

IMPRESSIONS OF A VISIT TO BRITAIN by S.F.

Los Angeles, Sept.-Oct. 1973

I was in Britain from April 15 to June 30 and from July 30 to August 13, which amounts to exactly three months. Naturally, I spent a great deal of time in contact with our British comrades including a tour of Scotland, Midlands and Yorkshire during the first half of June. I should add that I had spent two years in Britain from 1961 to 1963 when the group was infinitely smaller--about 250 at the time I left in July 1963. I don't claim to be an "expert" on the group or Britain but I want to relate to my U.S. comrades (as well as to at least some British comrades) what my impressions were. I do not intend to deal with everything that there is to be said about the I.S.G.B. but to highlight certain points. Thus, I will not discuss most of their theory (e.g., state capitalism, China, etc.) which comrades can glean from reading their publications, but to concentrate on what can be learned only by being there. I should state that I was very favorably impressed with our British comrades. The I.S.G.B. is certainly a healthy and impressive group. However, there are a couple of areas where I am particularly critical of the group and I shall discuss them later.

The I.S. is successfully making the transition from sect to party. This is not just a matter of numbers although its rapid growth (near 4,000 as of the latest report) is certainly noteworthy. It is also a question of its social composition, real influence on working class and national politics and several other considerations. As far as size is concerned the I.S. is far ahead of the other Trotskyist and revolutionary sects. I gather that the International Marxist Group (IMG--the equivalent of the SWP) has about 400 members, the Socialist Labor League (SLL--equivalent of the Workers League) about 600 and the Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL--no relation to our former political associates) about 300 members. I don't know the membership of the two main Maoist sects but they are small. The Communist Party claims 30,000 members but their real active membership is perhaps from 25 to 50 per cent of that figure which still makes them considerably larger than the I.S.

The change in the social composition of the I.S. is even more remarkable. From 25 to 30 per cent of its membership are blue-collar industrial workers (unfortunately, almost entirely male), about 1/3 of the members are white-collar workers and about 20 per cent are students and the rest are in miscellaneous categories. There is presently a campaign to recruit black and immigrant members into the organization, which includes the publication of at least one I.S. foreign language newspaper. The working-class character of the I.S. is particularly visible outside of London and I strongly recommend that any comrades visiting Britain should plan to visit some of the industrial branches, particularly in areas like Yorkshire and the Midlands; otherwise, you will get a distorted and much less impressive view of the group.

The group's influence in national politics is growing. While I was in Britain the bourgeois press had a story mentioning the I.S. at least once or twice a month. Its growing influence in the working class is even more noticeable. In at least one important local trades council the I.S. is in a decisive and commanding position. It is a leading force in various opposition groups in trade unions (notably teachers and autoworkers) and its influence is growing in other

trade union sectors (e.g., miners). The I.S. has begun to attract people who would never consider joining a sect and probably would not even hear about them. As an example, I have in mind a working-class grandfather in his late fifties who had been disillusioned by both the Labor and Communist parties and who only recently had heard about the I.S. because of the I.S.'s mass work against the National Front and similar fascist groups in his city. He joined the I.S. in the context of seeing it as becoming a credible alternative to both of the above-mentioned parties.

As both cause and consequence of these changes in the I.S. a lot of other things are different in the ISGB as well. The length, content, and style of membership meetings are considerably different from ours. Meetings are much shorter, there is a greater amount of discussion of actual activity and discussions center a lot more on how to affect the outside world rather than being as inward-oriented as we tend to be. Refreshingly, there is little posing and swagger in the outside world as well as inside the organization. After the almost dizzying talk of nuclei and embryos of vanguards in the American I.S. of early 1973 it was quite gratifying to see such modesty. Yes, there is a lot of talk of "join the I.S. and help build the party" but it sounds a lot more like an appeal on the lines of give us a hand in our great effort than the definitional fantasies and bravado we got so used to here. There appears to be an inverse relationship between boastful arrogance and real influence and size!

My contact with the I.S.G.B. in 1973 was a welcome refresher of many things I already knew either from my knowledge of the history of socialism and the working-class movement (particularly in regard to the difference between a sect and a party) or from my earliest non-sectarian political experience in Cuba. Thus, it was interesting to see the kind of topics that many working-class members and close friends of the I.S. wanted to discuss with me. One worker wanted to discuss the question of what would make people work once there were no bosses under workers control (wouldn't people rather stay in bed and not work?). An autoworker comrade and I seriously discussed the question of why Indians, Bengalis and Pakistanis (unlike West Indians) just wanted to "keep to themselves" and not dress like and mingle more with native white workers. I also found a much greater interest among my working-class audiences on the questions of Watergate and blacks in the U.S.A. than on the question of the U.S. labor movement itself; and I don't think that was solely due to my limitations in talking about the latter topic. In any case, this confirmed my earlier opinion that workers are not simply interested in discussing "point of production" matters and that our conception of what are theoretically important topics is very narrow and biased by our sectarian and academic training. As a matter of fact, the question of compulsion and work, cultural diversity, etc., are of the deepest philosophical and theoretical import and puzzled such giants as Marx and Freud. Those workers were trying to find in socialism not just a weapon to overthrow capitalist oppression but a new way of making sense and understanding the world and its complexity.

I was also "refreshed" in my earlier book knowledge that there are class and status tensions within a mass socialist organization. There are tensions between workers and middle class members and between those who have had a lot of formal education and those who haven't had it. Thus, I heard complaints about the tendency of the middle class members to dominate and channel the discussion in branches where workers did not set the tone; or about the reluctance of some educated and middle class members to engage in certain branch activities; or, less frequently, complaints about the life-style of some upper middle class I.S.'ers which was in sharp contrast with the rest of the members. Needless to say, the visibility of class and educational contrasts in Britain as compared to the U.S.A.

only makes the problem worse there.

This in turn led me to develop a new insight on what I would call the Two Souls of "Workerism." What I mean is that on the one hand I felt very identified and in great sympathy with the anti-elitist political currents in the group which opposed the reactionary traits of educated and middle class members inside the I.S. or the equivalent social groups outside the I.S. (even though these currents were often demagogically utilized by various elements in the I.S. leadership). On the other hand, there was a reactionary side to "Workerism" to the great extent that it showed a lack of sufficient concern for the struggle of non working-class groups against their oppression. In addition, wrong actions were sometimes greeted with approval if they were done in a "Workerist" spirit. For example, at the London Regional Conference in late May, Tony Cliff, in what was otherwise a brilliant analysis and attack on the reactionary traits of many middle class and educated I.S. members welcomed with a great deal of approval the decision of two branches to ban the recruitment of non-working-class members for six months in order to change the social composition and climate in those branches. It is certainly the case that you can always take care and dispose of your sinus congestion by not breathing! I must point out, however, that I have felt much more negative and less ambivalent about "workerism" in the I.S.U.S. since until recently at least it has had very little anti-elitist content and a great deal of abstraction and just plain bad politics.

The Strategy of the I.S.: While Britain experienced a mini-boom during my stay there due to Heath's successful floating of the Pound earlier on, the I.S. has forecasted that this will not last long and that relatively soon the Tory government will have a recurrence of serious economic problems and that therefore the level of class struggle will rise again. More generally, the I.S. has a sophisticated analysis concerning the possibility for reforms in Britain. As opposed to the highly schematic and unreal view of so many "orthodox" Trotskyists that no reforms are possible, the I.S. sees the situation as one where greater and larger struggles will be required to attain diminishing reforms. This is both a political and economic analysis where the diminishing room for reforms in capitalism is dialectically intertwined with the decreasing reformism of the Labor Party and other traditional working-class institutions.

The I.S. utilizes as a model the Minority Movement of the twenties in Britain as the organizational expression of a revolutionary trade unionism which neither ignores the unions nor capitulates to its leadership whether left or right. The I.S. encourages and leads in the formation of rank and file caucuses of militants in industry as an important step towards the formation of a new Minority Movement which will link the militant and advanced workers of various plants and industries. On the political level, the I.S., while continuing the slogan "Vote Labor without Illusions" at election time, only exceptionally participates in Labor Party activities. It should be pointed out that one of the key theoretical contributions of the I.S. Journal during the sixties was its analysis of the decline of reformism and of the Labor Party becoming little more than an electoral machine. This analysis has been vindicated in practice and it has provided the basis for the I.S.'s timely turn towards building an alternative to the declining Labor Party. Those who would have us imitate our British comrades should take careful note of the key role played by the theoretical "capital" that the I.S. built during the sixties and which greatly enriched its understanding of British society and the British working-class movement. Since they have worked out their politics and theory, they do not need to engage in endless rediscussion of the line whenever they want to make a new organizational turn. Needless to say, we have built no comparable understanding of American society and of the international scene and must often engage in repeated and endless discussions, even when

just putting out a leaflet. While replacing the Labor Party is not yet a possible goal for the I.S., the group does intend to replace the C.P. as the main organization to the left of the Labor Party. This could be accomplished within a few short years; there is a real vacuum in the British left and the I.S. has little serious competition. Maoism is insignificant in Britain, a welcome relief after one sees how even independent leftists in the U.S. continuously talk in Maoist jargon. The C.P., while stronger than in America in terms of influence and numbers, is also much softer and more fossilized than its American counterpart; perhaps the underground McCarthyite experience helped to make the C.F.U.S.A. a more aggressive and harder cadre-type organization than its European counterparts. The I.S. has already become a real rival to the C.P. in many areas in Britain not only because of the superiority of its political ideas and integrity but also because of its greater vigor and youth. As I previously mentioned, the Trotskyist sects have been left far behind the I.S. and they are not a threat to the organization although they can sometimes be a nuisance.

Having first mentioned the objective situation of capitalism in Britain where one might expect greater crises to occur, and secondly, the relative lack of competition on the left, we must also mention that the I.S. has developed a strong and authoritative leadership team which can take advantage of such conditions. That leadership has had a continuity with the past which we have lacked. There is a relatively small but very stable group of leaders who go back to the forties and even earlier; and then there are a much larger group of leaders who were recruited out of the Labor Party Young Socialists in the early sixties and the student movement in the middle and late sixties. This latter group has been successfully integrated both politically and organizationally with the former. Last but by no means least, a third group of working-class leaders recruited in the late sixties and early seventies has begun to play a key role in the organization. It is probably too early to tell how successful will be the integration of this third group with the previous two. In any case, it is clear that we have here a very competent and determined leadership which is both politically and organizationally sophisticated. This leadership has, on the whole, been able to make the right turns at the right time. It has been internally self-restrained and avoided intense factionalism when there were disagreements on important issues such as the Common Market. The leadership is able to carry their organization by proving itself politically correct, and never allowing views to grow up in the group which don't get answered and taken on by the leadership. We, on the other hand, have had a fragmented leadership which has little respect from the members. I should add that the small size of the country has most certainly facilitated the British I.S.'s cohesion. Going from London to Glasgow is like going from Los Angeles to Berkeley and the leadership of the group does a great deal of traveling to all branches. Just imagine the whole of our organization within a country the size of California!

It is in the light of the above considerations that we must understand the current I.S. mass recruitment policy and the new policy of forming factory branches. At present new members are recruited to the I.S. on the basis of their agreeing to abide by all majority decisions, pay contributions, actively work for the organization and agreeing on the following four points: 1. Opposition to all ruling class policies and organizations. 2. Workers control over production and a workers state. 3. Opposition to imperialism and support for all movements of national liberation. 4. Uncompromising opposition to all forms of racialism and to all migration controls. Also, many factory branches have been started since the March, 1973 conference (convention) authorized this formation (comrades are strongly urged to read the excellent pamphlet by Tony Cliff entitled Factory Branches). Some comrades in Britain and the U.S.A. have approached these two policies as if they were matters of principle.

Whether or not one engages in mass recruitment at a low level of political agreement and whether or not factory branches are a good idea depends on a variety of specific circumstances; socialist principle does not, in my view, indicate one course of action or another. Granted the limited nature of my knowledge, it seems to me that both policies are justified in the current situation of the I.S. in Britain while in the U.S. at the present time recruitment on the basis of a four-point political program would be disastrous for us and factory branches are in no way an immediate possibility for the simple reason that we have very few workers even in one industry or firm, let alone in one plant.

Naturally, there are many problems involved in the successful implementation of such policies. There is first the question of political education of new members. In connection with this the I.S. has produced numerous popular pamphlets, syllabi for the education of new members, and various other kinds of educational materials. In addition, several hundred members attended cadre schools this summer in London and Yorkshire. These cadre schools had basic, intermediary, and advanced sections. So it does appear that a great deal of effort is being put into this task. I am somewhat more skeptical as to whether an equal amount of effort is being put into creating cadres out of new members not in the sense of reading and attending class series but in the broader sense of total functioning (e.g., regular and punctual attendance of branch functions, ability to explain I.S. politics and tactics to non-members, ability to act individually as an I.S.'er if that becomes necessary in certain situations, etc.). In any case, I was not in a position to assess how successful the implementation of these policies has been. In order to do that you have to be able to observe at first hand and over a period of time what does in fact happen to new comrades recruited in a mass recruitment drive or to one or more factory branches. It is also clear that these new turns have created some tensions and stresses within the I.S. leadership bodies, as witness the most recent and very substantial changes in the personnel of their Executive Committee (equivalent of our NAC) and the appointment of a new National Secretary.

The Intervention of the I.S.: A key tool in building rank and file groups which eventually will link up with each other and form a new Minority Movement are the rank and file newspapers. These range from papers where the I.S. is in a controlling position to papers where the I.S. is in a minority within a broader group with the C.P. sometimes in control. On the whole, rank and file papers deal with matters concerning the particular industry and also issues like tenants' grievances to the extent that the workers in that particular industry are directly affected by a rise in rents for example. The different and limited political character of these papers is dictated by the fact that workers who are willing to struggle in a militant manner against the employers and the union bureaucracy very often do not share the socialist approach to general politics that one finds in Socialist Worker. Nevertheless, it seems to me that these rank and file papers may not have sufficiently explored the extent to which broader political matters might be dealt with (e.g., the Poulson and Lambton scandals in Britain) without necessarily raising all the political conclusions that the Socialist Worker would. However, these papers do perform an invaluable function and we must reject the slanders of "orthodox" Trotskyists that these papers (and the I.S.) are Economist and reformist. The fact of the matter is that the I.S. work in the rank and file movement is a very good example of how revolutionary Marxists (as opposed to sectarians) should intervene in non-revolutionary situations. I would even contend that the practice of the I.S.

in this regard is even better than its theory; I have in mind the extent to which I.S.'ers in Britain tend to make somewhat rigid theoretical distinctions between propaganda and agitation in the abstract, and also what I found to be an inadequate treatment of the question of how to fight for reforms and Economism in articles by Duncan Hallas in International Socialism numbers 54 and 56. I should also mention the important role played by the many shop bulletins put out by the I.S. which are designed to deal with grievances and issues within a given plant. These shop bulletins are often crucial in establishing the presence of the I.S. among workers and a great deal of care goes into producing what at first may appear to be an insignificant mimeographed sheet dealing with some highly specific matters. But these are the kinds of projects that test whether a group has struck roots among the workers or is simply hanging around the factory gate without being in touch with what's going on inside. Increasingly, the I.S. has been able to produce factory bulletins totally from the inside and this is another positive indication of the rapidly changing composition of the group.

The I.S. Press: Perhaps the most impressive single feature of the I.S.G.B. is the Socialist Worker. This is a very lively and professionally produced weekly which stays away from much of the jargon and inwardness of so many socialist papers. It is also a very well-balanced newspaper with just the right proportions of national, international, and industrial news and features. The contents of Socialist Worker are the most telling and conclusive against the slanderous charges that the I.S.G.B. is reformist, centrist, and economist. Most recently S.W. has had extensive coverage of the I.S.'s anti-racist work and it has been an important tool in the current effort to recruit black and Asian workers. The paper has also covered issues affecting tenants and perhaps most importantly it has developed socialist muckracking into a fine skill. Occasionally one finds in the letters to the editor sectarians complaining about the paper's muckracking. These people would have us believe that socialist propaganda must be abstract, schematic, and of course boring in order to be truly revolutionary. I believe that the paper is still weak in its cultural and arts section, with more than occasional lapses into a kind of socialist realism. It is also weak in its coverage of the struggles of many specially oppressed groups such as women and gay people. Socialist Worker is a true organizer for the group. Factory sales often lead to the formation of S.W. discussion groups which in turn are potential factory or industrial branches. In fact, S.W. groups usually do not last very long; they either become I.S. branches or dissolve into oblivion. It should be pointed out that there is a much higher degree of overlapping between workers who read one of the rank and file papers and S.W. than there would be between workers who read Workers Power and those who read rank and file papers we are involved in. There are many reasons for this difference but some of the main ones are the much greater number of politically advanced workers in Britain and their greater receptivity to socialist ideas; even relatively conservative workers are not likely to consider paper sellers as being some kind of kooks. One would wish that many of the American comrades making easy comparisons with Britain would be bear some of these key differences in mind.

The Theoretical Journal: The quality of the journal has gradually deteriorated in the last few years and in no way compares to the quality of Socialist Worker. Just recently there have been some attempts to change or modify the nature

of the journal but the appointment and unexplained replacement of Kidron as editor (even before he put out one issue!!) leave one wondering as to how the journal will change. The leadership places a great emphasis on using the journal as a rather direct aid to its current political work. One cannot help but sense that many of the I.S. leaders have developed a rentier attitude towards theory by continuing to live off the contributions they developed in the sixties and not seeing the need to continually review and renew such contributions. A group with so many talented Marxist economists should know that rentier classes are sooner or later displaced by those who are in tune with new modes of production. This applies to socialist theory no less than it applies to the economy.

The I.S. on Women: The I.S.G.B.'s politics and behavior concerning women's liberation leaves a lot to be desired. It is true that some improvements have taken place: the group is putting out a newspaper called Women's Voice and it has also put out an excellent pamphlet by Kath Ennis entitled Women Fight Back. The last I.S. Conference (convention) approved by a narrow margin a motion mandating the group's leadership to conduct an Equal Pay campaign; this motion passed in spite of the opposition of a majority of the outgoing National Committee. Yet, as of a couple of months ago the leadership continued to regard women's liberation as a low priority; no paid full-time organizer had yet been appointed to do women's work even though the group had a sizeable staff of paid full-time organizers. I was struck by the very wide range of women's liberation consciousness among the women members of the I.S. This ranged from the most advanced consciousness (particularly in some of the Midlands branches) to the most chauvinist set of attitudes. In my view, the main reason for this is that in the absence of strong women's liberation politics emanating from the center of the organization toward all the branches, the level of consciousness will then depend on accidental factors such as whether there happen to be strong leaders in a branch who happen to be women's liberation conscious. (I should point out that on more than one occasion I ran into very talented women leaders that had very little women's liberation consciousness.) Unfortunately, it is still the case that male chauvinist behavior on the part of male members and especially male leaders of the organization towards female members goes unpunished and sometimes even unnoticed; no mechanisms have been developed to deal with such violations of what should be the proper behavior of a revolutionary socialist. The fact that some male members and even leaders of the I.S. try to deal with this problem through the use of jokes only makes the situation worse.

I believe that the I.S.G.B. could make very rapid strides in this area if sufficient pressure was brought to bear on the leadership of the group. The politics of the group would not be an obstacle to this; unlike Lutte Ouvrier for example the I.S.G.B. has no fetish about "class politics" which would force it to oppose the independent organization of women as I am informed L.O. does; in fact, Kath Ennis' pamphlet advocates explicitly the formation of women's caucuses within larger rank and file caucuses in industry. I would expect opposition to women's caucuses within the I.S. although the matter has not been discussed in the group. To the extent that I talked to men and women members about women's caucuses within the I.S., I found a mixture of misunderstanding and disagreement with the position of the I.S.U.S. majority. But more often than not my discussions showed that the British

...the idea of... considered the idea...
 There seems to be a point of view among many U.S. leaders that the fight against racism is important and the fight against male chauvinism is not because the former is a tool of the ruling class to divide the working class and it is a more serious phenomenon than male chauvinism. It is true that racism is usually a more explicit and unsuitable way of dividing the working class, but any comrade who would study the conservatizing role of working class women vis a vis their striking husbands or the usual tendency of working class women to be to the right of their husbands in national politics, and all the other ways in which the sexual division of the working class sets back the working class movement as a whole, would realize that the difference is nowhere near as great as one might think. In any case, the existence of such a difference might be used to justify priorities in terms of allocation of organizational resources but in no way could it be used for example to justify the lack of internal measures to combat open male chauvinist behavior of I.S. members toward women comrades.

The weakness of the I.S.G.B. on the question of women's liberation is at least partially accountable for by the relative insignificance of the general women's movement in Britain as a whole. The absence of a strong women's movement has eliminated one powerful external pressure for change. Still, I find it very hard to accept the idea that revolutionary socialists should be content to be behind and more backward than other political elements in the population in the struggle against oppression. We should be the ones to take the political if not the organizational initiative in those struggles as well as in the more usual struggles of the working class. As V.I. Lenin put it in What Is To Be Done?: "The Social-Democrat's ideal should not be a trade-union secretary, but a tribune of the people, able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects. He who forgets his obligation to be in advance of everybody in bringing up, sharpening and solving every general democratic question, is not a Social-Democrat." (Lenin's emphasis - pp. 77-78, 80. Little Lenin Library, Vol. 4, International Publishers edition.)

The I.S.G.B. and Internal Democracy: Without a doubt, the thing that disturbed me the most about the I.S.G.B. was its current practices and even more its current tendencies on the matter of internal democracy. I should point out that I involved in Britain in the midst of the expulsion of the so-called Right Faction and that I was very much bothered by the manner in which they were expelled. They were called into a hearing with a sub-committee of the N.C. after which the N.C. went into executive session (which the potential expellees were not allowed to attend) and unanimously expelled eight leaders of the "Right Faction". The rest of the members of the "Right Faction" (about 60 members) were eventually expelled when they refused to cease "factional activity" after a thirty-day period. The original expulsion of the eight leaders happened shortly after the I.S. Conference (convention) at which the politics of the "Right Faction" were overwhelmingly defeated but where the question of expulsion never came up for discussion. I should point out that I am even less sympathetic to the politics of the "Right Faction" (degenerated workers' state, Transitional Program, Labor Party entrism, etc.) than the I.S. leadership is. The "Right Faction" was accused of disruption and

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"entrism" into the I.S. They were concentrated in four or five branches (Bristol, Brighton, Bradford, and Kilburn in London). I had no way of verifying these charges but from all that I have heard it is highly likely that they did deserve expulsion, but that does not make the question of how they were expelled irrelevant or unimportant at least in terms of the setting of precedents.

All the available evidence shows that the leadership of the I.S.G.B. is moving towards the banning of permanent factions or towards creating the kind of administrative obstacles which would make the creation of a permanent faction an almost impossible task. The Constitution of the I.S.G.B. already states (Part 8 paragraphs e and f): "If a faction meeting is open to any non-member of the faction it must be open to all I.S. members. . . . It is impermissible for a faction to try to levy a regular subscription on its supporters. Any member of the group may make a voluntary contribution to a faction or to the publication of an internal document which is in disagreement with group policy." Although the above provisions seem not to have been implemented in practice they could easily be used to make it very difficult (through the use of administrative means) to form a faction. It would mean that if a faction tries to recruit somebody in the I.S. by inviting the comrade to one of their factional meetings, Tony Cliff himself would presumably be entitled to attend as well. The Constitution does not of course establish the same obligation for dissenters being invited when the leadership meets with group members who are not part of the leadership. Any responsible leadership worth its name is a de facto faction. If factions are banned, or under a pall, then it is the rank and file who are being restricted because the leadership maintains its factional rights.

Some things have happened which unfortunately feed my fears. Immediately after the "Right Faction" leaders had been expelled, an official Branch Circular (73/77) was sent on April 18, 1973 by Jim Higgins, the then National Secretary of the I.S., calling on the Left Faction to dissolve after the Left Faction had already rejected an earlier call to dissolve. (The Left Faction is even smaller than the "Right Faction" and they are best known for their position of critical support for the Provos in Ireland; unlike the "Right Faction" they tend to have "orthodox" I.S.G.B. politics on more general questions such as state capitalism.) This Circular, while stating that the decision to dissolve was up to the Left Faction itself, also indicated that "the comrades of the Left have the opportunity to raise their disagreements in the next pre-conference discussion, they have the right to discuss the implementation of existing policy. For the next nine months they should make every effort to carry the policies agreed by the Conference. . . . Even at this late stage the National Committee appeals to them to reconsider their decision [not to dissolve] and to join the majority in building the organization." In other words, keep silent about your disagreements for nine months, the implication being that you cannot both loyally help to build the organization and continue to express your disagreements in an organized fashion. There is little question in my mind that this is the sort of circular that might indeed help to create a disloyal comrade where there was not one to begin with. When I read this circular I could not help but feel an uneasy SWP flavor in my mouth. Nor could I be reassured when I found, while perusing a collection of I.S.G.B. internal bulletins, the following statement by Andreas Nagliatti, a very prominent leader of the group (in "Report of Visit to Avanguardia Operaia"--Dec. 1972 I.S. Bulletin): "They are quite strict in controlling dissent, the attitude being

that those who can belong to the organization are those who can belong to the organization are those who agree with it and not those who do not. They seemed quite pleased when we told them of the departure of the Workers' Fight, since they are adamant, as we are now, that tendencies can not be tolerated in revolutionary groups." The rest of the article lists several other elitist and undemocratic traits of A.O. without any criticism whatsoever from the writer except to state at the end of the report the following: "To conclude: in A.O. an internal regime which would certainly be under considerable attack in I.S. exists and is defended by all the members who have spoken to me."

The I.S. is currently being reorganized and a new constitution is being drafted. Unfortunately, it seems that this new constitution will be less democratic than the previous one. Cliff's recent article (IS 58) more than hints about how various safeguards are unnecessary in a revolutionary party. The article also obfuscates a key distinction: while it is clear that in the course of the political life of Lenin or any other revolutionary leader violations of the democratic safeguards of a party will occur, there is quite a difference between making such a description of fact and making that a prescriptive rule. Also, within the last three months the N.C. decided to publish the Internal Bulletin every two months instead of every month (the I.B. also has a 2,000 word limitation per article) and also to discontinue the publication of N.C. minutes for distribution to the branches of the group; there will be a letter from the National Secretary instead of the N.C. minutes. That might not be a bad thing if that letter described, among other things, what differences of opinion existed within the N.C. on what matters, so the membership could at the very least have a more informed opinion on who to vote for at the next Conference (convention). But instead of that, the then National Secretary told the membership in Branch Circular 74/114 of July 31, 1973 that the purpose of his letter would be to "draw out and emphasize the points for activity in the localities, a function that the minutes (which are essentially a record for participants) cannot perform." Not a word about the minutes as an actual or potential source of information for the members to check on what their leaders advocate and are doing.

A variety of arguments are put forward to justify the above practices and tendencies in the group. One very common argument is that the revolutionary organization is not a mirror of the future socialist society but a weapon in the struggle for that society and that consequently one cannot demand the same safeguards of the former. Granted that there is a difference between a voluntary organization and the state which is an involuntary organization, and granted that we cannot be a "mirror" of the future society, the fact remains that there is a very strong connection between the kind of organizational tools and political traditions that we build and the kind of society we will obtain when and if we are victorious. The habits and orientations we build among today's revolutionaries will have a great impact on the content and shape of the society we will obtain after the Revolution. It is certainly undialectical to create a Chinese Wall (to use one of Cliff's favorite expressions) between the two situations.

Another argument is that procedural safeguards are inappropriate to an organization and party which should not set up a court system, trials, etc. This argument misses the point since neither I nor any other member of I.S.U.S.

that I know of would expect or demand a duplication of a court system with very strict rules of evidence, self-incrimination, etc. But there are still many basic elementary safeguards which fall far short of such an elaborate setup, such as the requirement that a potential expellee have a right to a full hearing and the ability to present his or her full case to the whole membership of the body which is going to do the expelling. (whether it is the N.C. or a branch) and that the charges be specific and not vague so that the comrade in question might present a defense on those very specifics. In the absence of such elementary and minimal safeguards, minority rights soon become a farcical dispensation from above.

The most serious argument I heard was that an organization with permanent factions is not viable; that if the same people within an organization always disagree with the majority on every important issue then it won't be long before a split occurs. I think there is a great deal of truth in this argument but the key point is that it is not necessarily true. And, in any case, the way to combat factionalism is not through administrative and bureaucratic means but politically, by creating an activist, outward-oriented organization which does not stagnate in its political and theoretical development. The creation of a non-factional climate must include a leadership which whenever necessary conducts a political battle to politically isolate potential or actually destructive elements in the organization. Expulsions should be the last and not the first resort and should be applied only when disruptive and/or disloyal behavior clearly warrants such action. Factions can be very useful in changing the orientation of an organization whose incumbent political leadership has not appropriately kept up with a changing situation. Furthermore, a growing organization like the I.S. is likely to develop a real "Left" and a real "Right" in the sense that some comrades will tend to be more cautious or conservative on every issue as the organization will have more of its own organizational gains and achievements to risk. These comrades should not feel that as soon as that happens their only choice will be to leave the organization altogether or keep their mouths shut for nine months. Real discipline does not mean to keep your mouth shut for nine months; it means unity in action while you continue, in a loyal and non-disruptive manner, to try to win over your comrades to your views all year round; this of course does not mean that a minority has the right to have the same question discussed at every meeting. People who are engaged in revolutionary politics and not engaged in propagandizing fixed religious truths must leave room and flexibility for political change within an organization and for changing a leadership which might fall out of tune with a changing situation or with the wishes and desires of the membership; and this often requires the formation of organized opposition which may continue to share basic agreements with the leadership they are opposing (e.g., revolution vs. reform, workers' power, etc.). It is particularly ironical that the basis for membership in the I.S.G.B. is politically much broader than in the I.S.U.S. (as defined by the four-point program cited previously in this report as well as by the statement of purpose published in every issue of Socialist Worker). None of the positions put forward by either the "Right" or the Left factions, or by many other potential factions in the future, are incompatible with what the group itself defines as a basis for admission to membership!

There are plenty of utilitarian grounds to justify the existence of the fullest internal democracy. But in no way

do I want to rest my case on those grounds. I do not share the pseudo-tough position of so many "Marxists" that we should be in favor of internal democracy because it produces better results in the sense of better functioning. In some instances the opposite might be the case, at least in the short run. In that case I am still in favor of it because I happen to believe that a group belongs to all of its members, whether they are dissenting or not, and not to the incumbent leadership, and that the views of the members have as much right to be aired as those of the leadership. If this is "petty-bourgeois" or "liberalism," then we have found one issue where some "revolutionaries" are more reactionary than the liberals and the petty-bourgeoisie.

I should also clarify that as often as not some leaders and members of the I.S.G.B. had a very cavalier attitude towards these questions rather than any kind of worked-out positions. I should also point out that I do not consider that the I.S.G.B. has become Cannonite, let alone Stalinist, in terms of its internal structure. For one thing, I was very positively impressed by the very independent spirit of the great majority of the members; talking to a member of the I.S.G.B. is in no way similar to talking to an American S.W.P.'er in terms of the way they relate to the political line of the organization. I also witnessed some very spited arguments between members and leaders of the organization in connection with some fundamental policies of the group (e.g., mass recruitment) and I saw no attempt to intimidate those members into line. But there is definitely forming an intimidating atmosphere against organized dissent; and that is certainly disturbing.

It could be argued that the I.S.U.S. behaved no differently than the I.S.G.B. in the manner it recently expelled the Revolutionary Tendency. While there would be a small amount of truth in the charge, the analogy is fundamentally erroneous. In the first place, there is no pattern emerging in the I.S.U.S. towards the restriction of internal democratic rights. Secondly, the departure of the R.T. was actually a total and irreconcilable split of nothing less than 1/3 of the organization which for a variety of reasons took the form of an expulsion. Thirdly, there is no comparison, quantitatively or qualitatively, between the behavior of the R.T. and that of either the "Right" or Left faction in the I.S.G.B. The case for expulsion against at least the leaders and a substantial number of the R.T. membership was as clear as any case for expulsion could possibly be. However, having said this, I do believe that the I.S.U.S. acted incorrectly in the manner it expelled the R.T. I do believe that the N.C. was certainly entitled and obliged to act immediately, even though the convention was two months away; otherwise the organization could have fallen apart in that period of time. But there was an inconsistency between the actual motion for expulsion which gave the behavior of the R.T. as the main reason for expulsion and the accompanying "Letter to Comrades" which gave their politics as the main reason for expulsion. We know of course that there is a close connection between the two and the political reasons which impelled them to disruptive and disloyal behavior can and should be stated in the whereases of any motion for expulsion. But the actual motion for expulsion and the accompanying letter should have stuck to their behavior as the operational and actionable part. Incidentally, such behavior can include speech (e.g., saying in public that the I.S. is reformist is certainly a clear case of disloyalty). That also means that the expellees should have been singled out by name--even the I.S.G.B. did that in the case of the

"Right Faction" leaders and supporter: I know of at least one member of the R.S.L. who can correctly assert he himself engaged in no behavior which was expellable under the I.S. Constitution. I believe that in this particular expulsion the outcome would have been no different had the N.C. followed the procedures outlined above. A likely scenario would have been that the N.C. would have expelled by name the leaders of the R.T. and say those members of that tendency in Chicago and Detroit who engaged in the well-known disruptive acts, and would have empowered the N.A.C. to proceed immediately to expel the rest--also by name--as soon as those others would have engaged in disruptive or disloyal actions. This would probably have happened within a matter of a very few days given the certain refusal of the Los Angeles R.T. for example to cease and desist in such practices as locking people out of the office. But it would have put the burden on them and leave no doubt where the total burden of guilt for the split lay. In this particular instance we are primarily dealing with a matter of precedent for a future situation where matters may not be so clear cut and where the arguments put forward in the "Letter to Comrades" might be used (with at least some validity) for a much less worthy cause. It seems to me that it is a serious concession to the authoritarian climate which is unfortunately hegemonic on the Left today to dismiss these objections as irrelevant, unimportant, and not worth discussing.
