

More letters on the International Socialist Organization

30 June 2010

Thanks for your exposure of the ISO. I thought you might appreciate the following anecdote.

My mother bought me a subscription to the *Nation* magazine following the 2000 election theft. By 2004, I was completely fed up with their unshakable support for the Democratic party, no matter how right-wing its candidates were. I was in college at the time and had also become infatuated with Marxism (my professors literally told me to leave them alone about Marxism, to stop bothering them at office hours), and began looking for socialist publications to read. I recalled that the *Nation* had made references to a group called the International Socialist Organization, painting them in a favorable light as the authentic voice of Socialist Internationalism. I began reading their web site. Ironically, I found a link to wsws.org on it. It wasn't long before I was reading WSWS every day.

I soon stopped reading the ISO web site, before I had discovered and appraised their support for the Green party or state capitalist heritage, for the simple fact that it could never seem to provide what wsws.org always did: genuine Marxism. It was abundantly clear to me that the WSWS had a scientific, historical materialist perspective underlying every single article it posted, every single day.

I thought you would appreciate the link between the *Nation* and the ISO. It reminded me of what you said in a reply to a reader that there is a division of labor among the middle class political milieu, the unions and the democrats. Lenin says that we march hand in hand on a dangerous road, with the swamp of petit bourgeois politics nagging on either side. Looks like the swamp dwellers stand arm-in-arm, or at least play footsie with one another. What unites all these disparate forces? Their opposition to a politically independent movement of the working class.

EH

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Good set of articles on the ISO.

1) I went back and reviewed the writings we have done on the ISO over the past 8 years and the question of centrism came up without being fully worked out in one of them:

The Revolution Betrayed and the fate of the Soviet Union

By Peter Daniels

26 February 2009

"Today, however, I would like to deal, not primarily with the Pabloites, but with the state capitalist tendencies, which claim, utterly falsely, that the collapse of the Soviet Union somehow vindicates their theories. And in particular, I will examine the role of Tony Cliff, the British ex-Trotskyist who left the Fourth International almost 60 years ago and died in 2000, leaving behind a number of centrist groups claiming to be Trotskyist, including the British Socialist Workers Party and, in the US, the International Socialist Organization (although the SWP has broken from the ISO, they still share a common theoretical outlook).

"Before we go further, it must be said that the term 'centrist' does not apply here in the same sense as with parties such as the POUM in Spain and the SAP in Germany, in the 1930s. Those were parties that attracted thousands of workers looking for an alternative to Stalinism and Social Democracy. The state capitalists are a middle class group whose anti-Marxist outlook has been developed over decades."

But he never really comes back to the question to clarify what exactly "centrist" denotes.

The ISO is trying to establish a chapter here and I had started going over their two new members' pamphlets, as well as their longer introductory book, "The Meaning of Marxism" by Paul D'Amato, when your

set of articles appeared.

The packets are certainly eclectic, with multiple references to Lenin's theory of party building and democratic centralism in an article right next to a completely demoralized article, "What Kind of Party Do We Need?" by Ahmed Shawki (pg 23-26 of "New Member Study packet"), typical centrist fare.

2) The other main point which hasn't been addressed as extensively is, who are their international co-thinkers and what is their approach to international questions.

The only group I could find they worked with was the Socialist Workers Party in the UK, a pretty damning indictment for a group who has been around since the late 1970s.

We covered and exposed their support of the "Green" revolution in Iran, with their left window dressing for American imperialism. Talking about that episode more extensively would be educational and reveal both their methods and outlook.

Thanks

CO

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