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We can periodise IS, and the Socialist Review group which came before it, in the following fashion.

From 1948 to their expulsion in 1950, as an ideological trickle inside the majority "orthodox Trotskyist" group, the RCP

From 1950 to 1953. In 1953 the group goes through a crisis and then reorganises with a simplified but regular paper

From late 1953 to 1957. By this time the SR group is solidly immersed in the Labour Party. In the first years, after the collapse of the RCP in August 1949, it had been much more "sectarian", though it was in the Labour Party

A period of transition which ends about 1960, with an apparent crisis and loss of members in 1959

The supposedly "Luxemburgist" period, from 1960 to 1968. The group grew sizeably, first in line with a general growth of all the revolutionary groups inside the new Labour Party youth movement. After 1965-6 it drifted away from the Labour Party and then grew quickly thanks to the tumult of 1968 and the descent into suicidal sectarianism of what had been the most visible revolutionary group, Gerry Healy's SLL (later WRP)

1968 to 1971: the reintroduction of so-called "Leninism". The creation of a formal structure and machine with an array of full-time organisers. After 1970, a rush for recruitment based on the fact that industrial struggles against the Tory government are opening up new chances to recruit trade-unionists. An increasing impatience with democratic procedures or theoretical scruples which may inhibit the implementation of hunches or improvisations which bring advantage and growth. This culminates with IS's shift of line on Europe, and the expulsion of the Trotskyist Tendency (forerunner of AWL) in 1971.

From December 1971 to 1975-6 the regime is finally tightened. After 1975-6, the IS's (from January 1977 the SWP's) operation is more and more an aping of Healy. It is interesting to trace the various subsequent ups and downs and zigzags, but the group is fully-formed by that stage.

The IS group, forerunner of the SWP, and before it the Socialist Review group, was something of a personality cult round Tony Cliff. Not just Cliff, but Cliff and his family: his wife, Chanie Rosenberg, his brother-in-law, Michael Kidron, and at one stage, I believe, another sister of Chanie and Kidron, were operating in a group which at the end of the 1950s had about 20 members.

Despite the myths and the appearances, SR was in substance an "orthodox Trotskyist" tendency with quirks. The quirk throughout the 1950s was that it considered Russia to be state-capitalist. The break in the pattern covers most of the 1960s, when it declared itself Luxemburgist, counterposing an imaginary Luxemburg to Lenin, or, in fact, to an imaginary Lenin. And then in 1968 Cliff reimposed "Leninism", which, for him, meant stuff he had learned in his formative period.

Korea

The Socialist Review group started with the expulsion in 1950 of some people from the main "orthodox Trotskyist" organisation, forerunner of the SLL, which was then called The Club. They were purged ostensibly because of their line on Korea. They rejected the support for North Korea which was to be the position of the Fourth International. In reality, they grouped people around them who were simply hostile to the authoritarian Healy regime in The Club.

I've been told by Ken Tarbuck, who was for a while secretary of the Socialist Review group, that there were 60 or 70 people at SR's first meeting. Nothing like that number were consolidated. You can make some guess at their numbers from their publications.

"Socialist Review" began in November 1950 as a stencil-duplicated magazine. In all, between November 1950 and April 1952, when the first printed SR appeared, seven duplicated numbers were published.

One of the myths in the very mythologised SWP-IS history was that there was first the theoretical period, then the propaganda period; and when they had sorted out their propaganda and educated a cadre, they started doing things. It's moonshine.

State capitalism played very little part in the public expression of the early SR group. Oddly, the early SR group also published very little about Korea.

SR no.1 had nothing on Korea except a mention in a single introductory paragraph to a general background article on US-USSR rivalry.

"The war in Korea serves the great Powers as a rehearsal for their intended struggle for the redivision of the globe. The fate of the Korean people is a grave warning to all humanity what sufferings the march of aggressive imperialist Powers will entail. To understand the real aims of the Powers and how they affect the interests of the international working class is a prime duty of every Socialist". Cliff, as a journalist, always tended to write background papers: the political conclusions were left vague and could vary enormously.

Socialist Review no.2 reprinted an article from a Sri Lankan Trotskyist as its line on Korea. In December 1952 SR came out with an article, its first substantial comment on Korea in two and a half years, with the chief demand: "The complete withdrawal of all foreign troops from Korea". It called for "A united Korean nation to be allowed to decide its own fate in its own way, as it is entitled to do" and "All foreign powers who have had troops in Korea to pay whatever Government the Korean people create, a sum equal in value to their military expenses in the campaign, the money to be raised by a capital levy".

This meant that the Chinese troops and the US and allied troops under the UN banner should quit. That would leave what you had in 1950, when the North Korean army cut like the proverbial knife through butter into the south. It was a serious reorientation towards support for the North. The implication was plainly: let the Stalinists win.

Thus the story, long sustained by the Healy organisation, and believed by us for many years, that SR refused any defence to Korea on the grounds that the Korean war was a proxy war between the US and the USSR, is more a myth than historical truth.

Reassessing the issues today, however, it was a proxy war. If you look at North Korea today, which is in its third generation of hereditary Stalinist monarchs, with the people half-starving, it seems very ironic indeed that Korea was a cause of so many ructions in the Trotskyist movement, and that failure to side with North Korea could seem so damnable at the time and for decades after.

In 1950, all the Trotskyists had been very hostile to Stalinism in Korea. The main Trotskyist group, the SWP-USA, did not come out with support for North Korea until about six weeks after the war started. Then it did it by a bit of mental juggling. The SWP-USA knew it was Stalinism that was being spread. They didn't like Stalinism. They didn't want Stalinism.

They believed that Russia was a degenerated workers' state, and ergo, if Russia replicated its structure, as it had in much of Eastern Europe, the result had to be some sort of workers' states. However, the SWP-USA did not arrive at that conclusion firmly until the end of the 1940s. It was very unhappy about the invasion of South Korea by the North.

It solved the problem this way: James P Cannon wrote an open letter to the President and Congress of the United States in which he identified what was going on in Korea as "the Korean revolution", reducing Stalinism to a mere detail.

Although SR had its theory that Russia was state-capitalist, its evolution on Korea was in fact not very different from the SWP-USA's. But it took two and a half years, not six weeks, to catch up.

The SR Group 1950-5

One way of getting a picture of the early SR group is through an archaeological survey of its publications. The first seven issues were stencil-duplicated magazines of between 26 and 42 pages. Those first issues were a "magazine" rather than a "paper". SR described itself on the first cover as "Live writing on the left", but in fact much of it was heavy, research-paper-type articles, statistics-dense and turgid. The dominant conception evidently was that Marxism was primarily an understanding of the economic background to politics.

In April-May 1952, SR went into print, 12 quarto-size pages (smaller than A4), with quite small print. In that printed 12-page format eight issues were produced, between April 1952 and October 1953.

In 1953 the group had some sort of crisis. A number of the founding members left the group. That included Don Hallas, or as he later called himself Duncan Hallas, who after a 15-year "sabbatical" came back to the organisation in 1968. Only two issues came out between December 1952 and October 1953. Readers were offered no explanation for the break.

From October 1953 SR was more or less stabilised as a monthly. Michael Kidron, Cliff's brother-in-law, who, I guess, had just come from South Africa, became editor. SR was now a smaller size - eight pages of bigger type. It read more like a youth paper - a rather turgid youth paper, but it was all very elementary. Kidron had a long series of articles on the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International, but on a very simplistic level.

There certainly was no propaganda for the group's special view on Russia in SR, and the group did not have a printed version of Cliff's 1948 document on Russia until 1955. SR retained this format until December 1956, when it was substantially expanded.

This was a very small group, which, after the mysterious crisis in 1953, was then re-stabilised on a much lower level of publication.

Within that framework, there were bizarre episodes. In June 1953 there was a working-class uprising in East Germany. It was the major example before the Hungarian revolution of open working-class conflict with the Stalinist states. The orthodox Trotskyists split, in part over a difference of opinion about whether they, defending Russia as they did, should demand the Russian army withdraw from Germany. Healy and the British group went with Cannon and the SWP-USA, arguing, against Michel Pablo, that they should call for withdrawal of Russian troops.

For six months SR said nothing at all about the events in East Germany! Its paper did not appear very often in 1953, but this was the sort of major event that should energise anybody to make a special effort. The first comment on East Germany in SR was in December 1953, and then it was a reprint from C L R James's group. I don't know how to explain that, but it shows that the picture of the early SR as a group focused on sharpening its understanding of Stalinism and its critique of "orthodox" Trotskyism is almost entirely a myth.

Was the SR group of that time "Third Camp"-ist? Yes, implicitly. But it was not at all identified publicly as "Third Camp"-ist. It did not use the term until 1955, when the slogan "For the Third Camp!" appeared in three issues of SR (August, September, October 1955), and

then disappeared again. The prominent self-proclaimed "Third Camp" socialist group in Britain then was the Independent Labour Party (ILP), which had separated from the Labour Party, which it had helped found, in 1932, and was still a fairly sizeable presence in the early 1950s.

Another myth is that SR had links with the Shachtman organisation in the USA (the ISL) from the beginning. That is not at all clear from SR's publications.

In the early issues of SR there was a heavy reliance on reprints, often reprints from the ISL-USA paper Labor Action. There was one advertisement in SR for Labor Action. There is no other evidence of any collusion.

The ISL's chief and most visible links in Britain at that time were with the ILP. The ILP was "Third Camp"-ist. Confusedly so: as an organisation, it was a hotch-potch, with many different tendencies. But the ILP paper Socialist Leader was quite a big paper, with a circulation much bigger than the ILP's declining membership.

As far as the files of SR tell us, closer links between SR and the ISL were not established until 1956.

SR and state capitalism

What role was played for SR by the theory of state capitalism, which is said to have been the lodestone of the tendency, the magic talisman which protected them from the mistakes that other Trotskyists made? Very little. After 1955 they had a book, and no doubt they sold it. But in practice the theory played very little role in SR.

SR of August-September 1951 reprinted an important article from the ISL magazine New International on the Chinese revolution by the Chinese Trotskyist leader Wang, and accompanied it by a gauche quarrelsome little editorial note taking Wang to task for using "bureaucratic collectivism" and "state capitalism" interchangeably. There was very little other than that sectarian defence of the shibboleth, and the phrase, of course, "Russian state capitalism".

Perhaps SR was wary of talking too much about state capitalism because they had to work in a milieu where the idea would have been very unpopular. One of the pieces of literary-archaeological evidence is a review of Cliff's 1955 book in Socialist Review of August 1955 by Peter Morgan, who was an SR member in Birmingham and had been a founding member. Morgan was anxious to persuade the reader that SR were not right-wingers in the sense of the theory implying the historic necessity of Stalinist counter-revolution. He was concerned to reply to the "orthodox" Trotskyists, and to refute the argument that if it is true that the outcome of the October Revolution was state capitalism, then the task of winning socialism is a hopeless and utopian project.

One of the things that it is hard for people today to believe is that the SR group appeared, within the left, to be "right-wing". It was denounced by John Gollan, the future general secretary of the Communist Party, as very right-wing. That was a matter of the standards the CP applied to everything: SR was "right-wing" because it was hostile to Russia. But the orthodox Trotskyists regarded SR as right-wing too. That was true when I joined the Healy organisation at the end of the 1950s. We said that they justified Stalinism. They gave Stalinism a certain historic legitimacy, as a lawful and necessary phase in economic development. The orthodox Trotskyists said it wasn't lawful; it was a usurpation of the working-class revolution of 1917.

The "deformed workers' state" version of orthodox Trotskyism implied support of Russia against invasion by the West. That idea had been in Trotsky; but it became something different among the orthodox Trotskyists after a long ferment from about 1948. The orthodox Trotskyists tended to become critical (though often extremely critical) supporters of and propagandists on behalf of the foreign policy of Russia, which they called a "degenerated workers' state" and the other Stalinist states, which they called "deformed workers' states".

Despite the "state capitalism", usually the Cliffites were not any different. Korea had been a major difference, but only for two years. In the 1950s dispute between Mao's China and Taiwan, Cliff and company simply asserted that the offshore islands were China's by right. For anyone interested in socialism, a fundamental consideration must be the regime the Stalinists would impose. Not even the Chiang Kai Shek dictatorship was as repressive as Mao. SR said that Hong Kong was simply China's. In Hong Kong there was a very severe regime, and you'd have legal problems organising trade unions, but you could do it.

In 1958, China started shelling some offshore islands which it claimed. That is now widely considered to be one of the points at which World War Three might have erupted. SR (October 1958) declared: "US imperialism has as much right to occupy [Taiwan] - through its quisling, Chiang Kai Shek - as Nazi Germany had to occupy the Channel islands. The British labour movement must make absolutely clear its relentless opposition to US aggression against China..." (There was no US attack on China: the "aggression" was US aid to Taiwan).

Cliff on Russia and China

SR in the early 1950s insisted on the inevitability of World War Three, and in a peculiar way.

World War Three was inevitable because Russia needed to invade Western Europe to get the capital equipment that it lacked. That idea was a generalisation based on the Russian dismantling of East European and East German industry at the end of World War Two. SR considered World War Three imminent and inevitable long after the orthodox Trotskyists - who had had the idea of inevitable World War Three central to their thinking in, say, 1951 - had changed their assessment.

Cliff published a number of academic-type books up to the middle 1960s. He had bad luck, you might say, with all his books. He would make a series of bad inductions, one-sided extrapolations from given facts like the early-1950s extrapolation that Russia had to invade Western Europe and dismantle industry there as it had done in Eastern Europe, often publishing his conclusions just before the trend changed and made his extrapolations false.

The first was his study, written inside the RCP in 1948, on Russia. Like much of his stuff, it is a mine of facts, and therefore valuable. It

came out too late for the Fourth International congress in mid-1948. It was also saturated with the idea that the USSR was growing economically at a vast speed, sharply contrasting with anything possible in the West - oddly, more saturated with that idea than "orthodox" Trotskyist assessments of the USSR at that time. Events would soon prove otherwise.

Cliff then published an academically-rooted book called *Stalin's Satellites in Eastern Europe* - just on the eve of the changes that took place after Stalin's death. In 1957 Cliff published another study under the name Ygael Gluckstein, called *Mao's China*. That appeared just on the eve of a full-scale transformation in China, when the remaining capitalists were bought out and then the Great Leap Forward started in 1958. Cliff was always unlucky in the timing of his publications!

A reviewer of *Stalin's Satellites*, in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 28 March 1952, described it thus: "Beneath us lies a forest of facts, with only the tree tops gently swaying under the gentle gusts of Mr Gluckstein's analysis". That's true of Cliff's approach in general.

Cliff's line on Russia was stated in definite terms; but there was quite a marked distinction between 1948 version of the text and the 1955 version, which I assume was edited by Kidron. In 1948 there was a great deal of "dialectics" and formula-mongering which was pruned in the 1955 version.

In any case, there Cliff had a theory of state capitalism as the most advanced form of capitalism. He cited what Marx and Engels wrote in the *Communist Manifesto* about the revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie to describe the Stalinists as making tremendous progress. How did that state capitalism come to exist? Cliff argues that it emerged as a result of the degeneration of the Russian revolution, and it could not have come any other way, since there was no state-capitalist class to overthrow the Russian bourgeoisie; only the workers' revolution could do that.

What did that say about states where there had been a revolution led by Stalinist peasant parties, like China? Cliff could not define China as state-capitalist according to his model for Russia. He did however keep to the designation. It was only used in passing; the book was mostly a forest of facts. He quoted Karl Wittfogel, who had a theory about Stalinism being the re-emergence of a sort of hydraulic society; and he seemed to cite the Chinese tradition of state intervention; but there was no theory of state capitalism in the book, not one that fitted both Russia and China.

That book, published in 1957, might have been expected to have some impact on the CPers who were rethinking after Khrushchev denounced Stalin early in 1956 and then acted like Stalin in suppressing the Hungarian revolution at the end of 1956. There is no evidence that it did.

Cliff's bad luck about timing remained true in 1964, when he published a much expanded version of his 1955 book on Russia - effectively, the 1955 book plus a new book attached to it. He published it just on the eve of Khrushchev's fall (in October 1964), and the partial restalinisation.

SR in that period never had anything by or about Rosa Luxemburg. In April 1951 the Birmingham SR group published, as a duplicated pamphlet, Luxemburg's "Socialism and the Churches", which was an explanation on socialism and Christianity. I don't know why they did that. It was a freak, though Luxemburg's text was certainly worth reprinting.

1956

SR were orthodox Trotskyists in almost all respects. They would follow the lead of the Healyites on many though not all issues.

In February 1956, Stalin's successor Khrushchev denounced Stalin as a crazy mass murderer, saying many of the things that Trotskyists of various hues had been saying for a long time. The Stalinist movement throughout the world had a quasi-religious character. At the heart of it was Stalin. To strike at Stalin was something like a Muslim leader today denouncing Muhammad as a child molester.

The British Communist Party had always been more easy-going than some of the other parties. Physical attacks on Trotskyists were very rare, unlike in France for example. The British CP had about 35,000 members. It went into a ferment of discussion, and that ferment became a riot after the Russians suppressed the Hungarian revolution in late 1956.

SR was well placed. It had a publication - small and not very impressive, but nonetheless a publication. The Healyites' *Socialist Outlook* had been banned by the Labour Party in July 1954, and had ceased publication in October 1954. The Healyites thereafter had nothing but a few issues of a tiny magazine. They circulated the SWP-USA's *The Militant*, but that could have been of only limited service. They were part of the Labour left, and they had occasional articles in *Tribune*: for example after Stalin was denounced by Khrushchev, the central leader of the Labour left, Aneurin Bevan, had a big article in *Tribune*, and Gerry Healy had a smaller piece in the same centre pages. But the Healyites had no publication to compete with *Socialist Review*.

SR tried to respond to the opening. Cliff wrote a pamphlet directed at the CPers. It was mostly telling them stuff that was no longer news to them, but it enabled SR to recruit a few CPers in 1957.

The Healyites, however, made far more impact. They were the biggest group, and they were the nearest thing in the Trotskyist world to a real organisation in terms of membership and being able to take initiatives. They did things. For example, they called broad conferences which lots of CP types would have attended. They were known. They were seen as a force in the labour movement. And they had a plausible explanation for Russia. The "Cliff-justifies-Stalinism" argument against "state capitalism" was more effective than people today might think.

The personnel of the SR group would probably have affected the way they were perceived, too. Cliff was an Israeli intellectual, very "foreign" in that more insular Britain. Kidron, who came from Israel via South Africa, had a marked English upper-class accent. SR must have looked like a small, strange, quirky, middle-class group.

The Healyites were working-class in composition; they were dynamic; Healy, believe it or not, could be quite charming. He won over

two of the most prominent dissident CPers: Peter Fryer, the *Daily Worker* correspondent in Hungary, whose true report had been suppressed; and Brian Behan, a leading industrial militant. Called to speak from the floor at a gathering of ex-CPers in April 1957 at Wortley Hall, in Yorkshire, Healy began his speech by saying: "This is a time for reading books, not for burning them". He presented himself, truly, as someone who had been expelled from the Communist Party in the 1930s for opposing the Moscow Trials. It was effective.

And, to repeat, the Healyites did things. They had roots in the Labour Party, which helped make them attractive to CPers looking for another home. They recruited hundreds of people in 1956-7, including some people who had been prominent in the CP.

The Healyites presented themselves as in the historical continuity with the Third International and the Russian Revolution. They had radical criticism of Russia, in fact a call for a new workers' revolution which for technical reasons they called a "political revolution"; but in a sense they demanded less from the ex-CPers.

There was another group, the forerunners of today's Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal, around Ted Grant and the Deane brothers, Brian, Jimmy, and Arthur. But that was in a dreadful state. It published a very small magazine very occasionally. Some of them had been the majority leaders of the RCP, but now they did very little. Grant and his friends had been expelled formally from the Fourth International in 1951. Then suddenly, in 1957, they became the official British section of the main "Fourth International", that is, of the Pablo, soft-on-Stalinism faction of the Fourth International. But it did them little good. They made very little impact.

SR and ISL

At the end of 1956 SR put out one issue of a publication jointly with Max Shachtman's Independent Socialist League (ISL) in the USA. One version of it was published in the USA, and another in Britain. It was the beginning of a new start. At one blow it more than doubled the size of the paper.

There was only one such issue, but thereafter SR kept the same format and began to expand. For the first time SR had a somewhat impressive publication. In 1956, however, another of SR's strange mishaps occurred. Eastern Europe went into ferment. Stalinists who had been purged in the early 1950s re-emerged as leaders, Nagy in Hungary, Gomulka in Poland. There was real fear of the Russians losing control.

In mid-1956 a rash of workers' councils spread across Poland. I don't think you can describe those councils as full soviets, but they were a tremendous step towards them. The Polish workers were barely kept under control by the Stalinists who had been in disfavour, around Gomulka. The Russian leaders made an emergency visit to Warsaw on the basis of which they would decide whether to invade or not; but Gomulka convinced them that he could dismantle the movement, and he did, though Poland had a far more liberal regime thereafter.

At the same time in Hungary Nagy became prime minister. In November 1956 he announced Hungary would withdraw from the military alliance led by the USSR, the Warsaw Pact. The Russians responded by invading Hungary. They met fierce resistance. Then the Russians seemed to withdraw. Some of the Russian troops had become disaffected. Then a new wave of Russian troops came in and fought their way to control. The workers struck and contested control of the factories with the Russians. It was one of the great events of the history of the working-class movement.

SR's mishap was that in November 1956 it went to press with a front page headline and article about the fighting in... Poland! There was no fighting in Poland...

But in 1956, as I've said, after SR had raised the "Third Camp" as a prominent slogan for the first time in 1955, SR established or re-established some working relations with the "Shachtmanites", the ISL in the USA. The ISL's relations with the ILP had become very strained indeed when the ILP justified the Labour Party's expulsion of the Healy paper. SR-ISL would run to 1958, when the ISL merged into the Socialist Party in the USA.

In September 1955 there was a conference in London of "Third Camp" socialist groups - a big conference, which also incidentally included the Ba'th party, then very different from what it would become when it fused with elements of the military took power in Syria and Iraq.

There was a quickening of life in SR. As we have seen, it reacted comparatively energetically to the Communist Party crisis. Shachtman got his passport back in the mid 1950s and he may have visited England and Ireland. But it's hard to see much ISL influence on SR. In his 1948 text, Cliff had taken things wholesale from Shachtman, but without acknowledgement, and while abusing the giver and compressing what he had taken into a theory of state capitalism which, considered in the context of the many state-capitalist theories about Russia, is very odd indeed.

In Labor Action in January 1956 Hal Draper reviewed Cliff's 1955 book, in a distinctly patronising fashion. He said it was an extremely valuable book for its facts - which it was - and that the theory was "virtually identical" with bureaucratic collectivism; Russia was "labelled a hyphenated-capitalism [i.e. 'bureaucratic state capitalism'] only as a matter of terminological taste". In a way that was a rather contemptuous dismissal. A couple of months later Draper reviewed another book giving facts on Russia, which he praised unqualifiedly, in effect saying it was better than Cliff's. But the interesting thing is that neither Cliff nor anyone from SR (authors of the angry little footnote on Wang a few years earlier) responded.

Bernard Dix, who was a trade union official and ended up as a Welsh nationalist, may at some point have served as a link between the ISL and SR. He wrote articles for the Healyite Socialist Outlook and for the ISL's Labor Action. He disappeared from the British left press at the time the Labour Party banned Socialist Outlook in 1954, but continued to write in Labor Action until 1958. He may have had some involvement in SR, but briefly.

SR in the Labour left, late 1950s

From the beginning of 1957 SR had an 8-page tabloid, well laid-out and good-looking despite having no illustrations. It was far more attractive than it had been. SR claimed they had doubled the circulation.

One of SR's peculiarities within the left then is that they made no claim to a heritage, to being Trotskyists. There was nothing about the history of the Trotskyists, or of Bolshevism, in their publications. At that point they did not even mention Luxemburg.

SR did have an article in January 1957 by Cliff on Plekhanov, in which he cited Plekhanov's idea ("Socialism and the Political Struggle") that a revolutionary socialist coup in Russia would end up adopting "the ideals of patriarchal and authoritarian communism, only modifying those ideals so that national production is managed not by the Peruvian 'sons of the sun' and their officials but by a socialist caste". It was a way of opening up the whole historical background, but without answering any of the questions, and without identifying SR as Trotskyists.

What SR did do was engage with a part of the Labour left, with the right wing of what would become New Left Review, John Hughes and others. They conducted debates with them on issues like incomes policy, which some Labour leftists at that time advocated.

SR had a fashion of presenting articles as "forum" or "discussion" when they really weren't, but it did get some interaction. There was life in the paper. Some members of the group wrote a letter, which was published, saying that it was just a digest of the Financial Times, but that was unfair. In fact, throughout 1957 SR was a more impressive paper than the Healyite Newsletter (which started in May 1957 as Peter Fryer's Newsletter).

SR went biweekly in 1958. There was energy in it. It was on a relatively high level, not so much Marxist high theory as written for people with formal education. It related to industrial struggles, too, in a way that was indistinguishable from the Healyites.

SR expanded its membership, but that was very relative. In 1958, according to Cliff, they had about 20 members.

In 1957, according to the myth, Cliff discovered the "permanent arms economy". That is not just myth, but ten times myth. The idea of the "permanent arms economy" was commonplace. There was even a big special feature in the big-circulation magazine Newsweek about it. It's typical of the group to be dishonest about this and claim the idea of the "permanent arms economy" for their own when in fact it was everybody's.

What Cliff discovered in 1957 was not the idea of a "permanent arms economy", but the idea that it would work indefinitely to stabilise and consolidate capitalism. The practical implication was that there were very few revolutionary possibilities, and SR worked in the Labour Party without much idea of ever doing anything else.

One of the latter-day myths is that SR was never in the Labour Party really, that they only joined for the audience. That may have been true at the beginning, when they collapsed into the Labour Party in 1949, like the Grantites, and operated there very much as outsiders (though they were always seriously involved in the Labour League of Youth). But by the mid 1950s SR was expressing its programme, the list of demands which it printed in every issue, as a programme for the Labour Party.

That was more than just a pedagogic adaptation. The mid-50s programme was introduced by the statement: "The Socialist Review believes that... a Labour Government must be brought to power on the basis of the following programme".

Tellingly, it took the adhesion to SR of a group of ex-Communist Party people to get this modified (in June 1957) to: "Only the mass mobilisation of the working class in the industrial and political arena can lead to the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of Socialism. The Socialist Review believes that a really consistent Labour Government must be brought to power on the basis of the following programme..."

That was a distinct improvement - achieved by introducing into the SR platform a formula about mass mobilisation from the Communist Party's evasive programme of 1951, The British Road to Socialism!

You could see from 1957 a winding-down from the origins of the group. The recruits did not become more than a trickle until the beginning of the 1960s, but the whole focus of the publication changed towards debate and dialogue with a section of the Labour left. SR did not stress any Trotskyist background at all.

SR and peace campaigning

In the late 1950s people were becoming concerned with the threat of nuclear war. The Healyites picked up the demand "Black the bomb, black the bases" very early on, and soon afterwards so did SR. "Black", of course, meant "don't work on", "boycott", "shun".

From 1957 it became the shibboleth of SR. SR had always been for workers' control, continuing the emphasis which the RCP in its last period had put on that idea in order to distinguish itself from the Labour government's nationalisations. Now SR raised the call for workers' control of the nuclear arms industry. For what? They would continue to produce nuclear bombs under workers' control? It was a piece of demagogic nonsense, which made no sense except that it could appeal to intellectuals who wanted a proletarian orientation.

In the 1960s, "workers' control" would become for SR/IS a general synonym for workers' power and socialism.

By 1959-60 SR had a massive focus on the peace movement. SR hadn't abandoned the view that World War Three was imminent until well after the orthodox Trotskyists had abandoned it. SR held to that view even after Khrushchev's thaw and even after the Geneva talks of April-July 1954.

SR's focus on peace campaigning gave it some base in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament when it started to flourish (about 1958 to 63). In my experience CND never had much of an active membership, but the SWP's story is that SR recruited from CND youth.

The turn to "Luxemburgism"

By the late mid-1950s the Healyites had transformed themselves. They always had an authoritarian regime, but that varied from time to time. When there were cadres who could stand up to Healy, and in the 1950s there were, it was not quite the monstrous thing it became. And it loosened up in 1957 to help recruit the ex-Stalinists. Lots of CPers were joining the Healy organisation from 1957, and that made it attractive to people in SR.

In 1958 the 20-strong SR group voted by a majority to approach the Healyites for fusion. Cliff's account of it, to me around 1968, was that only he and Chanie Rosenberg voted against. In reality the Healyites didn't want them, and it was very easy to provoke a failure of any attempt to fuse. SR lost two of its prominent people to the Healyites, Seymour Papert and Donna Papert. The need to compete with the Healyites generated a series of responses in SR which would amount to a break, for a decade, in their "orthodox Trotskyism". SR became "Luxemburgist".

That was done blatantly in response to the Healyites. The Healyites were the Trotskyists, the Bolsheviks, and so on. Cliff had been very careful not to identify with Trotskyism and Bolshevism in the period of CP ferment, which was still going on. Now SR hinted that they were not Leninists.

At the same time SR made a shift to deeper involvement in the Labour Party, and a focus on dialogue with the ex-CP intellectuals in the Labour Party. SR would eventually recruit from the Healy organisation the "Stamford Faction" of ex-CPers, Peter Cadogan, Ken Coates, Jim Higgins, and so on, in 1960.

In 1959, after what had been a vigorous period of effort, SR went into another crisis. The paper didn't appear for months. It seems that a layer of people like the future Labour MP Stan Newens dropped out, considering that the broader Labour left group Victory For Socialism was doing what they wanted to do. VFS had existed for a while, but it was becoming more active. It seems also that SR lost a lot of their own verve, because the effort of the previous period had produced small results.

SR restarted on a stable basis at the beginning of 1960. And Cliff published his small book on Luxemburg. It was a serious academic study, but Michael Kidron, reviewing it in SR, pointed out that a lot of it wasn't Luxemburg; it was Cliff weaving stuff into Luxemburg. From then on SR proclaimed itself "Luxemburgist".

SR/IS became "libertarian". In 1968 they used to boast that there had never been more than four expulsions from their organisation - Ellis Hillman, for gossip; Sid Bidwell, for racism; Peter Cadogan, for giving out information to the Daily Mail about a Marxist neurosurgeon, Christopher Pallas; and one other.

However, we found that the real anarcho-syndicalists in Manchester bitterly hated the IS libertarians, because they weren't very libertarian. They were what you might call "Oedipal libertarians" - "you can't tell me what to do". In our experience after 1968, most of the IS libertarians were authoritarians once there was any real political clash. The exception was Manchester, where we became friendly with the IS libertarians.

Peter Sedgwick, who was held to be the leading IS libertarian, resigned from the IS National Committee in 1970 in protest at the new rules which would later help to expel us. Then at the expulsion conference in December 1971 he backed our expulsion. He started his speech with a crude "psychoanalysis", saying that we felt better in a faction than we would as individuals. Even if that was absolutely scientific psychoanalysis, it had nothing to do with the politics at stake. That episode strengthened me a great deal. I remember feeling reassured that I had misunderstood the nature of the IS group.

From the Labour orientation to the shop stewards

One of the things difficult to grasp looking back from 2013 is just how dominant the Labour Party was in the labour movement in the 1950s, and how much it hegemonised the revolutionary groups.

Labour had carried through major reforms in the 1940s. The Cliffites, the Healyites, and a lot of other people took it as granted in 1951 that the election victory of the Tories would be followed immediately by a full-scale assault on the welfare state and the measures of the Labour government. It didn't happen. The Tories even expanded social housing, and the counter-offensive would not really come until Thatcher in the 1980s. But through the 1950s the Labour Party and the Bevanite left had big meetings. A lot of the Trotskyists saw the future in terms of a new Labour government which their ideas would dominate: Labour up to 1951 had carried through some elements of socialism, and a new Labour government could continue that work.

Labour's general election defeat in 1959, with the Tory leader Harold Macmillan using slogans like "You never had it so good", and the Labour leaders' subsequent attempt to swing Labour to the right, had a tremendous shaking-up effect on the left, including Socialist Review. SR had to reorient. It had become very immersed indeed. There was an atmosphere of crisis in SR in 1959-60.

SR was still very much in the Labour Party. In 1963, John Palmer, as a representative of the group in the Labour youth movement, the YS, declared: "The onus is on the YS to find a relationship with our Party which will radically reduce those frictions and clashes which are leaving such a bitter heritage in the ranks of young people joining the YS. One thing must be made clear above all. There is no future for the YS outside the Labour Party; our only hope is to find a relationship even more close to it than at present, but one which will allow us essential freedom as a youth movement".

But over the 1960s SR's orientation changed. In 1965-6 they would redefine themselves as being in the Labour Party only to look for an audience.

In 1958 the ISL in the USA stopped publishing its paper and its magazine when it fused with the Socialist Party. Around the same time the SR group published a big duplicated magazine called International Socialism. In advance they spelled out a number of things that they would do in that issue which in the event they didn't do: one of them was a project which eventually became Cliff's Luxemburg book.

There was only one issue of that magazine. Then in 1960 the group began publishing a printed International Socialism magazine. At first it was not an SR group publication. The editorial board involved young ILP, the group that became Solidarity (followers of Cornelius Castoriadis), the ex-SLL Stamford faction, the British Pablo-Mandelites, and even an incipient British Posadist, Theo Melville. It was quite an impressive magazine, with real discussion.

The first few issues dealt with matters that were of concern to the Trotskyist movement. It was a "sectarian" paper in the best sense of the world. There was some discussion with an ex-leader of the Healyite youth who had defected. But it was a hotch-potch. It included people who, if they would define themselves, were anarchists, and it included people who were Labour Party but dissatisfied. If you had to assess it overall, it was anarchist, with strange admixtures including Labourism.

But through the 1960s SR/IS grew in the Labour Party Young Socialists. In 1955 the Labour League of Youth had not been abolished, but all its national structures had been dismantled. That was reversed in 1959. The Labour Party Young Socialists was launched, and immediately became a battlefield for the Trotskyist groups.

SR started a youth paper, Young Guard, in 1961, to compete with Keep Left, the Healyite youth paper which had been published continuously since 1950. SR was allied in Young Guard with the Grant group, but dominated it politically. Socialist Review continued to appear until 1962, though now in a very small format, and then for a while they had little but Young Guard and the magazine. The group also got involved in campaigns like the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination and housing campaigns. It started a paper called Industrial Worker in 1961, which was just news of the factories, but that wasn't very satisfactory, so the group changed it to Labour Worker and made it a more general paper.

The IS magazine changed character when the SR group took it over fully in 1963. It became a very dull social-science-faculty magazine. But it was only in IS magazine of spring 1963 that Cliff squared his two theories of state capitalism (the one for Russia, and the one for China). He did it by way of arguing that the state was the only force that could raise sufficient capital to be able to function in the modern world.

Like the "permanent arms economy" idea, this idea of "Third World" statism was commonplace. For example, you will find in the SWP-USA magazine in 1954-5 in articles by Art Phillips, who I think was a member of the C L R James faction who stayed in the SWP when James quit, writing under the name David Miller. Other people like Joe Hansen also used the idea. Really the idea didn't cover Cliff's previous theory about Russia. It was a bit of factional line-squaring.

"Linking the fragments" mid and late 1960s

After the mid-1960s SR/IS drafted out of the Labour Party. They were still in the Young Socialists, and effectively they had control of the YS for a period after the Healyites absconded in 1964, though it was a very depleted YS. Militant did not yet have much presence. There would be at least one case of a YS branch joining IS en bloc.

Now IS started to develop a perspective based on industrial action. They published a book written by Cliff and Colin Barker, called "Incomes Policy, Legislation, and Shop Stewards", in 1966. It was sold to many contacts. It was heavily syndicalist.

It focused on rank-and-file workplace struggles, and more or less clearly suggested that linking-up and escalation of those workplace struggles was a sufficient strategy to achieve socialism.

There is a strange history to this question. The Healyites began to advocate a rank and file movement in 1957. It reflected their own base in the building industry. SR's riposte was a policy which they took, like much else, from the ILP: a proposal for creating industrial unions, breaking up the big conglomerate unions into industrial units. Whatever the merits of such a scheme, it had nothing to do with the central problem, which is that the trade unions have a well-paid bureaucracy and that bureaucracy has interests antagonistic to the needs of the rank and file. That bureaucracy exists in single-industry unions as well as in others.

The Healyites had a big industrial conference - big for the time - in late 1958, with 500 people the big majority of whom would have been real industrial militants. It created a stir in the bourgeois press. The Guardian became interested, and the Communist Party denounced the event right, left, and centre. There had been a big strike, for his role in which Brian Behan served six weeks in jail. Maybe the Healyites were a bit ultra-left. But the Cliffites responded not only by observing that but by publishing a vicious piece of quasi-witch-hunting.

SR followed the Healyites in many things. But not all. SR could often be very "soft". In 1958 there were racist riots in Notting Hill, in London. The Healyites raised the call for a trade-union-based workers' defence force. SR did not follow them on that! What they wanted was a Labour Party inquiry. SR were very careful not to stick their necks out, despite the ultra-left posturing.

Again, at the 22nd Congress of the ruling party in the USSR, in 1961, Khrushchev returned to his anti-Stalin theme, and gave a lot more detail. Cliff wrote an article on the 22nd Congress which was published in three variants - one in the US magazine New Politics, one in SR, and one in IS journal.

In the New Politics version, the longest of the three, he developed the perspective of "welfare state" state capitalism in the USSR. "The programme, in sum, is one of 'Welfare State Capitalism'." Cliff warned that "the transition from poor, aspiring state capitalism to mature 'welfare' state capitalism... will, at best, take decades... Communist Russia will probably never succeed in becoming a full fledged 'welfare' state capitalist society"; but he didn't question the direction of development, or see any reason why Khrushchev couldn't continue to make concessions until there would be in existence, under state-capitalist totalitarianism, a welfare system as there was in the West.

Another example was Michael Kidron's argument, when the Tories set up the National Economic Development Council in 1961-2 for three-way consultations between government, bosses, and unions on economic affairs, that it was "up to the Labour Movement's organisations to transfer their reformist activities to that administration and pay less single-minded attention to dying parliamentary institutions".

Of course, SR was always supportive of strikes. In the late 1950s SR had become strike-happy. There were lots and lots of articles calling for strikes in areas where they had no influence at all.

In the 1960s they began to talk about "the fragments". There was no viable overall movement, but only "fragments" of militancy, some of it in industry, some of it in other areas like housing struggles. It was all malarkey. There was a powerful and cohesive labour movement. SR/IS were using political, heavily-subjective, and arbitrary demarcations to "define away" the broad labour movement in which the militant "fragments" were firmly embedded.

The SR/IS idea around 1965-6 was that the job was to link the fragments. Now, if there were disconnected fragments (though in fact they were linked through the existing labour movement), then the job of linking the fragments was that of creating a party, in all but name. IS would put the cap on that train of thinking in 1968, with its turn then towards organising a party.

1968: growth and demagogy

In 1967-8 IS grew quickly because the Healy organisation was increasingly sectarian and increasingly bizarre. IS became a very disparate, chaotic organisation, and unbelievably demagogic in many ways. In April 1968 the Tory MP Enoch Powell made a vehement speech against immigration. The London dockers, who had been on a ten-week strike just recently, struck and marched supposedly in defence of Powell's right to free speech (he had been sacked from the Tory front bench), but in reality because they agreed with him. Cliff responded by talking about "the urgent threat of fascism".

That was nonsense, and I don't suppose Cliff believed it. But it was part of a "join IS" campaign. In 1968 IS also called suddenly for left unity, on a minimal four-point platform:

- (1) Opposition to imperialism; for the victory of all genuine national liberation movements.
- (2) Opposition to racism in all its forms and to controls on immigration.
- (3) Opposition to state control of trade unions; support for all progressive strikes.
- (4) Workers' control of society and industry as the only alternatives to fascism.

That too was blatantly demagogic. Who did they expect to unite with? The Militant group? The Healyites? They didn't in fact expect anybody. It was a come-on.

Workers' Fight had come into existence as a public organisation in October 1967. The editorial in the first issue of our magazine, which we then expanded and produced as a small pamphlet, was a call for Trotskyist regroupment. We believed, and we said, that the existing main organisations of Trotskyism were completely bankrupt, and we were calling for a regroupment of individual Trotskyists.

We didn't believe IS's talk about the urgent threat of fascism. But when they made their call for unity we responded, not because we believed their demagogy, but because IS was a relatively loose organisation, comparatively speaking a democratic organisation, and we could continue doing within it the work we had been doing separately, such things as workplace bulletins and campaigning against the Vietnam war.

After 1970

In 1970 the Tories unexpectedly won the general election. In IS in the run-up to the 1970 election there had been many different attitudes to the Labour Party. There were people who were against it in all conditions, and there were people who were very much for it.

Cliff's approach on that question illustrated IS's characteristic demagogy at that period. A snapshot: IS conference at the Beaver Hall in central London, Easter 1969.

IS has over 1000 members, mostly young, politically raw, uneducated people, full of life and enthusiasm and impatient of political restraint. Ultra-left, in the in-your-guts sense in which young people should be instinctively ultra-left. All they need is experience, political education, tempering, and the benefit of the political wisdom of the older comrades. But what will they get?

There is a dispute in the group about what to say in the next general election. Can we really call for a Labour vote? For Wilson's Labour government? Everybody, even those who think we should vote for the labour movement's party, hates the Labour Party. It is only nine or ten months since nine million French workers have staged a stupendous general strike and seized the factories. Things are heated and alarmingly confused at conference.

Cliff is called to speak and trots down the gangway to the lecture-room-style lowered stage in front. He grabs the microphone militantly, as if he's going to fight with it, body language exuding combativity and positively teenage impatience with political restraints.

"This", he said heatedly, "is an unnecessary discussion. We don't need it. You know why we don't need it? Because we won't take part in the blinking election when they call it. What'll we do? We'll call for a general strike, that's what we'll do! Not a general election, but a general strike!" Thunderous applause.

What happened when the election came? IS shouted: vote Labour.

The young people who needed calming down had been fed with amphetamines; those who needed political education, placated with political gibberish! But it "worked". Cliff knew how to handle them!

In 1970 we, the Trotskyist Tendency, were initially against a blanket vote for Labour: we said we should back only Labour candidates

loyal to the unions on issues like the laws to restrain strikes which Labour had tried and failed to introduce in 1969. But I think by the time of the election only three of us still held that position: Andrew Hornung, Rachel Lever, and me. All of us in the Trotskyist Tendency wanted IS to stand a candidate in a selected constituency and make a national campaign around it.

There's no doubt that our opposition to a general Labour vote was a mixture of miscalculation on our part and sheer hatred of the Labour Party. We would have to learn better. The IS majority demagogically finessed its differences, dismissed the idea of an IS candidacy, and came out with a slogan, "Vote Labour without illusions".

Under the Tory government, IS began to see opportunities for growth in the rising class struggle. Quickly the group became "anti-Tories". Everything bad was "Tory this" or "Tory that". This anti-Toryism was a long tradition going back to the Healyites.

The leaders now began to tighten up the organisation. Cliff as a "Luxemburgist" opposing Lenin was obviously free of any obligation to give any account of himself in Leninist terms, i.e. terms of scrupulous ideological accounting. So was the Cliff who had "returned to Lenin" in 1968.

The motivation, even the proclaimed motivation, was not any new drive for political clarity and coherence, but a mixture of administrative arguments about the need for some centralisation to run a group which was now much bigger, and organisational arguments about the need for a party machine to "link the fragments".

Lenin was not a guide; Lenin was a demagogic flag for centralising the group. Cliff was as free from Lenin when he was a "Leninist" as when he had been an "anti-Leninist".

Later he would start to use Lenin as a Cliff palimpsest, as a way of justifying himself. Someone joked about the multi-volume biography of Lenin which Cliff would publish from 1975 that it was a biography of Tony Cliff by Lenin. It was an enterprise in collecting texts and facts from Lenin's life so that they would fit whatever Cliff wanted to do.

Fundamentally what happened after 1970 was that the leadership sensed new opportunities and wanted to get the group - which in 1968-9 had been very chaotic - into shape. There was nothing to be condemned in them wanting to get the group into shape. The question is how they did it.

The dispute on Europe 1971

By mid-1971 there was a lot of bad feeling between the Trotskyist Tendency and the IS leadership. We had disputed with them on Ireland and other issues. What triggered their move to expel us was the question of the Common Market (as the European Union was called at that time).

The campaign to expel us took the form of a "de-fusion" campaign. It was done that way because the members would not have been quiet about a purge if it had not been dressed up. The leadership called a special conference, and we had a very fruitful six weeks to campaign against the expulsion.

It was a very democratic six weeks in its forms. Though in practice it was unbalanced and subject to the most god-awful demagogy, it did not seem obviously the end of a democratic regime. A lot of people voted for the expulsion who would not have voted for its implications.

When we pointed out the implications of confining the right opposition to episodic single issues, we were generally not believed. That was partly because among those supporting our expulsion were people who had been on the same side as us on the Common Market issue. The difference between them and us was that we had tried to requisition an IS special conference to stop Cliff changing the policy as he did.

The IS leadership carried the day at the conference, with 40% opposing them. About 35 of us refused to accept the ban on the faction. We had the option of going underground and pretending that our faction had dissolved, but we felt that doing that would simply dissipate our strength and miseducate people. So we went out of IS on 4 December 1971.

A few people who hadn't made their minds up then would join us later. One member of the Trotskyist Tendency decided to stay in the IS. He said that the differences were not big enough to justify the separation. On one level that was true: the initiative for the separation did not come from us.

We set about organising the group in the way it hadn't been organised as a tendency in IS. A couple of comrades, Phil Semp and the late Dave Spencer, remortgaged their houses and we bought a printing press. We rented an office and set out to produce a fortnightly paper.

We were suddenly faced with responding directly to a rising class struggle, and it was very invigorating. There was a miners' strike in early 1972, which was victorious. The closing of Saltley Gates, which was decisive in that strike, was about the time we produced the first issue of our paper.

1972-5

1972 must have been invigorating for IS too. But Cliff had whims, he had sudden inspirations, and now he found himself curtailed by a formal constitution. He was surrounded by people who were followers of Cliff, but also had a tendency to think for themselves, people like Jim Higgins and Ian Birchall and a few others.

IS expelled another opposition, the "Right Opposition", early in 1973 (on which more below), but continued to grow. Socialist Worker, edited by Roger Protz, was a pretty good paper. There were things wrong with it politically, but as a journalistic enterprise it was pretty good.

In 1971 IS had created a new type of general secretary. The group had always had a secretary, but in the minimal sense: the person had always been a lightweight, with no independent political influence. Now Duncan Hallas became national secretary. Hallas was clever; he was well-educated politically; his problem was that he had no guts. He had for example agreed with us in the dispute on Ireland in August 1969, but kept quiet because he didn't want to clash with Cliff.

For whatever reason, Hallas couldn't do the job, and he was soon replaced by Jim Higgins, who also was well-educated, capable of independent judgement, and with a labour-movement background. Higgins was the man who purged the Right Opposition. But then he and Cliff began to fall out.

The process would culminate in nearly all the old cadre of IS as it had been in 1970 being expelled or quitting in late 1975. There were differences on trade-union orientation. Cliff, now plainly taking the SLL of the previous decade as his model, pushed for a turn towards "raw youth who wanted to rip the head off capitalism". Higgins wanted a more patient approach with established trade unionists. I think that the essence of it was that Cliff was learning from the Healyites (selectively, of course) to break from the broad labour movement and build IS as an organisation revolving on its own axis. That didn't happen in one day or all at once, and there was resistance to it even after 1975.

A whole swathe of the cadres - Higgins was the representative figure - had been members of IS in the 1960s when it was an organisation which got off on skitting at the Healyites, jeering at them, mocking them, very sceptical, "Luxemburgist". That heritage was inimical to what Cliff was now trying to do. You can't build a Healyite organisation, sustained by verve, conviction, and intolerance, with the sort of cadres IS had had before 1968.

Cliff went through various manoeuvres, culminating in an exodus of the people around Higgins. They were expelled for refusing to dissolve their faction after the 1975 conference. It was an irony after their role in expelling us and the Right Opposition.

From that point on, IS was consolidated as a single-leader, rather cultist group, oriented to building its own organisation on any basis Cliff decided was usable. The group became highly centralised to the point that, some years down the track, an organiser could simply expel someone at will. The days when Cliff would boast that no more than four people had been expelled in the whole history of the group were no longer cited as a model!

The next great landmark came between April 1978 and 1980 when Cliff became convinced of the "downturn" and imposed that doctrine on the SWP. This "downturn" doctrine was a vastly premature giving up on the struggle. In this as in other things Cliff followed in the tracks of other people, in the first place of Eric Hobsbawm, who first put forward a similar thesis in March 1978.

The "downturn" period was, I think, the final nail in the process of making IS (from 1977, the SWP) a self-oriented sect. There had been a progression in the previous history of the group. They related to the Labour Party. Then they tried to relate to the rank-and-file industrial movement. They tried to relate to the shop stewards. They retreated and become more and more self-oriented. The shift comes to a sort of resting point in the declaration at the end of the 1970s that the labour movement had no more potential for struggle and nothing could be done except building the SWP.

In 1979, after Labour lost the election, a big upsurge began in the Labour Party, backed by some of the unions and even some of the union leaders. The phenomenon is known as "Bennism", though there was a lot more to it than that term would convey. The upsurge was really vibrant and alive at the beginning of the 1980s - and the SWP stood aloof. They coined an idiotic witticism to explain why they would not join the Labour left: if you want to push a wheelbarrow, you don't sit in it.

In the great miners' strike of 1984-5, Cliff would write: "The miners' strike is an extreme example of what we in the Socialist Workers Party have called the 'downturn' in the movement" (Socialist Worker, 14 April 1984).

Week after week in the early months of the strike, when it was very buoyant, Socialist Worker would deplore its shortcomings and comment sadly that it was going ill. In June it saw it as almost lost. "The chance was lost to rejuvenate a strike which has been drifting towards a 'compromise' settlement".

Until October 1984, it deplored the miners' support groups set up by many trades councils and Labour Parties as "left-wing Oxfam". Throughout it ignored the calls for a general strike and for wider strike action by many people in the labour movement, and polemicalised against the idea of a general strike as only sectarian hot air.

Only after October 1984 did the SWP correct itself, and then only partly.

Chronology

1940, April: the Trotskyist movement splits, in the USA and internationally, between those who "defend" the USSR invading Finland (led by James P Cannon) and those who reject such defence (led by Max Shachtman). Over the next decade this split between "orthodox" Trotskyists (Cannon and others) and "Third Camp" Trotskyists (Shachtman and others) will widen and consolidate.

1946, September: Tony Cliff comes to Britain, and joins the majority faction of the British Trotskyist movement (the RCP), led by Jock Haston and Ted Grant.

1947: The minority of the British Trotskyists, led by Gerry Healy, separate from the RCP majority in order to begin systematic work in the Labour Party around the paper Socialist Outlook. Cliff moves to Dublin (until 1951).

1948, June: Cliff publishes first version of "Russia: A Marxist Analysis".

1949, August: The RCP collapses; its members join the Labour Party and are reunited with the Healy group there.

1950, June: Korean war starts.

1950, September: Supporters of Tony Cliff expelled from the British Trotskyist group in the Labour Party, led by Gerry Healy, and form their own "Socialist Review" (SR) group. 33 members.

1951, November: Labour loses election. Tories take office (until 1964). Big left movement ("Bevanism") develops in the local Labour Parties.

1953: Crisis in SR group: paper appears only with big gaps.

1956, February: Khrushchev denounces Stalin. Over the next couple of years a big crisis develops in the British Communist Party. Meanwhile, from 1955 strike activity (mostly local, short, and unofficial) increases (average 2,069,000 striker-days per year 1945-54; 4,601,000 1955-59).

1957, January: Healyites launch much-expanded magazine, Labour Review. In May they launch a new paper, The Newsletter.

1958-60: SR group much eclipsed by Healyites; has crisis in 1959: redefines itself as "Luxemburgist".

1960: Labour Party relaunches Young Socialists; all the Trotskyist groups will grow with recruits from the YS; nuclear disarmament movement also flourishes.

1960, Easter: International Socialism magazine launched. Initially wide editorial board, way beyond SR. A single previous issue had appeared in 1958.

1961: Young Guard launched (paper for YS also including the future Militant but dominated by SR). SR also launches Industrial Worker, soon renamed Labour Worker.

1962: SR ceases publication; group takes the name IS.

1964, October: Labour returns to office (until 1970). After about 1968 disillusion with Labour will become angry and widespread. In 1964 Healyites pull out of Labour Party to launch their own youth movement (they had won the majority in the official YS). IS left with majority of YS.

1965-6: IS shifts to more detached attitude to Labour Party: between 1966 and 1968 it will drift out, bit by bit. By the end of 1965 IS has increased to 200 members, from a couple of dozen in late 1950s to 200. It shifts to an orientation to "linking the fragments" of (mostly industrial) militancy.

1966, August: Founding nucleus of what would become Workers' Fight, and today the AWL, breaks from Militant group and publishes its document What We Are And What Must Become.

1968, May-June: Name of Labour Worker changed to Socialist Worker (and in September SW goes weekly). IS responds to anti-immigrant speech by Tory politician Enoch Powell by proclaiming "urgent threat of fascism" and calling for left unity on the basis of four points. IS is growing fast - maybe 1000 by the end of 1968.

1968, June: Cliff calls for democratic centralism.

1968, December: Workers' Fight merges with IS.

1969, August (and after): sharp dispute between Workers' Fight (Trotskyist Tendency) and IS leaders over IS leaders' effective support for deployment of British troops in Northern Ireland

1971, June: IS switches from its previous line on Europe, "In or out, the fight goes on", to "No to the Common Market". The shift is first proposed as a tactical fallback (vote no if your internationalist resolution has been defeated in your union branch), but soon becomes IS policy; the old line disappears.

1971, December: IS expels ("de-fuses") Workers' Fight at a special conference.

1973, April: IS expels the "Right Opposition" on the following grounds: "The undeclared Right grouping within IS is fundamentally out of consonance with IS politics, programme, strategy and tactics... The NC therefore resolves to expel the main proponents..."

1973, summer: crisis in IS leadership - EC purged - Higgins and others in opposition.

1974, February: Tories fall, Labour government elected. SWP policy of "steering left" (ultra-militancy).

1974, March: IS organises first national Rank and File conference. Votes down amendment, moved by Workers' Fight, for commitment against racism, for abortion rights, for expropriation.

1975, December: IS expels the IS Opposition (Jim Higgins, Stephen Marks, John Palmer, etc.) on grounds of refusing to dissolve their faction after conference. Many of IS's manual trade unionists quit.

1976, December: IS proclaims the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP).

1977, August: Anti-fascist "Battle of Lewisham"

1977, November: SWP launches Anti-Nazi League ("alternative to street-fighting")

1977, November: Third (and last) national Rank and File conference declares one-day general strike for 7 December in support of the fire-fighters, then on strike. Complete failure.

1978, April: Cliff starts arguing "downturn" thesis.

1979, May: Labour loses election, Thatcher takes power.

1979, November: SWP conference formally adopts "downturn" thesis.

1980: Rank and file left-wing rebellion explodes in the Labour Party. SWP aloof.

1984, April: Tony Cliff says that the miners' strike, then in its fourth week and still on the up and up. "is an extreme example of what we in the Socialist Workers' Party have called the 'downturn' in the movement".

1985, March: Student Jewish society banned at Sunderland Polytechnic because it will not disavow Zionism. SWP evasive but sympathetic to ban.

1986, October: SWP publishes pamphlet, "Israel: The Hijack State" (with cover pic of Israel as mad dog dragging along Uncle Sam).

1987, September: SWP switches line on Iran/Iraq war (raging since 1980) to support for Iran.

1988 June: SWP announces the end of the "downturn" and its replacement by the "new mood of anger".

1992, October: SWP demands "General Strike Now/ TUC must act" against new pit closures.

1993, July: SWP beats up AWL member Mark Sandell for leafleting at SWP summer event.

1997: SWP repositions itself as those who "hate the Tories but have doubts about Blair".

2000 to 2003: SWP participates in London Socialist Alliance, then Socialist Alliance, with AWL and others.

2000, April: Tony Cliff dies.

2001: SWP expels ISO-USA from its international network.

2002, April: SWP signals full-scale turn towards Islamism by uncritically backing Muslim Association of Britain demonstration against Israel

2004, January, to 2007, September: SWP in Respect coalition with George Galloway, and then ejected by Galloway (who takes a few prominent SWPers with him). SWP leadership scapegoats John Rees for the fiasco.

2010, February: John Rees, Lindsey German and others quit SWP, form Counterfire.

2011, April: Chris Bambery quits SWP, forms ISG.