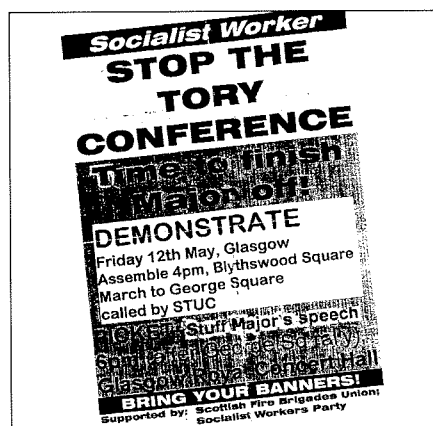
Between 1974 and 1976, there were also a number of security alerts. Many of our phones were we thought, and probably rightly, being tapped; someone tried to fire-bomb Cottons Gardens; some sensitive documents were thought to have gone missing. Thus it seemed not much more than common sense to check our meeting rooms for electronic bugs, and to operate on a need-to-know basis. The pseudo-revolutionism of 'democratic centralism', 'revolutionary Portugal' and 'security' was a heady mix. Combined with "declaring the party", it was the source of delusions of grandeur and hence of many expulsions at precisely the time when the new SWP should have doubled or trebled its size and political weight. The breach with the 'Birmingham engineers' that Vic Collard wrote about recently was undoubtedly the most serious of these expulsions.

The background to these expulsions lay in the fact that in trying to expand the industrial strength of the group on the CC, the reluctance of others I approached to take on the risk involved, had led me to bring in my third choice, John Deason, at the time an AEU steward in Warrington. He was an often courageous and effective agitator and campaigner, but he had not the slightest interest in patient long-term work, and clearly saw himself in some ways as having to prove his industrial prowess in competition with me and Ken Appleby, who was initially given responsibility for the Rank and File Co-ordinating Committee. I was then operating not only as industrial

organiser, but also with responsibility for some international work and for our anti-racist work. I was involved in work with the group of black members around *Flame*, and (along with many other members) was arrested several times in clashes with the National Front, the most important confrontation I organised being the Lewisham mobilisation, which put us in the position of launching the Anti-Nazi League (the first time round).

When John Deason joined the Industrial Department, then, the object was to ease the burden of work on me and we had to divide up the responsibilities for the eight or ten union fractions we organised. John's workerist leanings meant I kept most of the white collar fractions myself, and although I had been an AEU member for five years, it was agreed that he take over that fraction. Our EETPU members, with whom I had been working for years, had actively participated within the EETPU Broad Left since 1969, and had earlier decided to put up a rank-and-file candidate in opposition to that of the Broad Left. This was because the CP had chosen a candidate who had not supported the Broad Left in the past, and because they had failed to consult the whole Broad Left properly. The campaign we ran was highly successful and so, against my advice, John decided to push for a similar electoral strategy in the AEU. I didn't believe there was a real parallel between the two unions, and certainly our AEU members didn't carry the influence that our EETPU members did among the union's left-wingers and local authority and contracting sparks. Cliff, however, wasn't interested in any debate about the issue. My doubts were brushed aside as sounding very much like the boring old Higgins group and I attended none of the AEU fraction meetings which debated 'the line'. At them, as Vic Collard recounted, AEU members who didn't and hadn't played any role within the AEU Broad Left, like those I had recruited in the Glasgow car industry, were ultimately 'used' as cannon fodder to vote through the policy John wanted to impose.

Relations with those AEU members who were doing on-going work within the Broad Left in Birmingham quickly broke down. Because by then none of the engineers trusted Deason enough to listen to him, the CC decided that I and Mick Brightman, a very talented young AEU steward from Smiths Industries in North-West London, whom John had elevated to the position of "AEU fraction secretary", should go to Birmingham to try and persuade the engineers to follow the new SWP line. We were, it became clear, on a total hiding to nothing. John had argued, and the CC had agreed (very reluctantly indeed on my part and on that of Duncan Hallas) under its new democratic centralism binge that it would be a total loss of face if some of our members were voting for one candidate in an election while others voted for another. The Birmingham engineers had, however, decided they were not going to change their position even before speaking to me and Mick, so the compromise I tried to persuade them



No, the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) did not storm the Scottish Tory conference on 12 May, seize John Major and hang him from a lamp-post. No more than they crashed through lines of police to march on Parliament and bring down the government at the big student demonstration of February 1994, or started a "General Strike Now" in October 1992. But the agitation should be good practice for real revolutionary sloganising by the SWP come the next General Election: "Don't wait for the polling stations to open! Storm them at dawn Disembowel all Tory voters! Vote Labour in a truly revolutionary way!"

to accept, of merely not campaigning for either candidate, was dead in the water. We saw just two or three of the dozen or so we wanted to meet individually, to put these arguments to them in a less confrontational way than had occurred at public meetings. Most refused to meet us individually, and those we did meet (in pubs, where else?) would not be convinced. Finally I informed them, with great sadness, of the CC's prior decision.

Coming back late one Monday night after an evening of argument and without any success in keeping some excellent militants within the group, I can still remember Mick Brightman looking pale. This may have been because Chanie Rosenberg, Cliff's all-suffering partner, was driving him and us back from Birmingham (her driving was, rightly, infamous). But it was also how I felt. Cliff, who was returning from a meeting, sat in the front of the car. He didn't appear the least concerned at the bad news we gave him. In retrospect I am sure he was not displeased that a group of experienced, articulate and hence potentially oppositional activists had left. His interest was essentially factional. The expulsions of the Birmingham engineers completed the old faction fight against the Higgins and Palmer axis and destroyed the tremendous work Granville Williams (who remained connected with the Higgins-Palmer tendency) had done in Birmingham.

When I got back to London Joan Smith rightly asked me what in the world I thought I was doing getting involved in John Deason's dirty work? I could only reply that I thought I could make a difference, and that if there was the slightest chance of holding on to the Birmingham engineers then I had to take it. Once again I had allowed myself to be used as a fig-leaf covering up rotten politics for the wider interests of the group.

As time went on it became increasingly clear that I wasn't making any difference. Two entirely different perspectives clashed all the time: building outwards to others in struggle, or retrenching inwards towards a homogeneous sectarian core.

I continued to argue (with general agreement from Harman and Hallas) that the central activity of the SWP was or should be building links with left activists in the unions and reaching out to black and feminist socialists and anti-racists who were not necessarily going to join the SWP tomorrow. I had supported Nigel Harris in the setting up of *Flame*, for which I was then responsible, and agreed with the development of *Women's Voice* from a magazine into an organisation. Cliff, on the other hand, was increasingly obsessed with immediate direct recruitment. If someone convinced him that a 'punk Socialist Worker' or a 'Right to Work' march was going to recruit quicker than he was for it. For two years Chris Harman, for example, was virtually declared redundant by Cliff and Jim Nichol as representing 'boring politics'. I had to find industrial department jobs for him to do, like writing on the challenge of New Technology, to justify his

very existence on the payroll.

I was still in sufficiently strong a position among the industrial members of the group to be some sort of threat. It was only a matter of time before Cliff attacked me. I strongly opposed the rapid degeneration of the Rank and File Movement, when John Deason finally pushed Ken Appleby out, into a campaigning shell that could be easily transformed into the Right to Work Campaign. This was miles from the original concept of bringing together active minorities across different industries and unions. I remained convinced that *Socialist Worker* should remain an intelligent read addressing the adult resistor rather than youth rebellion. At conference after conference and National Council after National Council between 1974 and 1979 I publicly argued for different positions than Cliff on these and other issues, insisting that democratic centralism did not mean cabinet responsibility at policy-determining meet-

"During the momentous struggles of the early 1980s and the repeated doses of Tory anti-union legislation throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, rank and file organisations no longer existed."

ings. My 'disloyalty' meant that CC meetings got increasingly difficult, even including physical threats against me by Jim Nichol.

Finally Cliff was forced to write something about the current perspective. In retrospect it is even more absurd than it appeared at the time. Just at the very moment that the British working class was heading *towards* a major confrontation with the Tories (from the steel workers to the miners) Cliff announced that the battle *had already been lost* in 1974 because the shop stewards had become incorporated into the trade union bureaucracy. By implication, although he dared not argue this outright until after I was defeated, the only thing to do now was to pull out of any contaminated trade union positions. For a combination of sectarian ultra-leftism it really took some beating. I replied that this was nonsense; that unionisation and strikes had continued to rise since 1974; that we could not afford to cut ourselves off from the minority movement of stewards and even left officials who wanted to fight back; and that by announcing a 'downturn' *before* its likely arrival Cliff was disarming the group and distorting its direction inwards. My counter arguments very nearly won the day after a debate that took place, often personally against Cliff, all over the coun-

try. Cliff, however, used all the SWP full-time organisers to campaign for his position, telling them that I and Joan Smith were the enemy within, preparing to split the SWP. I lost the conference vote by a handful. Indeed, without his attacking *Women's Voice*, which I was also defending, at the same time it is probable that he would have lost the vote on the industrial perspective. *Flame* also fell to sectarian correctness.

The result was that in the 1981 inner city riots *Flame* no longer existed. During the Greenham Common campaign and the mobilisation of the miners' wives, the public sector cuts and the growth of women's employment in the 1980s, *Women's Voice* no longer existed. And during the momentous struggles of the early 1980s and the repeated doses of Tory anti-union legislation throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, rank and file organisations no longer existed.

Do I blame Cliff for the lost opportunity of the 1970s to build a political force to the left of Labour? Yes and no. I've never believed in the 'great men' theory of history, and most certainly I never felt that Cliff had the makings of one. Rather I think that many of us, including myself, contributed considerably to that missed opportunity by failing to understand that Cliff's natural factionalism and sectarianism, which all those who work with him cannot fail to be aware of, constituted an even bigger obstacle than the harsh conditions of the external world. What could/should we have done differently? As far back as 1968 we should all have done more to persuade IMG comrades and other activists we knew to not simply 'join the IS' but to work with us (and inevitably against Cliff) to create a new genuinely open and democratic organisation. I was personally wrong to argue against trying to recruit Tariq Ali, who, as time has shown, would have made an excellent addition to the broader melting pot of political enthusiasm that needed stirring. In 1973 Jim Higgins and John Palmer should have raised their political and industrial differences with Cliff more sharply. It was never enough to simply attack organisational changes, which was the predominant impression we got in Glasgow. The inappropriateness of Leninist formulations for late 20th century Britain (and probably everywhere too) was not just a narrow organisational issue. It was also about how socialists should see the world. And certainly through most of the 1970s the IS/SWP activists as a whole did not see the world in the same sectarian way as Cliff. In 1975 I should have publicly fought the expulsions of the Birmingham engineers and the combination of Cliff's rootless campaign politics and factionalism which lay behind them. That might have done me the personal favour of severing my links with the SWP those few years sooner; but at that time it might just have defeated Cliff. If that had happened, the one thing I am convinced of now is that there would certainly have been a much healthier left of Labour organisation in Britain today than the sect I am now finished with writing about.