



1964 — Berkeley free speech movement



Third Camp politics in the 1960s-70s USA

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DR: Who were the Independent Socialist Club (ISC) and International Socialists (IS), and what drew you to compile this history?

ASH: The ISC and IS were New Left organisations that grew out of the anti-Stalinist socialist tradition in the US. Where the largest New Left organisation, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), was not explicitly Marxist until the late 1960s, the ISC and IS grew out of a longer trajectory that identified with the pre-Stalinist Communist Party of the 1920s, the (Trotskyist) Socialist Workers Party (SWP) of the 1930s, and the Workers Party/Independent Socialist League (WP/ISL) of the 1940s and '50s.

The Independent Socialist Club was founded at University of California (UC) Berkeley in 1964. The IS, International Socialists, was founded as a much

larger, national organisation in 1969. From the start, the theoretical leader of the organisation was Hal Draper, a long-time socialist. The ISC was founded with 24 members, most of whom were students, but Hal was then fifty years old and working as an acquisitions librarian on the Berkeley campus. His own political history, and that of his wife Anne, stretched back to the 1930s.

I began to look into this history as part of my first book, *Higher Education for All*, which explored 1960s student activism in California in relation to larger political developments. The second chapter of that book focused on the Free Speech Movement (FSM) at UC Berkeley. Working on the first draft of that chapter led me to Hal Draper who, as it turned out, was the lynchpin connecting the FSM to the larger trends I was exploring. As luck would have it, Hal Draper's papers — about one hundred boxes of them — ended up in special collections at the University of California at Davis, where I was then a graduate student.

As I learned more about the Drapers and the ISC, I began to mull over the idea of a book project. I was, in those years, very involved in the student movement

against tuition increases in the wake of the financial crisis and in union organising with United Auto Workers (UAW) 2865. Both of these efforts predated and overlapped with the Occupy Movement. In the wake of Occupy, I was particularly interested in gaining a deeper understanding of Hal Draper's tradition of socialism from below as an alternative to the then-predominant anarchism, on the one hand, and an uncritical embrace of Stalinism, on the other.

While over the next few years I mainly worked on finishing my PhD, teaching, and publishing my first book, I continued digging into the IS tradition through archival and secondary research. When the pandemic began, in 2020, I knew I wouldn't be visiting archives any time soon, so that's when I began reaching out to surviving veterans of the ISC/IS in the hopes of putting this book together.

New Left

DR: You describe the IS as a "New Left organisation", but also rightly situate the IS in a continuity with the pre-Stalinist CP, the SWP, and the WP/ISL, all solidly "Old Left". Combining continuity with

novelty is potentially exciting and innovative but can also be a source of tension that leads to odd zags, and sometimes opportunistic chasing after whatever appears to be the "new" thing. I'm not sure the IS always resolved this tension in the best way. In my view, to put it a little crudely, some of what they ended up keeping from the "Old Left" they probably should've thrown out; some of what they threw out, they should've kept. How do you see this tension in context of the IS's development?

ASH: I generally see the ISC and IS as benefiting greatly from having one foot in each door, so to speak, of the Old Left and the New. Most generally, with regards to the Old Left, I see this in the ISC-IS's appreciation of the labour movement and the centrality of the working class — as opposed to the SDS, which emphasised, in different periods: students, the poor, Blacks, the Third World, etc., but not the working class.

With regards to the New Left I see this, first, in the ISC-IS embrace of the youth culture of which they were a part. The SWP, Progressive Labor (PL, a Maoist group active in SDS), and some others

Timeline of ISC/IS and forerunners

1939-40: The US Trotskyist movement, the SWP (no relation to British SWP), which is then the strongest in the world and one of very few that would be able to operate with some freedom during World War 2, splits in a dispute over whether to back the USSR in its war against Finland (Nov 1939 to March 1940). The USSR "defencists" led by James P Cannon (and supported by Trotsky) expel the minority led by Max Shachtman.

1940, August: Trotsky killed by Stalinist assassin.

Late 1940 to early 1950s: The minority, now organised as the Workers Party (WP), conclude that the USSR has become a new exploiting-class society, the "barbarism" fork in their day of the options long seen as produced when capitalism decays: socialism or barbarism. The SWP also moves from its 1939 stance, becoming more and more swallowed up by "defence of the USSR". By 1951 it sees Stalin's satellite states in Eastern Europe as "deformed workers' states". In 1946-7 there are negotiations to reunify WP and SWP, but they fail, and by 1951 the two groups are bitterly opposed. After 1979 the SWP will spiral off even further, becoming an uncritical pro-Cuba, pro-North-Korea, sect. Most of its members still wanting some sort of Trotskyism, and who remain active, will end up in the Solidarity group formed in 1986 (see below).

1950s: The WP, now more modestly renamed Independent Socialist League (ISL), slowly dwindles, hemmed in by conservative relative prosperity in the USA, working-class quiescence, and the successes of revolutionary Stalinist-oriented movements in ex-colonial countries. Shachtman writes little after 1954. Hal Draper, who had been a youngster in the 1939-40 split, produces the ISL's weekly paper *Labor Action* almost single-handed.

1958, September: The diminished ISL dissolves into the Socialist Party USA and disperses. Draper no longer works with Shachtman. The SP's youth group, YPSL, thanks to a de facto ISL-youth takeover, becomes the biggest left youth group in the USA in the early 1960s, with great activity in the civil rights movement. But that fades. In December 1972, the residual SP-USA splits, a month after Shachtman's death. Social Democrats USA is led by Shachtman associates such as Tom Kahn and Penn Kemble. It soon dwindles. Shachtman had been drawn into string-pulling and politicking with "sympathetic" union bureaucrats and was equivocal on the Vietnam war. Kahn becomes a high-up trade union official, Kemble a high-up government official. In the 1980s they would push Reagan to back the Contras in Nicaragua. The other side of the split, DSOC, a forerunner of today's



Mario Savio, of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement

DSA, is led by Michael Harrington, who had joined the ISL in 1953 but seems always to have been a (feisty, talented) reformist. The DSA will be weak for a long time. It will grow rapidly from the Sanders movement in 2016. It now has nearly 100,000 members, but at the same time has shifted towards "campist" politics, i.e. supporting almost any political force in the world appearing anti-USA. Hal Draper quit *Labor Action* in July 1957. His partner Anne Draper and he spent a year travelling in Europe, then moved to Berkeley, California. Anne Draper worked with unions, especially farm workers; Hal Draper studied for a postgraduate degree and in 1960-70 had a job in the university library. He started writing again, with *Two Souls* for Harrington's *Anvil*, and more for Phyllis and Julius Jacobson's *New Politics* journal, in 1960-1,

1964, September: YPSL members at the university in Berkeley influenced by Draper form an Independent Socialist Club (ISC), which quickly becomes active in and recruits from a big Free Speech Movement on the campus, the first flowering of 1960s US student radicalism.

1965, April: First Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) demonstration against Vietnam war

1967, from June: ISC leads successful drive for 120,000 electoral registrations for a "Peace and Freedom Party" placeholder-party in California to get "ballot line" status.

1967, September: ISC expands outside Berkeley to form Independent Socialist Clubs of America (ISCA).

1967, from October: Radicalisation and agitation against the US war in Vietnam

explodes on US campuses.

1968, November: ISCA backs Eldridge Cleaver, a maverick Black Panther leader, as PFP candidate for President. The Jacobsons (who do not join ISCA) object. Cleaver's politics are anything but working-class and he gets 0.05% of the vote.

1969, June: SDS, which was an old grouping previously connected to Democratic Party meliorism, but had exploded to become the biggest vehicle of student radicalism and dominated by variants of Maoism, splits and collapses.

1969, September: ISCA renames itself International Socialists, and declares itself "democratic centralist". In September 1970s it will move its HQ to Detroit (then seen as the centre of US industry) and rename its paper *Workers Power*. It pushes its student members hard to get jobs in heavy industry.

1971, January: Hal Draper and a few comrades quit IS, saying it is becoming too hectic and mandatory. They propose instead a "political centre", an editorial board seeking educational influence rather than tight activist organisation. They do not do that. After Anne Draper dies in 1973, Hal Draper writes five valuable volumes of exegesis, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution* (1977-1990).

1971, November: Start, in one LA high school, of the Red Tide movement of high school youth, linked to IS. It will become a national organisation in 1975. Hit hard by the 1977 IS split, it continues diminished for a few years after.

1972, January: IS expels Third Camp Tendency (Joanne Landy and others), who object that IS's policy on the Vietnam War has shaded too pro-Stalinist.

1973, September: Revolutionary Tendency (about 100 of the 300 members IS has then) splits. Although led by an old ISLer, Sy Landy, it now wants a more "Orthodox-Trotskyist-like" profile (and a "state-capitalist" designation for the Stalinist states). The RT forms the RSL (soon fades; dissolves in 1980s). In 1976 Landy splits from RSL to form the LRP (small, but extant). Another split from the RSL, Revolutionary Marxist Caucus, enters the SWP and soon dissolves.

1977, March: IS expels a Left Faction led by Barbara and Cal Winslow, linked to the SWP-UK. (Barbara Winslow's raging in Higgins's book against indifference to feminism in the SWP-UK then has come with hindsight, and is unjust). Contrary to what I used to think, the Left Faction is arguing for a more measured approach against hectic "Bolshevisation" (so called) pushed by IS secretary Glenn Wolfe (a former member, though always Maoist-leaning, of a forerunner of AWL, the Trotskyist Tendency in IS-SWP-UK: he had split from us in 1971 to side with the IS-SWP-UK leadership). With the help of Joan Smith and Steve Jeffreys from SWP-UK, the Winslows will form the International Socialist Organization (ISO). The ISO will push out the Winslows a few years later. Then, led by Ahmed Shawki (also arriving from SWP-UK), it will become the biggest group on the US far left before disbanding suddenly in 2019.

1978, October: IS stops publishing its paper, *Workers Power*. Subsequently Steve Zeluck, the now-famous historian Robert Brenner, and others split from IS to form a group called Workers Power (WP), which starts the magazine *Against the Current* (still produced, now under the auspices of Solidarity). Both IS and WP abandon the hectic perspectives of the 1969-77 IS. In 1985 they reunite, and then (spring 1986) merge with "Mandelites" expelled from the "Orthodox Trotskyist" SWP to create a group, still extant, called Solidarity, explicitly designed to be a loose educational network rather than an activist organisation with a binding policy.

1979, February: Kim Moody, Jane Slaughter, Mike Parker and others from IS launch *Labor Notes*, still buoyant and publishing bulletins, briefings, pamphlets, etc. and organising large conferences of rank and file unionists, but explicitly not under IS political leadership. It helps Teamsters for a Democratic Union (launched 1976), the main "success story" from IS's union activity. But TDU now backs Teamsters leader Sean O'Brien, who is better than the gangster-type Teamsters leaders of the 1970s, but also the union leader closest to Trump. □

Martin Thomas

would, for instance, expel members for smoking marijuana. PL wanted men to keep their hair short, and avoid facial hair. Well, if this was your position in mid-to-late 60s Berkeley, you weren't going to win a lot of converts. More substantively, I think the ISC and IS were exemplary in their consistent, if at times critical, support for autonomous Black struggles, which paved the way for their alliance with the Panthers, and their relatively smooth, early embrace of first women's and then gay liberation. A lot of New Left organisations were, early on, dismissive of or even hostile to feminism and gay liberation, so this really stands out to me.

With regards to Old Left baggage, I am still somewhat torn over the organisation's turn toward Leninism and its embrace of democratic centralism. It's easy to cast judgement from the vantage point of fifty years. The US clearly was not heading into a revolutionary moment, despite how surreal the late 1960s and early 70s might have been. I also appreciated Joel Geier's explanation, in conversation with me, that the turn to democratic centralism aided the organisation, helping it keep its coherency, as it went from a small, local organisation in Berkeley where everyone knew one another, to a much larger national organisation in which people did not necessarily know one another. The rapid growth of both SDS and the Panthers, I think, shows us what can happen to smaller, coherent organisations as they spread across the country and are embraced by people with only vague ideas of their politics and strategies.

Still, I think had the IS remained more of a big-tent Third Camp organisation, it would have avoided suffering so many splits and could have survived as a sort of left alternative to the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA, founded in 1982 as a merger of various left-social-democratic groupings). It also could have been a sane alternative to increasingly cult-like organisations like the American SWP or Bob Avakian's Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP). The RCP, one should note, was the largest organisation on the left after the collapse of SDS.

I can envision an IS, sans democratic centralism and such a strong emphasis on industrialisation, that managed to keep in the Drapers and their Reorient Tendency, the Third Camp Tendency, Eric Chester's student power folks, and the Left Faction/International Socialist Organisation (ISO). They still would have split with the Revolutionary Tendency, but that would be no great loss without the other splits from the organisation. A deeper appreciation of the ongoing efforts of academics in the IS, many of whom were then making their way up the tenure track, certainly would have made the non-industrialisers feel a bit more valued. This is, of course, a real counterfactual, but I do think given what we know in hindsight, a bigger, more flexible organisation was probably the way to go. But I wasn't there, and don't intend to cast stones.

Inheritor

DR: *At its foundation, the ISC saw itself as the authentic inheritor of the WP/ISL tradition, given Shachtman's lurch into Cold War social-democracy. But there was obviously a process of evolution. One difference seems to be around the attitude to "Trotskyism". The WP/ISL saw itself as Trotskyist, sometimes even presenting itself as the authentic Trotskyist current, who, despite the break with Trotsky on the question of the USSR, were carrying on his legacy more consistently than the "orthodox" Trotskyists who accommodated to Stalinism. However, Lois Weiner says "the ISC and IS never formally self-identified as Trotskyist". How did its political genealogy inform the IS's development, both in terms of continuations and breaks?*

ASH: This is a great question. You are right to point out the contrast with the "orthodox" SWP, for example. While the IS was not a big tent organisation like SDS, nor was it as ideologically narrow as the SWP or later New Communist organisations.

The ISers I spoke with had different relationships to Trotskyism. In addition to Lois Weiner, members including Jack Weinberg, Sam Farber, and Gabe Gabrielsky pushed back against the notion that they ever identified as Trotskyists and questioned whether their political tradition should be categorised as such. Others, including Joel Geier, who co-founded the ISC with Draper, and Jane Slaughter, who joined in the mid-70s, would disagree, identifying the group as explicitly Trotskyist. I think one of the problems here is the extent to which organisations can, or should, read and embrace Trotsky's work without necessarily applying the label Trotskyist.

I personally identify the ISC and IS more as practitioners of socialism from below. As the late Gabe Gabrielsky noted in his contribution to the book, Hal Draper identified the tradition of independent socialism as "an entirely new tendency." Not an offshoot of Trotskyism, but rather sui generis. Gabe, in particular, identified the Independent Socialist Clubs of America years, 1967-69, as a particularly free-wheeling time. Yet certainly after the founding of the IS in September 1969, key leaders within the organisation wanted to move the organisation in the direction of a more orthodox Leninism or Trotskyism.

At one extreme, the self-proclaimed Revolutionary Tendency, grouped around Sy Landy, Ron Tabor, and Chris Hobson, would push the IS to embrace orthodox Trotskyism, but ended up breaking away from the organisation altogether. Ironically enough, after starting their own organisation, some, including Tabor, would eventually move into the orbit of anarchism.

All this to say, I don't see the IS as Trotskyist myself, but understand that Trotsky was a central influence, and that others on the left, and indeed many within the organisation, understand the IS to be Trotskyist. The WP/ISL tradition of Third Camp socialism, and Draper's interpretation of Marxism as socialism from below, however, seem to me to be

more central with the exception, perhaps, of some years in the mid-70s.

DR: Hal Draper and Ernie Haberkern, another WP/ISL veteran, quit in 1971. David Finkel describes Draper's departure as being over "not entirely clear differences". What do you make of Draper's own eventual explanation for it (the critique of the "micro-sect")?

ASH: My own take on the Draper split is that both sides of it continued to adhere to what they understood to be the WP/ISL tradition of socialism from below, but that they were divided over the question of what was to be done. As far as I can tell, Draper's Reorient Tendency, totaling only eight people, thought that the social tumult of the 1960s was largely a spent force. They left the IS in January 1971 to focus on educational work.

It is hard to argue with Hal. Many of his criticisms of parts of the New Left circa 1970 ring true, but it also seems inescapable to me that Draper's decision marks a sort of political retreat. The New Left did go into decline in the 1970s, but does that mean people should have stopped organising? I don't think so.

I wish I had been able to include a piece by one of the members of the Reorient Tendency in the book, but it didn't work out. I did, however, manage to correspond with Ernie Haberkern before he passed, as well as Mike and Dave Friedman. In my correspondence with Dave, we talked to some extent about what he described as their "fraternal" exit from the IS. After much debate over the IS's emergent trade union strategy — discussions over "struggle groups," dual unionism, and rank-and-file caucuses — it became clear that Draper's group simply did not want to play a part, so they left. They disagreed with the IS's embrace of democratic centralism and wanted to focus on education, what Draper called "a Marxist political center in a non-sect form," on the lines of Lenin's *Iskra* newspaper. While I am very grateful to Hal and the rest of the Reorient Tendency for their continued political work after the split, I do wish they had managed to find some way to remain within the IS because I think they could have continued to exert a positive influence on it.

Vietnam

DR: *There was a debate about how to develop a Third Camp internationalism vis-a-vis the war in Vietnam, in a context in which anti-colonial resistance to US domination was hegemonised by a Stalinist party which, a generation earlier, had massacred Trotskyists. Thomas Harrison talks about concerns that some in the ISC were getting swept up in pro-NLF fervour. He sees Draper's intervention, in his document "The ABCs of National Liberation Movements", as a fudge, an attempt to give a "Third Camp" gloss to that pro-NLF lurch. I think the criticisms he and Joanne Landy made have a lot of merit; what was the significance of those debates for the development of the ISC/IS?*

ASH: As with the case of the Reorient Tendency, the Third Camp Tendency

(TCT) was a relatively small group of people; ten individuals, in this case. And again, the actual debate, in this case over internationalism not trade union policy, was further complicated by the decision to embrace democratic centralism. This was in early 1972, about a year after Draper's group exited the organisation and, again, it was largely a split on friendly terms.

All of this is to say that I don't feel that the debate had all that much significance for the development of the IS. People can and will interpret Third Camp politics in different ways. I understand how the TCT could look askance at the notion of "military but not political support" for the NLF. At the same time, I find convincing the IS position that the NLF was clearly the dominant force within the Vietnamese struggle, if not the only one. If the IS had to take a position on the Vietnam War, and in the context of the anti-war movement you'd think they would, I appreciate their taking a principled stance in favour of Vietnamese self-determination while not sugar-coating the Stalinist politics that Ho Chi Minh and the NLF represented. Walking that tightrope guarantees that a lot of people are going to be unhappy, on both sides, but I think the IS was right to do so.

Once again, I think this is a split that didn't need to happen, but the TCT wanted to leave the organisation, and they continued to do important political and scholarly work then they did. Joanne Landy and Tom Harrison's work in their Campaign for Peace and Democracy was really admirable, and Nelson Lichtenstein and Charlie Capper made really wonderful contributions to their respective fields as historians, Lois Weiner is an important voice in the field of education and on teachers unions, but it's clear these folks were not interested in heading in the direction the IS was going and that's okay.

DR: *What verdict did the IS draw from its rather messy experience with the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP) and its support for Eldridge Cleaver as president in 1968? The IS's approach to the Panthers seems to me something of a break from the WP/ISL approach to anti-racist struggle, developed principally by Shachtman and Ernest Rice McKinney. Is that a fair reading, and if so, what prompted the shift?*

ASH: You are right about the shift in approach to anti-racist struggle within the longer IS history, stretching back to the WP/ISL of the 40s and 50s. Most concretely, the IS shifted from a sort of "Old Left," CIO-era position of "Black and White, Unite and Fight" to an embrace of autonomous Black struggle. Given the larger trajectory of Black liberation politics in the United States, this seems to me a smart move. Whatever preference one might have for interracial organising in the abstract, and I share that preference, there was a period in US history where it was effectively not possible.

The immediate precursor to the ISC was the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), the youth group of the Socialist

Party, into which the ISL had entered. The YPSL was deeply involved in the emergent civil rights struggle, from the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-56, through the wave of sit-ins that began with Greensboro in 1960, and the Freedom Rides that followed. This really took off with the participation of YPSL's Tom Kahn and Rachelle Horowitz with Bayard Rustin as part of a tiny organisation called In Friendship, comprised mainly of Rustin, Ella Baker, and Stanley Levinson. Where Kahn, Horowitz, and Rustin would follow Max Shachtman to the right, many of the left YPSLs and SPers who did not later ended up in the ISC and IS.

YPSL involvement in the civil rights movement continued through the deep participation of Berkeley YPSLs in the Bay Areas' civil rights movement in 1963 and 64. These YPSLs who were Berkeley students were mainly active in Campus CORE (Congress of Racial Equality). All of this activism was in tune with the civil rights emphasis on interracialism as part of combating segregation, yet nationwide, tensions were rising around the involvement of increasing numbers of white liberals in the civil rights movement. This came to a head with the Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964, and the subsequent fiasco around the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. Among other tensions, these developments helped pave the way for the Black Power turn which, in practice, meant an era of racial separatism on the left.

For the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and CORE, the two most important direct action civil rights organisations on the national level, this meant becoming all-Black organisations. This was a disheartening turn for many committed white civil rights activists, but it didn't mean that white organisers just stopped supporting the struggle for Black equality.

In the context of the Bay Area, the IS took the important, trailblazing step of forming an alliance with the Black Panther Party, which was rapidly becoming the widely-recognised vanguard of the Black left. It simply would not be possible, in this era of resurgent Black nationalism, to expect Black activists to go along with the old program of interracial organising. But this didn't stop the Panthers from organising with white radicals. The Panthers had some early, and generally tense interactions with other left formations in the Bay Area — the Communist Party and (orthodox Trotskyist) Socialist Workers Party. But it was the ISC, and to a lesser extent what was called the Radical Caucus of the Peace and Freedom Party, that the Panthers would form a year-long alliance with. This was a precursor to the much better known Rainbow Coalition of Fred Hampton's Illinois Panthers.

The ISC had gotten to know the two-sides of the Panther leadership separately. ISers met BPP co-founders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale on the UC Berkeley campus, which was only two miles, a straight shot down Telegraph



Avenue, from the Panthers' base at Merritt Community College in Oakland. They got to know Eldridge Cleaver before he joined the Panthers, and encouraged his doing so. The ISC's Jack Weinberg, of Free Speech Movement fame, worked at *Ramparts* magazine alongside Cleaver.

Cleaver's abrupt turn away from the Peace and Freedom Party program, just after he had secured the nomination as its presidential candidate, was a real blow. Weinberg, who had worked closely with Cleaver and put months of hard labour into building the PFP, was deeply disappointed. This extended to the whole ISC. Hal Draper wrote a scathing denunciation of Cleaver that never saw the light of day.

When I talked with Weinberg about this, decades after the fact, he had another important takeaway from the PFP. He said, and this is paraphrasing, that it didn't matter if the New Left could win over the coasts, if socialists couldn't win over ordinary, working people in the midwest, then it would never be enough. Mike Parker had a similar read, you could win over the social movements, sure, but what about winning over the whole working class?

It really is in the wake of the PFP that the ISC begins taking steps that would lead it toward a greater emphasis on the industrial working class and their eventual move to Detroit and the wider industrial midwest. I don't want to overstate this, as the ISC had been deeply invested in the labour movement from the start, but this is the beginning of a real turn away from the campus and student organising.

While the alliance with the Panthers ended on a disappointing note, the Black liberation movement would still serve as an inspiration for the organisation. In the industrial period, this was reflected by the influence of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement and its successor, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

New generation

DR: *The Red Tide youth movement seems to be the one place where the IS made significant inroads into black communities and began to recruit black activists. Several contributions, especially those from Tonya English and Kyle Hopkins, give a vivid sense of the vibrancy of Red Tide at its height. But it seems not to have produced a new generation of leaders, committed to taking the overall IS project forward. What's*

your assessment of that?

ASH: I agree with your assessment of the Red Tide, both its accomplishments and the lack of a clear, long-term organisational impact. The main problem, as I see it, is that the Red Tide really came into its full form only as the organisation around it, the IS, was beginning its slow disintegration. If it wasn't clear that the New Left was in decline in the early 70s, it certainly was in decline by the late 70s.

The early 1970s saw three small splits, with the exits of a cohort of campus-based activists in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1970, and the Reorient and Third Camp tendencies in 1971 and '72, respectively. Then the splits start getting bigger. In 1973, eight-five members left with the Revolutionary Tendency, in pursuit of a more explicit Trotskyism. In 1977, a similar number of members exited the IS as part of the Left Faction, going on to form the International Socialist Organization (ISO). The ISO split included the Red Tide's national secretary, Michael Letwin, as well as long-time RT organiser Susie Bright. The exit of these friends and comrades was disheartening to remaining Red Tiders, but also, I think, the ISO split really paved the way for the end of the IS a couple years later.

All of this is to say, I think the Red Tide would have created, if not an entire generation of leaders, at least a number of new leaders who would have stepped into bigger roles in the adult organisation, the IS. But because the IS collapsed, this couldn't happen.

Key mistake

DR: *In your introduction, you describe IS's "failure to prioritise" entry work in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS, the main "New Left" organisation on campuses, which was eventually hegemonised by Maoist currents) as a "key mistake". Can you explain why? David Finkel talks about finding it "hard to be heard amid the noise" in his SDS chapter; what balance sheet did the IS collectively draw from its efforts to work in, through, and around SDS?*

ASH: SDS dominated the New Left numerically, even as it sometimes drew ideas and influences from outside groups — the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Black Panthers, and the ISC/IS, among others. To give some sense of scale, the IS probably had 1,000 people go through the organisa-

tion throughout its existence. At no point did it have more than 500 members. SDS, by the late 1960s, had perhaps 100,000 members — 30,000 dues-paying national members, and maybe 70,000 additional members of local SDS chapters. It was by far the largest group on the left. No-one was even close.

Yet SDS started out small, smaller than pre-IS groups like the Young People's Socialist League and the Student Peace Union in the early 1960s. And SDS politics, in the early years, were somewhat vague: participatory democracy, anti-anticommunism, support for the civil rights movement. As the East Coast ISer Gabe Gabrielsky put it, in the early 60s "We didn't think they could organise their way out of a paper bag." But this started to change with the massive antiwar protest SDS organised in 1965. Coincidentally, one of the two main organisers of that protest was Charlie Capper, who would soon move to Berkeley and join the ISC.

The ISC's failure to enter into SDS was related to its failure to expand, or expand much, outside of Berkeley in the early years of 1964-67. At Berkeley, SDS served mainly as a meeting place for representatives of other left-wing organisations. On virtually every other campus in the United States, SDS was the only game in town, it was where budding radicals went to meet up with potential comrades and get involved in the left. As this happened, across the country, members of the Progressive Labor Party (PL) entered SDS in hopes of recruiting new members to their own organisation.

The history of PL's entry into SDS is a sad, destructive, sectarian one. But their militant sectarianism had a boomerang effect. As the sixties marched on, seemingly every year was more tumultuous than the last. And as SDSers struggled to come to terms with American imperialism in Vietnam, and the American government's war on Black radicals at home, SDSers across the country turned away from participatory democracy and towards Maoism, sloganeering, and violent confrontation. This reached its apex with the Weather Underground and the dissolution of SDS in mid-1969. But the fact is, as SDS was radicalising, egged on by PL sectarianism, ISers generally were not there to offer a more thoughtful, grounded, or democratic alternative.

Interestingly, several key IS leaders came out of SDS: Kim Moody, Steve Kindred, Charlie Capper, among others. And when SDS collapsed, first the ISCA and then the IS, founded three months after SDS's demise, managed to recruit various groupings from among ex-SDSers at places like the Universities of Chicago, Michigan, Wisconsin, Washington, and more. Into the 1970s, the IS would continue to recruit small, post-SDS collectives like the Modern Times in Cleveland, Ohio. Such recruitment, however small when compared to the 100,000 member strong SDS, points I think to the possibility that the ISC could have had a greater impact had it left the confines of Berkeley.

DR: In my view, the use of the phrase

“rank-and-file strategy” to describe the IS’s industrial orientation is misleading, as it covers at least a couple of different phases. First, there was “industrialisation”, a conscious effort to get jobs as rank-and-file workers in strategic industries, in order to carry out political work in workplaces and trade unions. This shifts into a different approach, helping develop and connect rank-and-file leaders and caucuses through projects like Labor Notes. In the earlier industrialisation drive, members’ workplace and union activity had the aim of building what David McCullough calls “an organised revolutionary socialist contingent” on the left of the labour movement. Labor Notes is a different type of project. McCullough calls it “politics-free”. Was this just a case of the slightly febrile energy of industrialisation “burning out” into something that felt more sustainable, or a conscious pivot, or a bit of both?

ASH: I think you are right to point to a break. As Joel Geier has pointed out in a recent *Jacobin* article on IS rank-and-file work, the period from 1965-75 is one of working class upsurge, wildcat strikes, and hopes for socialism. But over the course of the mid-1970s, things shifted decisively. This is the early onset of neoliberalism in the United States and what is often referred to as the employers’ offensive. The onset of a newly conservative era, which to be sure had deep structural causes, was hastened by politicians’ decimation of the New Deal, which was the basis of the American welfare state, and capital’s attack on unions. The two proceeded in tandem.

I think of Labor Notes, as well as the organisational turns represented by the ISO focus on campuses, on the one hand, and Solidarity’s efforts at regroupment, on the other, as a response to the larger political and economic shifts which, by the late 1970s, were undeniable. So to talk about IS rank-and-file work, its implementation of what we know as the rank-and-file strategy, is really to focus on the era before Labor Notes.

IS rank-and-file work focused on four key industries: telephone, auto, trucking, and steel. To a much lesser extent teaching and postal were incorporated, and there were even some abortive efforts at organising in the coal mines. But to really understand how it worked, it’s best to approach these efforts chronologically.

To reiterate the US context, the New Left of SDS and Port Huron Statement fame was thought to be dismissive of unions. This is something of an over-simplification, and it changes over time, but it certainly was not the case for the ISC. The ISC was founded as a small group that united student activists, civil rights organisers, and labour militants. Beyond just Hal and Anne Draper, with their deep roots on the labour-movement left stretching back to the 1930s, young ISers were lucky to benefit from the mentorship and wisdom of Stan Weir, a labour organiser with a political history stretching back to the early 1940s. In 1966, Stan released a famous pamphlet, which he first delivered as a

talk, called *The New Era of Labor Revolt*.

With the mentorship of the Drapers and Weir, among others, young ISers who had left college campuses began to get jobs in key industries. In New York City, seven IS members ended up getting jobs in the telephone industry. In January 1971, their local went on a two week strike. Out of that experience, these ISers started a newsletter called *United Action*, and a caucus of the same name followed. This was the first rank-and-file effort made by the IS.

While the IS had a large active branch in NYC going back to the ISCA days, that is, even before the 1969 founding of the IS, the organisation’s presence in Detroit only really began in August of 1970. Within a couple months, ISers began to secure employment at auto plants in Detroit, as well as other mid-western cities. In their work, ISers sought to learn from historical examples, but also the more recent experiences of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (initially founded as DRUM, Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement). While the League was by that point in decline, suffering a debilitating split, the IS linked up with a longstanding organisation known as the United National Caucus (UNC) in the UAW. The IS joined the UNC in 1971, and helped win it to a number of IS perspectives, most importantly an anti-racist commitment to open up the (then all-white) skilled trades to Black workers.

As Geier notes in his *Jacobin* article, the IS’s high point in auto work was the summer of 1973, which witnessed ten simultaneous wildcat strikes in UAW plants. Unfortunately, the economic crisis of 1974-75 would do much to temper militancy in the auto industry. The same cannot be said for IS efforts in Teamsters, which really took off in 1975.

The IS had been involved with Teamster support as far back as the spring of 1970, with ISers at UCLA organising in support of LA-based Teamsters during a strike. In 1971, Teamster activists formed Teamster United Rank and File (TURF), which became an important model for IS efforts. Unfortunately, TURF fell apart within a year. Over the coming years, the IS became increasingly involved in Teamster activism, and was the only left organisation to do so.

Much IS Teamster work in the early stages consisted of helping write, edit, publish, and distribute Teamster newsletters in half a dozen cities. By 1975, however, IS organisers like Ken Paff, a former Berkeley student and ISC member, and Steve Kindred, a former SDSer from the University of Chicago, became central players in the Teamsters for a Decent Contract and its successor organisation, Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU). At the same time, ISer Anne Mackie, a former SDSer from the University of Washington in Seattle, would form the organisation UPSurge among UPS workers, initially through the production of a newsletter of the same name. UPSurge, which focused on local delivery drivers as opposed to long-haul trucking, would later merge with TDU.

Without getting into IS organising in steel, I’ll note that, like auto and truck-



ing, it began later the efforts in telephone, but overlapped with and brought in lessons learned in all of those other industries. By the late 1970s, economic decline, off-shoring, and concessionary bargaining, among other unfortunate trends, had all set in. While some ISers remained in their industries — Wendy Thompson’s example is a fascinating and inspiring one — many lost their jobs as the industries they had entered went into decline. This is the context for the emergence of Labor Notes.

As David McCullough notes in his piece for the book, by June of 1979, he, Jane Slaughter, and Mike Parker had all lost their jobs in the auto industry. Not coincidentally, these were three of the important early figures behind Labor Notes, which sought to impart key lessons learned by the IS, and other militant organisers, in their years in industry.

As far as Labor Notes being “politics-free,” my understanding is that, first, this was part of the IS’s long-term commitment to non-sectarian organising in mass movements, in this case the labour movement. Second, this was a fairly sensible position to take for a group, rightly or wrongly understood as Trotskyist, that was seeking to maintain influence in a left that remained dominated by Maoists. The IS, through Labor Notes, was continuing its work of fighting the bosses and the labour bureaucrats simultaneously, so fighting other leftists was perhaps not the best bet.

UK SWP

DR: Can you talk about the relationship between the ISC/IS and the “Cliffite” current in the UK? Some contributors in the book have a very dim view of the relationship. Joel Geier describes the SWP-UK’s “sponsorship of a faction fight and split to create a clone group that accepted all of their views, not presenting any divergent outlook in their ‘international’”. What did the IS learn from the SWP-UK?

ASH: The relationship between the British IS-SWP and the American ISC-IS is a long and complicated one. I hope someone will look into that history more deeply as it could make for a very interesting article if nothing else. On the one hand, I know that American ISers learned a lot from their British counterparts and I imagine that experience was mutual. On the other hand, there were obviously some major tensions.

Prior to the Drapers’ break from Max

Shachtman and the Socialist Party, Hal and Anne left New York City for ten months in Europe, before settling in Berkeley. I think at this point the writing was on the wall and Draper was thinking about exiting the organisation, he doesn’t, but he does move away from its center in NYC. Across Europe, Draper seeks to connect in person with like-minded socialists who he would later maintain correspondence with. In England, the person Hal really connects with is Michael Kidron. I’ve heard he and Tony Cliff did not get along.

Beyond the sort of theoretical contributions that each side made to one another, there were personal connections and influences. This didn’t make it into the final draft of the book, but originally I had included a footnote about Christopher Hitchens’ time in the states in 1970-71. In his autobiography, Hitchens notes the influence of Hal Draper and recalls his own participation in IS strike support at a GM plant in Fremont, California. In my book, contributors including Joel Geier, Gay Semel, Barbara Winslow, and Michael Letwin, reference shorter or longer trips to the UK, where they worked in or alongside the British IS. Their experiences varied, of course, with Barbara Winslow making note of the sexism, both structural and explicit, prevalent in the organisation at that time.

The real tensions with the British group were two-fold. First, was the arrival and influence of Glenn Wolfe (a nom de guerre) who came to the US, quickly rose to a leadership position in the IS, and pushed a program of Bolshevisation that many members look back on with regret.

Second, was the behind-the-scenes engineering of a split within the American IS, manufactured by what was then becoming the British SWP. To be sure, this split thrived on tensions that were preexisting in the American IS, including the emphasis on industrialisation in the four key industries of auto, trucking, telephone, and steel. I hesitate to speak more about the internal politics and developments of the British IS-SWP, as I am not as well read in this history as I would like to be — my apologies to Jim Higgins (no relation) and all the rest.

DR: What is the story of ISC/IS’s intervention into the feminist movement?

ASH: This is a great question, and one that brings to the fore a sort of sub-

plot running through the book. We can see, early on at UC Berkeley, ISC women leaders like Anne Draper and Joanne Landy who play important roles in the burgeoning organisation. As the group spreads geographically and transitions into the IS, there were leading women like Gay Semel, Marilyn Morehead, and Barbara Winslow at the national level, as well as women who were leaders of their particular fraction/industry like Anne Mackie at UPS, Wendy Thompson in the UAW, Candace Cohn in steel, and more. Ilene Winkler, who didn't contribute a piece to the book, was a leader in telephone in NYC and was one of the two liaisons to the NY Black Panthers, alongside Kim Moody, during the PFP alliance. Jane Slaughter, who joined the organisation only later, in the mid-70s, nonetheless became an important figure in the group and was a key figure in the development of Labor Notes. Nancy Holmstrom, to take another example, emerged from her experiences in the IS and women's movement a leading theorist of socialist-feminism.

So as far as having women whose work was taken seriously, I think the ISC-IS was as good, if not better, than any of their competitors on the left. And the left, despite its continuing problems with misogyny, was better than most other parts of American society at that time. That being said, with the turn to industry, there was conflict around the question of whether women should industrialise in jobs that were traditionally thought of as "women's work," but the decision was made to focus on male-dominated industries. Because of this, not as much work was done in teaching as might have been done, or in hospitals/the healthcare sector which would of course become so important over the decades to come.

The decision to target predominantly-male industries was made with the understanding that, first, those were the unions and industries most likely to be able to "move the class" and, second, that women would be able to become leaders in male-dominated fields. And we see this is the case, as evidenced in the pieces written for the book by Mackie, Thompson, and Cohen.

But even as IS women became path-breaking organisers in UPS, auto, and steel, women across the organisation, those who industrialised and those who did not, continued to organise in women's liberation circles. To take one example, ISC and IS women were involved in, first, the Union Women's Alliance to Gain Equality (WAGE), and later the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW). The first organisation was founded by Anne Draper, and the second, a much larger organisation, built on Draper's early work. The founding conference of CLUW, in 1974, was actually held in memory of Anne Draper, who had died from cancer in the previous year.

All of this to say, while there was certainly interpersonal sexism and lingering questions regarding the industries targeted for industrialisation, I think the IS looks rather good on gender equality compared to other left groups of

the time — SDS, SWP, the Panthers, the LRBW, what have you.

Two Souls

DR: *Many of the contributors in your book describe Hal Draper's "Two Souls of Socialism" as seminally influential. Mike Parker says it "defined his thinking". However, an emphasis on "socialism from below" didn't prevent the IS from developing a leadership culture that could be intolerant of dissent (cf, the expulsion of the Third Camp Tendency in 1972). Joel Geier says the IS "inherited the Workers Party's opposition to Zinovievism", i.e., a proto-Stalinist, authoritarian form of "Leninism", but the "Bolshevisation" drive, that gave the national leadership the right to appoint local organisers, seems to me very much a "Zinovievite" step, and one which the proclaimed adherence to "socialism from below" also didn't prevent. The ISO would consistently cite "Two Souls" as foundational, but demurred only occasionally and minimally from the campist anti-imperialism to which SWP-UK had pivoted midway through the Iran-Iraq war, which saw social forces which were very much not socialist, nor even particularly "from below", valorised.*

In my view, "Two Souls" is the weakest of Draper's well-known works; stirring as a literary flourish, but not really a solid basis from which to extrapolate an entire theory. I covered some of these criticisms of "Two Souls" in a 2018 article for New Politics. I think there may be a relationship between some of the IS/ISO's later development and the thinness of "Two Souls" as a foundational text, especially as the link to the previous WP/ISL culture degraded. Is there anything in that, in your view, or am I being unfair, or "reading too much" into the centrality of this text in particular?

ASH: While this seems fair to me, I think you are on the right track when you mentioned "reading too much" into the centrality of Draper's "Two Souls." I think it was, and remains, an important introduction to the idea of socialism from below (and above). But it was an introduction and not a manual or how-to guide to building a democratic socialist organisation.

The ISC-IS survived through a lengthy historical stretch that witnessed rising hopes and expectations, a climax of sorts, and a pretty clear decline. Over the course of those years it grew from a small, local, predominantly student-based organisation of two to three dozen members, into a national organisation of hundreds of people. Leading ISers and rank-and-file members alike experimented with new ideas and organisational forms while attempting to maintain fidelity to independent, Third Camp socialism from below. In some ways they strayed, to be sure. Bolshevisation, the attempt to build a workers' combat organisation, is something that almost everyone I spoke to now looks back on with misgivings if not regret. But the mid-1970s were a different time, and for a lot of ISers, building a harder, more effective Leninist organisation seemed

to make sense.

DR: *The IS eventually broke up, into at least six fragments. Why did the International Socialist Organization (ISO) survive best of those, at least until 2019?*

ASH: I think the ISO's focus on students, whatever its faults or merits, guaranteed an unending pool of idealistic young recruits, with the time and energy to pour into political education and movement building. If we are thinking about six fragments as the Ann Arbor grouping around Eric Chester, the Drapers' Reorient Tendency, the Third Camp Tendency, the Revolutionary Tendency, the ISO, and Solidarity, I think it makes sense that the ISO would be the most successful.

As far as I know, Chester's group was entirely limited to Ann Arbor, it wasn't aiming to be a national organisation. This grouping later joined the New American Movement (NAM), one of the two organisations that was part of the merger that founded the DSA, but apparently the Chester group left to join Solidarity. The exact chronology is a bit murky for me. Chester himself eventually went into the Socialist Party. I never had luck connecting with Chester, nor Julia Wrigley, another leader in this small Ann Arbor-based group.

While remaining a small grouping, the Draper tendency built the sort of organisation it aimed to build, eventually through Draper's Center for Socialist History, and Hal obviously did a great service in writing his books on Marx. The Third Camp Tendency did not aim to build a membership organisation, although all of its surviving members went on to do good work. The Revolutionary Tendency was, by far I think, the most sectarian outgrowth of the IS, so it makes a lot of sense to me that they didn't go on to do much. That might be unfair, but it's how I see things at least.

As opposed to the ISO, Solidarity seemingly wanted to be part of a larger regroupment strategy on the left, organised around continuing opposition to the Democratic Party. While I've known a lot of great Solidarity members over the years, and they do good work, I don't believe they have had all that much luck with growth, even as they outlasted the ISO. It seems to me that Solidarity's attempt to bring together New Leftists — some 20 years after the birth of the New Left — around continuing opposition to the Democrats was simply not a recipe for growth in an increasingly conservative era in the way that the ISO's campus-based recruitment strategy was.

Lessons

DR: *What should contemporary socialist activists learn from this tradition?*

ASH: There are a number of things that have really stuck with me, but I think the book will provide a range of lessons for leftists with interests or emphases different from my own.

One lesson comes from Nancy Holmstrom who ends her piece with the line, "It is very difficult to be a revolutionary socialist, a Marxist, on your own." If you consider yourself a socialist, then you

should be a member of a socialist organisation. I think this is true even if you want to continue to vote for Democrats in elections; even if you plan on being more of a paper member than full-time cadre. Being in an organisation is crucial.

Two, the late Mike Parker noted in his piece that not every question is a fighting question. His point was, it was less important what positions the organisation took in the abstract and more important what work they were actually doing. If you want to have an effective socialist organisation, don't worry so much about your party line, worry about the organising. This isn't to disregard theory, obviously all activity and no theory would be a bad thing, but to avoid fetishising it and elevating it above the practical.

Third, and this is related to Mike's emphasis on the actual work, over the course of my working on the project Joel Geier has consistently emphasised the importance of the IS carrying out coordinated but non-sectarian mass work. ISers did so in the civil rights movement even prior to forming the ISC, they did so in the Free Speech Movement, in anti-war organising and within the Peace and Freedom Party, in the women's liberation movement, and in the labour movement. The goal is to walk a line. In this case it is walking the line between radical abstentionism, where you refuse to participate in movements that are too liberal and, alternatively, participating in movements only to shout slogans or raid them for members. The IS knew that to win converts, especially given some of the unpopular ideas they had (read: anti-Stalinism), they had to be dependable comrades who did good work, and I think the record shows that they succeeded in achieving this.

Finally, the book, particularly its closing chapters, drove home to me the importance of maintaining a youth group, giving young socialists the space and autonomy to figure things out, while also providing guidance and support. There are millions of young people out there who are horrified by the world they are inheriting, to borrow the language of the Port Huron Statement. Winning a sizeable chunk of them to a committed, principled democratic socialism is going to be a key part of getting through the current political moment. □

• *Further reading on the Workers' Liberty website:*

• "The Third Camp Socialists in the USA", a [symposium](#) of recollections and reflections from activists involved in Third Camp organisations in the USA, including the ISC-IS

• "The legacy of Phyllis and Julius Jacobson", an [interview](#) with Kent Worcester, about the recent book *Third Camp Socialism: A Phyllis and Julius Jacobson Reader*

• "The 1939-40 Split in the Fourth International", [Workers' Liberty 3/30](#), a survey of the split in the Trotskyist movement from which the "Third Camp" current emerged. □

The vicissitudes of the Heterodox

By Martin Thomas

In his introduction to our book *The Two Trotskyisms Confront Stalinism*, Sean Matgamna wrote:

"The Alliance for Workers' Liberty, which had distant origins as '1953', that is, sharply anti-Stalinist 'Cannonites', made our way to the Third Camp politics of the Heterodox Trotskyist tradition by our responses to successive political events, rather than by way of a sudden conversion. Then we revised our ideas about the history of the Trotskyist movement: we 'went back to 1940', to the parting of the ways of the two main Trotskyist currents [when Max Shachtman and the 'Heterodox' were expelled for arguing that 'defence of the USSR' was no guide to working-class policy in Stalin's 1939-40 war on Finland]...

"Despite [the] vicissitudes [of the 'Heterodox' current], and despite the fact that it does not come down to us as a neatly-codified package transmitted by a continuous chain of organisational and intellectual activity, that tradition, and the formulations of its politics form a rich heritage. As well as the political disputes, mistakes, and degenerations, there is also a magnificent record of indomitable devotion and courage in the fight for socialism against both capitalism and Stalinism".

Yet in the USA, there seems to be, or have been until recently, "a continuous chain" of the Heterodox tradition. Andrew Stone Higgins's book, and his interview, tell much much about the "vicissitudes" of a big link in that (in fact) not quite continuous chain, the ISC/IS between 1964 and the late 1970s.

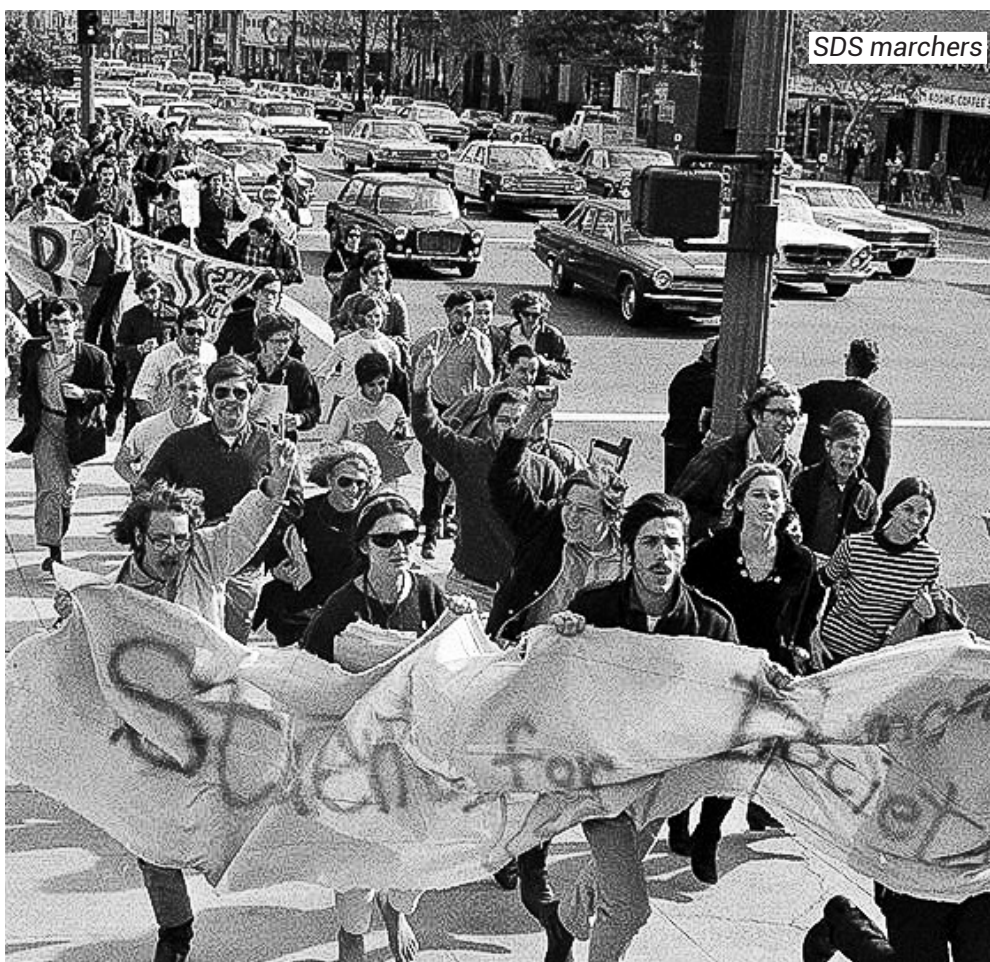
Many of the documents from the ISC/IS are now available online, thanks to the work of the Marxist Internet Archive: see bit.ly/wp-is and bit.ly/is-doc. I have not studied them fully, but such knowledge as I've picked up prompts some comments on the book and the interview.

Authentic

Max Shachtman and the Heterodox Trotskyists of the 1940s insisted (rightly, I think) that they were the authentic continuators of Trotsky's overall ideas, and that the self-styled "Orthodox Trotskyists" had departed from those ideas, pro-Stalinistically.

In the 1950s, however, as Shachtman faded (heart attack 1951, new partner 1951, move to suburban Long Island 1954), and Hal Draper took over as the main writer of the Heterodox Trotskyists (by then called ISL), the take changed. Less "we are the Trotskyists, and the 'Orthodox' are imposters", more "they are the Trotskyists, and we are different".

Higgins cites Gabe Gabrielsky as saying that Draper's "Independent Socialism" was "an entirely new tendency". Draper's actual words were milder: "a new socialist synthesis". Draper cited Marxian, Fabian-Revisionist, anar-



cho-syndicalist, and "Leninist" as the older syntheses.

When the ISC printed Draper's *Two Souls of Socialism* in 1966, the cover had Lenin and Trotsky among the images of the "good" soul. But the valuable "Clipping Books" which Draper produced in the mid-1960s for the Independent Socialist Club campus stalls (yes, they ran stalls every day, followed up by individual discussions with people who showed interest, and frequent well-advertised meetings: that is how they grew, not just by engineering "broad movements" like the Peace and Freedom Party and getting flow from there) — those "Clipping Books" are mostly Draper's own articles from the mid-1950s, not a selection from the whole "Heterodox" tradition.

The "Clipping Books" have much of value, but they are a half-version of the Heterodox tradition, from a period when it was perplexed and losing energy. According to Julius Jacobson, "half the New York membership" (and New York was by far the main centre) were in psychotherapy.

Phyllis Jacobson records that Draper "was remote. He was a wonderfully educated, brilliant guy, who had few real friends in the movement". So he wrote, often very well, but he tended to the scholastic rather than the interventionist.

All that, I think, explains three things.

First, why Draper didn't last long in the ISC/IS. He was reluctant from the start. He seems to have concurred with Phyllis Jacobson's assessment: "we ended up as a sect with practically no members. We ended with zilch", which led her and

Julius Jacobson doing their launch of New Politics (for which Draper wrote) in 1961 on the basis of sponsorship by the Socialist Party's old reformist leader Norman Thomas and agreed access to the SP mailing list. The Jacobsons and Draper were hostile to Shachtman's edging into Democrat and union-boss politicking, but their dissent was not a drive to maintain an independent Marxist organisation.

Draper did excellent work when, later, he turned to writing scholarly exegesis of Marx's writings, often digging out Marx's real meaning from decades of Stalinist "slant" read onto it. But political direction and scholarly exegesis are not the same thing.

Bureaucratic Collectivist

Second: Draper's take on the Stalinist states as "bureaucratic collectivist" fared badly among the post-ISC fragments. Most (including the Australian IS, founded by ex-Berkeley migrant Tom O'Lincoln) abandoned it for versions of "state capitalist" designation, sometimes very poor ones like Tony Cliff's.

The *Introduction to Independent Socialism* "Clipping Book" included a text by Shachtman on "bureaucratic collectivism", but a thin and late one (1954). By then Shachtman had tacitly gone over to Joseph Carter's view, so the text declares: "The first thing to grasp about Stalinism is that world capitalism is at the end of its rope" (emphasis added). Capitalism is collapsing. It could be into bureaucratic collectivism or into socialism. Better the socialist way.

Decades later, Draper's sidekick Ernie

Haberkern told a Workers' Liberty forum in London that the clearest example then in the world of "bureaucratic collectivism" was the International Monetary Fund, because it was more bureaucratic than simple profit-maximisation. That was close to the "convergence theories" popular in the 1970s, according to which the (sort of) liberalising and marketising USSR and the increasingly plan-minded Western powers were converging towards a common future of "industrial society".

Views vary within Workers' Liberty on whether "bureaucratic collectivism" can be rescued. I think not (and that "deformed state capitalism" is a better framework). Probably most in Workers' Liberty disagree with me. However, Draper's stripped-down version of bureaucratic collectivism is now untenable.

Stalinism arose in China because capitalism was "at the end of its rope" there? Look at Taiwan and at mainland China since 1989. In Korea because capitalism was "at the end of its rope" there? In Vietnam ditto? Etc.

Capitalism generates terrible crises and suffering, but it had not come to a halt in the early 1960s, and has not now..

Democratic Centralism

Third: "democratic centralism" became a big issue in the ISC/IS groups. Those who wanted to be more "Trotskyist" also wanted to be more "democratic centralist", but in an addled way.

The term "democratic centralism" was coined by the Russian Mensheviks (yes, Mensheviks, not Bolsheviks) as an approving summary of the organisational changes made by the German Social Democracy (SPD) in 1905 to create more coherence than the ramshackle old structure from its period of illegality (1879-1890). The SPD remained pluralist, more so than the emergency regime which the Bolsheviks had to resort to in the Russian civil war, and nothing like the "Zinovievite" version of "democratic centralism" (called "Bolshevisation") imposed on the Communist Parties in 1924-5.

"Democratic centralism" means, for us, simply an effort to work out the truth of issues, and to seek coherence in action to promote that truth, with wide rights for minorities to voice objections, including publicly. It is the alternative to members being guided more by the immediate pressures on them in their different spheres (in different unions, for example, or when they gain trade-union positions); to a culture of fudge and theoretical indifference; and to a passive, only half-paying-attention, membership which can be manipulated but cannot gain sufficient common conviction for energetic collective activity. The pre-1914 SPD's disease was much more a culture of compromises to reduce conflict than of excessive "centralism".

However, in the ISC/IS, the arguments

were mostly about “democratic centralism” of a “Zinovievite” form (appointment from the central office of local organisers, etc.), with an irrationally hectic perspective (win leadership in the workplaces within a few years by dragging students into factories) and an expulsion-happy culture. Other groups, including ourselves, had ex-students “industrialising” then without the same frenzy. But ISC/IS seemed to flip between frenzy and looseness (don’t fuss about “the line”, as long as activity looks buoyant and successful).

The “Zinovievism”, together with the thinness of the political-cultural base, must be the reason why the ISC/IS was so very split-prone, with at least eight serious splinters between 1969 and 1979. The splits are not explained by a decline in working-class struggle in the USA. The “Orthodox Trotskyist” SWP, weaker than the “Heterodox” YPSL in the early 1960s, had membership growing until the late 1970s. US strike statistics show no sharp fall until the mid 1980s.

The “Heterodox Trotskyist” Workers Party, in its day, had a well-explained alternative both to “Zinovievism” and to flaccidity. But that wasn’t presented in

the Clipping Books, and seems never to have got a hearing.

Draper’s *Two Souls of Socialism* text, first written in 1960 for Michael Harrington’s *Anvil*, a plea for a “from below” “soul” of socialism against the “from above” soul, however, got and still gets a wide hearing.

[Daniel Randall](#) and [I have](#) argued that this most famous text of Draper’s is, despite some well-written denunciation of Stalinism, shoddy.

Even in its revised version of 1966, when allocating all varieties of socialism to “from above” or “from below” boxes, it refuses to classify Bolshevism and anarcho-syndicalism.

Its treatment of anarchism is a travesty, equating anarchists in general with the worst of Proudhon and Bakunin. Its treatment of German Social Democracy in its best years is also a travesty (it denounces it as thoroughly socialism-from-above).

“From below” is a poor soft-soap alias for “working class”. Many variants of socialism have seen capitalism as being crowded out by socialistic initiatives “from below” (cooperatives, municipal socialism, “liberated zones”, etc.) rather

than being overthrown. Consistent working-class socialism seeks to organise the working class, currently “below”, to become “above” by overthrowing the capitalist state. Also, on the way, to win reforms legislated “from above” (from the legal ten-hour day onwards).

The text suggests that capitalism will be ousted by one form or another of socialism, whatever we do. Only there are bad socialists who want to do it “from above”, and good ones who want it “from below”. The difference is a moral rather than a class one.

In his first Clipping Book, Draper included a good 1955 text by himself on “Why the Working Class”. But the Independent Socialist Clubs’ first manifesto of 1964 is not class politics. It wants a “third party”, but “by the labour and civil rights movements and other progressive forces”, not a workers’ party.

The ISC manifesto wanted a “Third Camp” which is defined as “those who reject both war blocs” (not, as the Workers Party, or all the Trotskyists in 1938-9, had it, as the working class). The difference is not pedantic. In European politics in the late 1940s and early 1950s, “Third Camp” or “Third Force” mostly meant a

hope for Europe, or social democracy, or a Europe led by social democracy, to be a pole against both the USSR and USA.

The ISC/IS’s “worker turn” may have been driven as much by “competitive” exigencies as by rational analysis. If young people angry to overthrow capitalism find socialists telling them it can be done quickly (and, in the 1960s, citing say Cuba as an example), and others saying yes, but wait, we want a better socialism, then they are likely to go for the imperfect socialism now (maybe to be improved later). Thus, pressure on IS to “compete” by proposing to do the better socialism quickly, just by getting into factories and soon leading the workers there.

Marx never wanted to be labelled Marxist, Lenin never wanted to be labelled Leninist, and Trotsky never wanted to be labelled Trotskyist. After a while we may have little choice. Saying we are Marxists may convey little, but saying we are not Marxists conveys a lot of bad things. We in Workers’ Liberty have little choice now but to go along with the “Third Camp” label, but in awareness of its limitations. □

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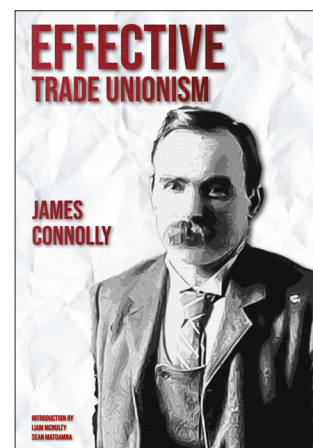
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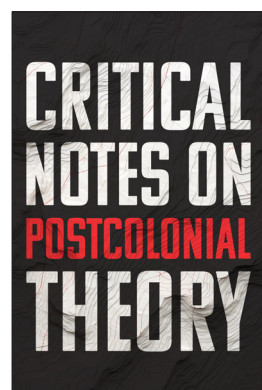
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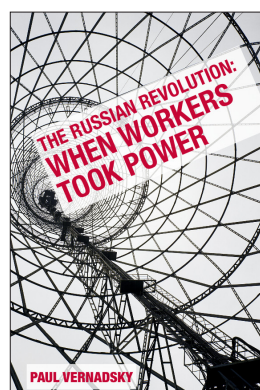
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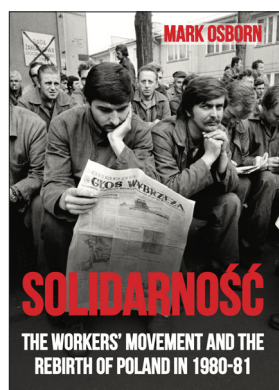
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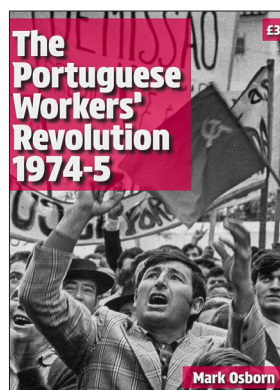
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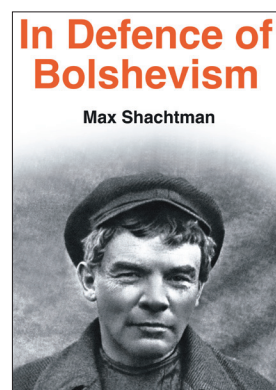
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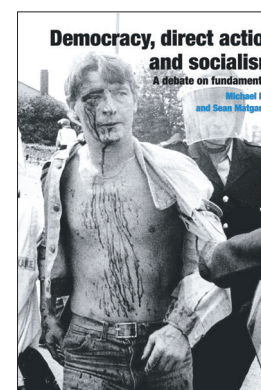
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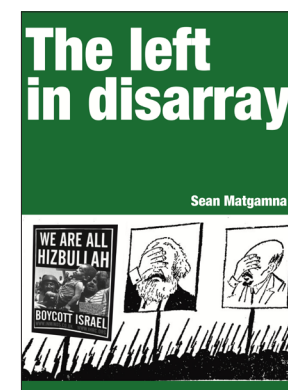
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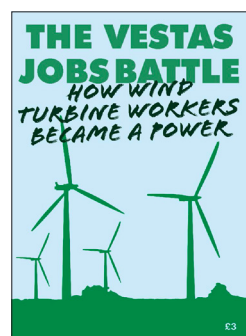
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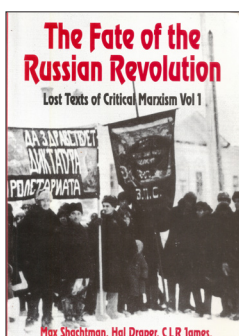
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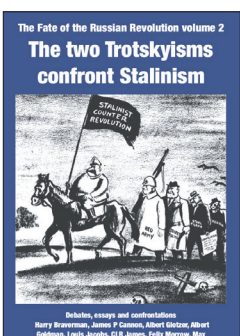
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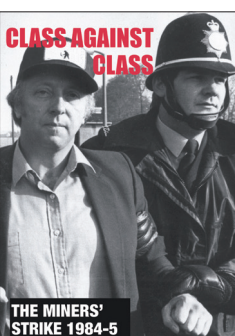
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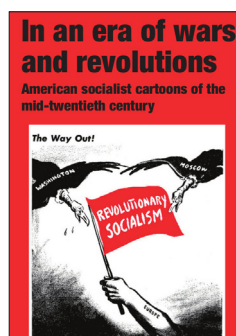
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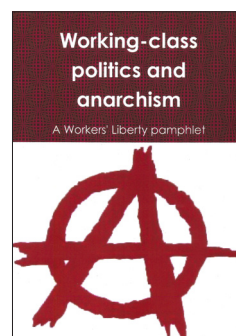
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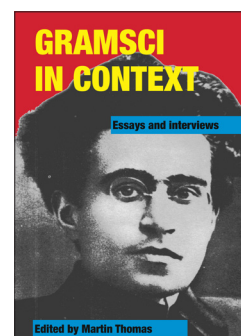
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