



?Neither Washington nor Moscow? The view from the third camp

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Conflicts between imperialism and petit bourgeois nationalist and Stalinist-led forces in the semi-colonial world have raged throughout the post-war era. From Korea in the 1950s through to Afghanistan in the 1980s revolutionaries had to declare which side they were on. Here, Dave Hughes asks this question of the SWP and its forerunners.

The theory of state capitalism has led Cliff and his various groups into fundamental errors over a series of post-war conflicts. Cliff's first organisation was built around the journal *Socialist Review* (SR), which began publication in November 1950, inside the Labour Party. It was the first publication to appear from this stable after Cliff's break with the Fourth International (FI).

To this day the leaders of the SWP take much pleasure in ridiculing the inability of the FI to come to terms with the nature of the world at the end of the Second World War. Certainly it was true that the majority of the FI proved incapable of recognising that Stalinism emerged from the war strengthened and that imperialism, re-ordered internationally under US hegemony, was set for a sustained period of economic recovery.

It was also the case that increasingly after 1948 the FI revised the Trotskyist critique of Stalinism and abandoned the view that the Stalinist bureaucracy was counter-revolutionary. However, Cliff's view that Russia was state capitalist and that the world had been divided into two giant capitalist camps provided no better a view of the post war world.

It shared with the FI the belief in an imminent "Third World War". Also it failed to develop a revolutionary strategy independent of both Stalinism and imperialism. While the FI's programmatic degeneration led to capitulation, primarily to Stalinist and petit bourgeois nationalist currents, the state capitalists' 'alternative' ended up capitulating to imperialism under the guise of "third campism".

According to the early SR both Truman's America and Stalin's Russia were being propelled by the same motive force in their drive for world domination. Conflict between the two imperialisms threatened mankind with the more or less immediate prospect of a new--albeit atomic--world war. As SR No 1 declared:

"The 'Peace' Campaign of Stalin's Russia is no less hypocritical than Truman's 'Defence of Democracy' . . . in their mad rush for profit, for wealth, the two gigantic imperialist powers are threatening humanity with the terrible suffering of atomic war." (SR Vol 1, No 1, November 1950)

The Cliffites thus accepted the view that the Stalinist bureaucracy was an expansionist class set on global domination at the expense of Truman's America. This echoing of Cold War propaganda was the constant refrain of the Socialist Review Group (SRG) throughout the early 1950s. In 1954 it was declaring that the two powers were driven towards war with each other by their respective economic problems. Overproduction was increasingly presenting US capitalism with a stark choice:

"Slump or war are the two alternatives facing western monopoly capitalism, and faced with this choice, there is no doubt what the ruling classes of the west will choose." (SR Vol 3, No 7)

Notwithstanding the 'fact' that the Soviet Union was supposedly capitalist as well and propelled by the same laws of

motion as the USA, the USSR was depicted as heading to war for different reasons. Underproduction and economic shortages were driving the Soviet bureaucracy towards war by making a grab for Western Europe ever more attractive to the Kremlin:

"The crisis of underproduction pushes Moscow to imperialist expansion. How magnificent the dream of establishing SAGs or mixed companies in Western Europe!" (ibid)

When Soviet withdrawal from Austria, in exchange for guarantees of neutrality on the part of the Austrian bourgeoisie, seemed to confound SR's perspective, and demonstrated the class collaboration of the Soviet bureaucracy, the journal argued that this was only a temporary turn occasioned by the industrialisation of China and its demands for more steel: China's need for steel may still push the Kremlin to invade Western Europe later, so SR claimed.

In fact the SRG's characterisation of the Soviet Union as a state capitalist and expansionist imperialist power gave rise to a totally false understanding of the nature of Stalinism. All the evidence, from Stalin's foreign policy and from the Soviet Union's attitude to revolutionary situations which threatened capitalist dominance, demonstrated a totally different role for Stalinism than that ascribed to it by the Cliffites.

Far from being an expansionist force looking for every opportunity to extend its rule at the expense of western imperialism, the Soviet bureaucracy demonstrated in the post-war years, that it was a social formation bent on international class collaboration and compromise with the imperialist bourgeoisie. Not only did Soviet withdrawal from Austria contradict Cliff's schemas, but in both Greece and Indo-China Stalin demonstrated his intention of maintaining his pact with the bourgeoisie on "spheres of influence" by sabotaging the struggle against imperialism. In Eastern Europe the bourgeoisie was kept in power after the war and no steps were taken to ensure a Stalinist take-over until after the offensive launched by Truman in 1947.

The "Truman Doctrine", promising military intervention anywhere in the world "threatened by communism" combined with the economic offensive of Marshall Aid, aimed at Eastern as well as Western Europe, faced the Soviet Union with a choice. It could either retreat from Eastern Europe, thus massively weakening its own position in the face of an imperialist offensive, or complete a Stalinist overthrow of capitalism. It chose the latter.

Yet even during the US-led Cold War offensive Stalin continued to demonstrate his reluctance to overthrow capitalist property relations. Until the eleventh hour he repeatedly advised Mao against toppling Chiang Kai Shek's disintegrating regime. The USSR handed back its part of Austria in return for the country's neutrality and proposed the same for Germany--i.e. a reunified, capitalist, but disarmed and neutral country.

The Third Camp

This did not fit in with the SRG's analysis of Soviet expansionism, but their analysis did fit in very well with a group which wanted to swim with the stream in Cold War Britain. The political consequence of this view for the SRG was that a conflict between the USA and the USSR was a conflict between two imperialisms and as such it was necessary to adopt a position of neutrality in the conflicts between them. (In fact SR's pages were heavily weighted towards anti-Soviet propaganda during this period, with a regular series of articles from Tony Cliff on the miseries of life in the USSR).

This neutrality took the form of a commitment to building a "Third Camp" under the slogan raised in the first issue of SR: "Neither Washington nor Moscow, but international Socialism". SR was not the first to raise the idea of a "third camp"--it was the stock in trade of the Tribune group. Figures such as Foot, Mikardo and Crossman denounced Soviet and western imperialism with gusto. But with the Cold War, these social democrats loyally trooped behind NATO and the Anglo-American alliance. It was the Cliffites who picked up the rhetoric and bolstered it with state capitalist theory. Not surprisingly the call for a third camp was raised first in SR by one Stan Newens (later a leading Tribunate MP) in the following fashion:

"The present power of the two world camps is largely based on the dragooning by force and trickery of the many by the

few. Let us set up our standard against all such methods and lead the way to working for a genuine international socialism--not for Washington, nor for Moscow." (SR Vol 3, No 4)

For the SRG the slogan "Neither Washington nor Moscow" suited the prejudices of the left reformist current in the Labour Party, in which they were immersed, very well. It led the SRG into alliance with a motley variety of political tendencies. SR of October 1955 carries a favourable report of a "Third Way is the Only Way" international conference attended by 110 delegates.

While it is silent as to which organisations were represented the nature of SR's allies is made clear in its pages over the next months. The October 1955 issue contains an article by Max Shachtman extolling the "third way". By May 1956 SR carried--as a supplement--Tony Cliff's "The future of the Russian empire" published by Labour Action Shachtman's (US paper) in collaboration with SR.

The Shachtmanites did not hang around in the "third camp" for very long. They were very soon declaring Soviet totalitarianism a greater threat to socialism than US democracy, and putting themselves firmly in the camp of US imperialism. But it was not only the Shachtman group that rallied to the banner of the "third way". It also attracted the anti-Leninist libertarian "Socialisme ou Barbarie" of P Cardan whose material also appeared in SR and early issues of International Socialism. The Third Camp conference proved a rallying point for libertarians and social democrats who, ultimately, had nothing in common except their hostility, both to the Kremlin bureaucracy and revolutionary Leninism.

Even if the Cliffites pulled back from the logic of Shachtman and Newens' Third Camp position they nevertheless ended up by refusing to support genuine struggles against imperialism. Their slogan for "International Socialism" was never given a revolutionary communist meaning in the actual struggles against imperialism. This would have meant developing slogans and tactics which both supported unconditionally the struggle against imperialism and aimed to mobilise the working masses against Stalinist counter-revolution. It remained instead a political fig leaf to cover their refusal to give support in the struggle against imperialism. Nowhere was this more clearly demonstrated than in the Korean War.

Neutral in the Korean war

The formation of the SRG coincided with the onset of the Korean War. The programmatic conclusions that logically flow from state capitalist theory meant that the SRG inevitably adopted a position in that conflict that failed to distinguish between Stalinist-led struggles for national liberation against imperialism and the forces of imperialism itself. The Communist Parties were seen as agents of Kremlin imperialism--or as SR No 2 (January 1951) called them "Moscow's Foreign Legion".

At the end of the Second World War Soviet and US forces occupied Korea. At the same time "Committees of Preparation for National Independence" mushroomed throughout Korea predominantly under Stalinist leadership. An all-Korean People's Republic government was declared on 6 September 1945. The USA refused to recognise this government and created its own under the much despised emigre rightist Syngman Rhee. The ensuing conflict between the Northern, Soviet backed and Southern, US backed governments was therefore a form of civil war in Korea within which the northern Stalinist regime had the leadership of those forces fighting imperialism and its agents.

When direct military hostilities broke out between the two regimes and the Northern armies overran the South in June, it should not have been difficult for revolutionaries to see which side they were on. They would have been for a victory of the North against the Rhee puppet regime and its US backers. And when--under the cloak of a UN peace keeping force--the USA poured troops into Korea and provoked a direct military conflict with China, it should have been even easier for any socialist not blinded by cold war anti-communist hysteria to know what side to take.

Revolutionary socialists should have unconditionally defended the North Koreans and their Kremlin allies on the recognition that a defeat inflicted upon the really expansionist USA would have been a massive blow to its plans. Unlike the SRG it was necessary to draw a distinction between the Stalinist leadership (which eventually sold the

struggle short) and the popular mass forces involved, striving to overthrow a hated regime. Defending North Korea and seeking to win the leadership of the Korean masses were complementary not contradictory tasks.

The SRG, however, proceeded to demonstrate quite how reactionary the programmatic conclusions of the theory of state capitalism really are. SR took a predictable and logical view of the conflict. In an article entitled "The struggle of the powers" R Tennant declared that, "The war in Korea serves the great powers as a rehearsal for their intended struggle for the redivision of the globe." (SR Vol 1, No 2, January 1950) and in an attack on Socialist Outlook's (a paper run by Gerry Healy) support for North Korea Bill Ainsworth talked of "our opinion . . . that Russia no less than the USA, is imperialist and bent on world domination". (ibid) It followed that:

"We can, therefore, give no support to either camp since the war will not achieve, the declared aims of either side. Further, so long as the two governments are what they are, viz, puppets of the two big powers, the Korean socialists can give no support to their respective puppet governments." (SR Vol 1, No 2, January 1951)

The Korean position was not a blunder inadvertently committed by an innocent, fledgling organisation. It flowed logically from the theory of state capitalism. The SRG drew exactly the same conclusion from a similar conflict in Vietnam between Stalinist led anti-imperialist forces under Ho Chi Minh and imperialism's puppet Bao-Dai. In February 1952 they printed and entirely endorsed a statement of the French La Lutte that declared:

"In Korea, the war continues in spite of the parties for an armistice in which, of course, the Korean people have no say. In Vietnam, likewise, the war continues and the people vomit with disgust at both Bao-Dai, the tool of the colonialists, and at Ho Chi Minh, the agent of Stalin." (SR Vol 1, No 7)

The Cuban revolution demonstrated the reactionary logic of state capitalism as once again the Cliffites turned their face against those struggling to defeat imperialism. In the face of a US economic and military blockade the Castro regime proceeded to expropriate US holdings and reorganise the Cuban economy on the basis of bureaucratically planned property relations modelled on those of the USSR. At the same time Castro adopted the Stalinist model of state and party.

The Soviet bureaucracy moved to support the Castroite regime with the threat to place Soviet missiles in Cuba which would have served both to extend the international bargaining position of the Soviet bureaucracy and defend the Cuban revolution against imperialist counter-revolution. Cold War warriors and pacifists alike raised a hue and cry against Castro's "undemocratic regime" and against the shipment of Soviet arms to Cuba. So too did Cliff's renamed International Socialism group (IS).

The Cliffites took Soviet economic aid to the blockaded Castro regime as evidence that dynamic Soviet capitalism was now ready to do battle for the markets of US imperialism. Doubtless hoping that the USSR was about to indulge in some real capitalist competition. An IS editorial, entitled "From Cold War to price war" took increased Soviet trade with India and the shipping of Russian oil to Havana to indicate that:

"Russian oil exports look to be the harbinger of mighty economic conflicts between the giants of capital on either side of the Iron Curtain." (IS No 3, Autumn 1960)

Mirroring Khrushchev's pompous fantasies about the USSR being poised to outstrip the west economically, the editors continued:

"There seems to be a growing realisation that Russia is beginning to present an economic challenge to western capitalism potentially far more persuasive and threatening than the politico-military challenge of recent years." (ibid)

As long as the Castroites steered clear of Russian aid the editorial offices of International Socialism were prepared to support them. IS No 6 (NB. there were two number sixes) argued that:

"The pressure on Cuba towards integration into the Soviet bloc will exert pressure towards bureaucratisation of the revolution. But this, so all the evidence seems to show has not yet happened . . . The Cubans only turn to Russian power because there is no power of the international working class for them to turn to. Our defence of the Cuban revolution could itself be a step, even a small one, towards creating such a power."

Cliff's "Third Campism" could not deliver oil or guns. Neither could it break an American blockade. As soon as the Castroites looked to Soviet aid in order to defend themselves the Cliffites deserted the Cuban revolution.

To cover their retreat a series of articles were printed by Sergio Junco pushing the view that Cuba had none of the features of a workers' state and thus deserved no support against the USA. Following in Shachtman's footsteps Junco very soon decided that because Castro's internal regime was repressive, it represented a form of society lower than that achieved in the bourgeois democracies.

He spelt out his position in the pages of Young Guard (IS Youth Paper in LPYS):

"Given the fact that there has never been any popular control of revolutionary institutions in Cuba, it makes no sense to say that this is a socialist or even a progressive society. Nationalism is conducive to socialism only when there exists a state which is owned and controlled by the majority of the people. Otherwise, we get a type of state and society which is less progressive than say, liberal democracy, since in the latter the popular forces are able to organise and actively work for the earliest possible substitution of the system." ("Cuba and socialism", Young Guard No 4, December 1961, emphasis in original)

It was IS members, most notably Paul Foot, who sprang to Junco's support in the face of criticism in the pages of the paper.

If the political forms adopted by the Castroites had already turned the Cliffites off the Cuban revolution, the dispatch of Soviet atomic weapons completed the retreat of the IS into their neutralist corner. While being perfectly aware that the Soviet Union assists anti-imperialist struggles only to the extent that it can safeguard its own privileges and security, we would defend the right of anti-imperialist struggles to defend themselves by any means--including Soviet weapons.

In the face of US imperialism's military might the Castroites really had little choice but to seek Soviet aid. In this situation the IS fulminated with liberal pacifist rage. Once again the conflict was seen as simply a conflict between two imperialist superpowers:

"The terrible fact was that the Cuban people and the rest of us were held to ransom from both sides of the Iron Curtain. If that has not laid the myth that rocketry on one side of the curtain is somehow more humane and defensible than it is on the other, nothing short of war?" ("Cuban lessons", IS 10, Winter 62-63)

Once again, therefore, the third campists declared themselves against both the USA and the USSR. Young Guard raised the slogan: "All hands off Cuba, no war over Cuba." (Young Guard No 13, November 1962) The pacifist Paul Foot denied any legitimacy to Soviet nuclear backing for Cuba. Instead he begged his readers:

"Socialists must ask the question: Why did Russia establish nuclear bases on Cuba and more important what political justification was there for doing it?" (Young Guard No 15)

In one sense he was right, his problem was that he could not answer his own set questions. In order to defend itself the Soviet bureaucracy was - in certain circumstances - prepared to extend that portion of the globe that is not directly open to imperialist exploitation. It does not do so because it is a revolutionary force but because the very property relations upon which it rests are in permanent antagonism with the interests and nature of world imperialism.

Soviet military backing for Cuba was not a nuclear umbrella for a capitalist price war. It was a means of increasing the strength of the Soviet bureaucracy through military advantage by underwriting the defence of another (degenerate) workers' state.

From Korea to Vietnam

The theory of state capitalism logically led the SRG and the IS to argue against support for anti-imperialist struggles that were led by Stalinists. On the surface therefore, the IS group's support for the Vietnamese NLF's struggle against US imperialism may seem either inconsistent or even a healthy break with the positions adopted on Korea and Cuba. This seeming inconsistency is easily explained by other consistent elements in the tradition and method of the Cliffites.

As a political tendency they have accommodated to every prevailing wind on the British left. Their position on Korea reflected and adapted to, the fierce climate of Cold War anti-communism of the early 1950s. The Cuban missile crisis coincided with the growth of CND first time round. The IS group's denunciation of the nuclear arms race, their rejection of any legitimate role for nuclear weapons as a defence against imperialism reflects its accommodation to the CND milieu in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Things had changed quite drastically by the late 1960s however. The Vietnam war had become an inspiration to thousands of youth. To have called for opposition to both North and South, and for a plague on the Stalinist-led Vietcong, would have been programmatically consistent for the IS. But with theoretical consistency threatening to isolate the IS the Cliffites threw themselves in behind "support for the NLF and a North Vietnamese victory". (IS 32)

They declared the Vietnam War to be unlike previous Cold War conflicts:

"The Vietnam war does not fit neatly into the pattern of belligerent incidents between east and west since the war. Such incidents were often the result of direct confrontation between the major powers, each jostling for military or strategic advantage along the undemarcated border between their respective empires--the raw wound that ran through Central Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East and South East Asia." (IS 32)

The small scale of Soviet and Chinese backing at this time was sufficient for the IS group to salve their consciences and decide that China and the USSR were not involved. As a result of this view of Indo-China it was not difficult for the IS to immerse itself in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign as supporters of the Vietnamese Stalinists they had refused to support in the early 1950s.

In defending their decision to back the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong against the USA, the IS had to plumb the depths of state capitalist logic. The IS journal declared that it was giving support:

"In the same way, socialists were required in the nineteenth century to support bourgeois liberal movements against feudal or absolutist regimes." (IS 32)

Only bourgeois tasks were on the agenda of the Vietnamese revolution:

"Of course, when the issue of American power is settled, we know what kind of regime and policies the NLF will choose--and be forced to choose by the logic of their situation. But that is, for the moment, another fight, the real fight for socialism." (ibid, emphasis in original)

For the state capitalist theorists then, the fight against capitalism was relegated as a later stage of the Vietnamese revolution.

The Vietnam episode brings to light another essential programmatic ingredient of state capitalist theory--its Menshevik position on the possibilities for socialist advance in the under-developed and "backward" countries. For the Mensheviks every underdeveloped country had to experience a stage of bourgeois capitalist development.

The 1950s and 1960s saw important nationalist movements against imperialism in Egypt and Algeria as well as in Indo-China. Large sections of the centrist and reformist left presumed that this signified a decisive shift in the terrain of the class struggle to a struggle between the "first" and "third" worlds. Against this impressionistic and defeatist "third worldism" the IS constructed their own, no less one-sided, metropolitan centred view of the world. The positions

developed by the Cliff grouping in the 1950s and 1960s effectively deny the possibility of the struggle for socialism, for workers' revolution in the semi-colonial world.

In his initial work on Russia Cliff had declared that state capitalism in Russia was inevitable given the revolution's isolation and the need to industrialise in order to survive in a hostile environment. In his analysis explicitly states that the only two realistic economic programmes open for Russia in the 1920s were private capitalism or state capitalism.

This is how he explains it:

"One solution to the conflict between state industry and individualist agriculture would have been to make the development of industry depend on the rate at which agricultural surpluses developed. It would have inevitably led to a victory of private capitalism throughout the economy. Alternatively the conflict between industry and agriculture might have been resolved by rapid industrialisation based on 'primitive accumulation' by expropriating the peasants and forcing them into large mechanised farms thus releasing labour power for industry and making agricultural surpluses available for the urban population." (T Cliff, *Russia: A Marxist Analysis*, p97)

Prospects for the semi-colonies

Cliff wrongly argued that the subordination of consumption to the accumulation of the means of production was ipso facto a capitalist task. The implications of this is that in societies where pre-capitalist modes of production dominate, or where capitalism is weak, a stage of private or state capitalism is inevitable, unless a revolution in such a country is accompanied by other revolutions in the advanced capitalist world.

This explains the apparent indifference that the IS showed at the prospects of a Stalinist victory in Vietnam--after all what else could be hoped for? Certainly not a genuine workers' revolution.

The IS theorised this view systematically in the 1960s. It accompanied, necessarily, a thoroughgoing and explicit junking of Lenin's theory of imperialism and Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. By 1962 Michael Kidron was declaring that imperialism was now the "highest stage but one", having been replaced as a world system by the "permanent arms economy" (i.e. military competition) as the fundamental motor maintaining stability and expansion in the major capitalist economies:

"It [Lenin's imperialism] must be rejected on at least four counts: finance capital is not nearly as important for and within the system as it was; the export of capital is no longer of great importance to the system; political control, in the direct sense meant by Lenin, is rapidly becoming dated; and finally, resulting from these, we don't have imperialism but we still have capitalism . . . If anything it is the permanent war and arms economies that are 'the highest stage of capitalism . . .'" (IS 20, Spring 1965)

Kidron argued that imperialism had suffered the loss of its colonies "without disaster, without indeed much dislocation or discomfort". He even refers to the "spontaneous withdrawal of classic imperialism" from the colonies. Imperialist relationships, we are told, were being replaced by new relationships:

"Now, after independence, despite many points of friction and competition that remain, the overriding element is one of mutual independence and convenience." (IS 20)

Leaving aside this bizarre view of the relationship between the imperialist and imperialised world which would do more credit to a White House briefing than an article written by a socialist, the programmatic implications for the underdeveloped world were stark. Whereas both Lenin and Trotsky had seen a vital role for the working class in leading the struggle against imperialism, because of the weakness of the national bourgeoisie and its enmeshing in world imperialism, now, according to Kidron, "the national bourgeoisie--or failing it, the national bureaucracy--has been rescued from oblivion by imperialism's withdrawal". (IS 20)

Kidron goes on to muse that it might well be that the only form through which capitalism can triumph, "in large

sections of the world is through state initiative and bureaucratic state capitalism--and the destruction of its bourgeois democratic cousin and rival". (IS 20)

One result of these developments he argues is "the growing irrelevance of national struggles". If Kidron poses this development of state capitalism as a possibility, Tony Cliff has no such doubts. Drawing on the "experience" of the Chinese and Cuban revolutions, Cliff states forthrightly that Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution, whereby the working class can lead the struggle of the oppressed masses both against imperialism and for socialism, is no longer tenable. Trotsky he argues was clearly wrong in assuming "the revolutionary character of the young working class" in these countries:

"In many cases the existence of a floating, amorphous majority of new workers with one foot in the countryside creates difficulties for autonomous proletarian organisations: lack of experience and illiteracy add to their weakness. This leads to yet another weakness: dependence on non-workers for leadership. Trade unions in the backward countries are almost always led by outsiders . . . Once the constantly revolutionary nature of the working class, the central pillar of Trotsky's theory becomes suspect, the whole structure falls to pieces . . . the peasantry cannot follow a non-revolutionary working class." ("Permanent Revolution", IS No 12 Spring 1963).

"Deflected permanent revolution

In this situation according to Cliff, the intelligentsia of the underdeveloped world is ready and able to constitute itself as an embryonic new state capitalist class and "deflect" the permanent revolution into a stage of totalitarian state capitalist development. In Vietnam what was at stake was the construction of "a state-class, not a private or bourgeois class, that is spearheaded by the NLF and has already been instituted in the North." (IS 32)

Throughout the underdeveloped world the intelligentsia:

". . . care a lot for measures to drag their nation out of stagnation but very little for democracy. They embody the drive for industrialisation, for capital accumulation, for national resurgence. Their power is in direct relation to the feebleness of other classes, and their political nullity. All this makes totalitarian state capitalism a very attractive goal for intellectuals." (IS 12)

So having distorted Marx's analysis of capitalism, junked Lenin's theory of imperialism and abandoned Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, the Cliff grouping rounds off its complete rejection of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky by abandoning the revolutionary potential of the working class in the vast majority of the globe! There only remains for these metropolitan chauvinists the "pure" working class of the advanced industrial world.

The leading theoreticians of the IS grouping here demonstrate once again the inability of their theory to provide a way forward for the international proletariat. The special nature and difficulties of the proletariat in the semi-colonial world are nothing new for revolutionaries. Indeed, despite Russia's position as an "old" imperialist power, the country's very backwardness meant that its working class showed many of the characteristics which Cliff believes should make us write off the revolutionary potential of the working class in the imperialised world.

The ability of the Bolsheviks to lead a socialist revolution in such a "backward" country was not, as Cliff believes, because of Lenin's organisational genius, but because the Bolshevik party developed a political programme, tactics and strategy which was able to unite the working class behind a revolutionary perspective and draw the peasantry behind it. By rejecting the theory of imperialism and consequently seeing only the "growing irrelevance of national struggles", the SWP abandons the major weapon in the fight for socialist revolution in the semi-colonies--it abandons the fight for working class leadership in the national struggles against imperialism.

But, of course, it is only to be expected from this grouping, steeped as it is in syndicalism and economism, that once they had decided the working class in the semi-colonies was not spontaneously revolutionary they would write off the possibilities of socialist revolution in these countries.

For Cliff, however, the non-revolutionary nature of the working class in these countries does not mean that there will be no revolution:

"A concatenation of national and international circumstances makes it imperative for the productive forces to break the fetters of feudalism and imperialism." (ibid)

But these revolutions will not be led by the working class but by the much more cohesive "revolutionary intelligentsia" who are attracted to "totalitarian state capitalism":

"These forces which should lead to a socialist workers' revolution according to Trotsky's theory can lead, in the absence of the revolutionary subject, the proletariat, to its opposite, state capitalism . . . Mao and Castro's rise to power are classic, the purest and most extreme demonstration of deflected permanent revolution. Other colonial revolutions--China, India, Egypt, Indonesia, Algeria etc. are deviations from the norm . . . but they can best be understood when approached from the standpoint of, and compared with the norm." (ibid)

So the best that the semi-colonial world can hope for in their struggles against the oppression of feudalism and imperialism is their replacement by some form, pure or otherwise, of "totalitarian state capitalism". The only hope that the Cliffites offer for the masses of these countries is that in the "long run", under these regimes they might well increase in "numbers, cohesion and social weight". And presumably once they reach the level of the industrialised west they too can have a socialist revolution!

Thus in the mighty struggles against imperialism, in Algeria, in Cuba, in Vietnam and Indo-China, in Nicaragua and Central America today, the SWP's programme offers no goal worth fighting for.

They are left only with a chronic fatalism, with the belief that all these struggles can only end in tears, in a new exploiting, totalitarian system. This fatalism was most clearly summed up in a notorious article by Kidron on the LSSP of Ceylon (the LSSP was an ex-USFI section, then part of a "socialist" coalition government). Kidron argued in his article, entitled "Tropical Trotskyism", that the difficulties facing Ceylon in escaping from semi-colonial servitude were insurmountable.

This is all he had to offer the workers and peasants by way of perspectives:

"If the transition (to a modern competitive economy) is to be made at all--and it is undeniably necessary--productivity will have to be jacked up and wages held down. There is no alternative. All the LSSP can hope for is that the workers will make the sacrifice willingly." (Socialist Worker, 3 July 1969)

It is a measure of the bankruptcy of state capitalist theory that what started life as a theorisation of moral outrage at the horrors of Stalin's Russia became a rationalisation of the inevitability of state capitalism except in that portion of the globe where productive forces were ripe enough for the immediate transition to socialism. State capitalist theory has proven itself to have no real understanding of the dynamics of international class struggle. On each occasion the state capitalists have done little more than retail the options and moods of western radicalism.

It has led the SWP to adopt reactionary positions on major struggles in the post-war world. SWP members can either follow their leadership and prepare to repeat the old mistakes again, or they can take stock of the compromised history of state capitalism and look once again to the tradition embodied in Trotsky's Fourth International.

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