

What is the Revolutionary Communist International proclaimed by the former International Marxist Tendency of Alan Woods?—Part 2

Part Two

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Grant and Pabloism

Ted Grant's claims to orthodoxy are decisively refuted by his attitude to the emergence of Pabloite liquidationism within the Fourth International, which culminated in a split and the founding, against Michel Pablo and his supporters, of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in 1953. Indeed, the theoretical revisions of Grant were a clear anticipation of those associated with Pabloism.

At the conclusion of the discussions on Eastern Europe, the Fourth International defined the hybrid states formed by the Stalinists as *deformed workers' states*. Emphasising their distorted and abnormal character, this definition establishes the principled basis on which the Trotskyist movement asserted the necessity of defending these states against imperialist intervention while insisting on the mobilization of the working class against the ruling bureaucracy in a political revolution to establish genuine workers' democracy as an essential component of the struggle for world socialism.

However, from 1949, Pablo, leader of the FI's International Secretariat in Europe, proposed that the transition from capitalism to socialism would take place through "centuries" of such "deformed workers' states". In what came to be identified as the "theory of war-revolution", he even postulated that the conflict between the US and the Soviet Union would end in a global civil war in which the Soviet bureaucracy would be forced to carry through the socialist revolution. Pabloism wrote off the working class as a revolutionary force and reduced the Fourth International to the role of a pressure group on the Stalinists, social democratic and bourgeois nationalist movements.

At the Third World Congress of the Fourth International in 1951, Pablo insisted that building the cadre of the FI depended on learning to appreciate the "mass movement as it exists" and "to find our place in this movement". The aim of this policy of entrism *sui generis* (of a special type) was not to facilitate the building of the Fourth International by winning the allegiance of workers from the reformists, but to push these parties to the left.^[1]

With the very political existence of the FI at stake, on November 11, 1953 the leader of the US Socialist Workers Party James P. Cannon issued an Open Letter rallying orthodox Trotskyists internationally which insisted that the overthrow of capitalism "can be accomplished only under the leadership of the working class in society," requiring in every country the construction of "a revolutionary socialist party in the pattern developed by Lenin" as a section of the Fourth International.

Grant, in contrast, recognised Pablo as a political co-thinker. As early as June 1950, Jimmy Deane, Grant's close collaborator, had noted, "Pablo has made the transition! What a development. He conducts a struggle against us and then ends up with our position more or less."^[2]

Pablo's initial supporters in the UK were grouped around John Lawrence, who sought the liquidation of the British Trotskyists grouped around Gerry Healy, before supporting the Stalinists' crushing of the Hungarian revolution in 1956 and then, in November 1958, joining the Communist Party of Great Britain. It was Grant, and a small number of Pablo's supporters in Britain, who replaced Lawrence as the British section of the International Secretariat of the Fourth International, forming the Revolutionary Socialist League in 1957.

Grant subsequently broke with the International Secretariat in 1964 but maintained a Pabloite orientation of a particularly nationalist character. As he explained in 1970: "Under the hammer blows of events, the development of mass centrist groupings in the Stalinist and social democratic parties is inevitable. Mass splits from these tendencies will be on the order of the day in the coming decade or two... It is from these mass forces developing within these organisations that the mass forces of the International will come."^[3]

Though privately referring to themselves as revolutionaries, publicly and in recruiting its cadre, the Militant Tendency spent decades insisting that socialism would come about by a Labour government passing a parliamentary enabling act nationalising the biggest corporate monopolies. Its essential political role was to confine leftward moving workers and youth within the Labour Party, defined as the essential party of the working class due to its resting on the trade unions.

Militant grew in the 1980s during the wave of opposition to the Thatcher government and the IMT has lived off this politically ever since. Notoriously, in Liverpool, where it dominated the Labour-controlled city council, Militant demonstrated its grotesque opportunism by striking a deal with the Tory government that headed off a struggle by Liverpool's council workers over attacks on local services and helped contribute to the

isolation and defeat of the 1984-1985 miners' strike.

For its pains, the Kinnock leadership of the Labour Party expelled Militant's leadership as Labour began an historic lurch to the right. This shift was rooted in the extraordinary development of economic globalisation, the explosive growth of transnational corporations and unprecedented integration of the world market and internationalisation of production.

Globalisation and the dissolution of the Soviet Union

The unprecedented international mobility of capital had rendered all nationalist programmes for the labour movement of different countries totally obsolete and reactionary, leading the social democratic and trade union bureaucracies to abandon their old reformist programme in favour of acting as naked advocates of the capitalist market and direct appendages of corporate management.

This universal wave of political renunciationism found its most fundamental expression in the turn by the Stalinist bureaucracy to capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union, which began under the guise of Mikhail Gorbachev's promise of "democratic reform" through *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*. His actual programme was for the counter-revolutionary restoration of capitalism—an attempt to overcome the crisis of the isolated Soviet economy through the destruction of the nationalised property relations and the restoration of private ownership of the means of production. This culminated in the dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991, the establishment of the capitalist market, and the transformation of the leading figures within the Stalinist state, industry and party apparatus into criminal oligarchs.

The ICFI insisted that the contradictions between the nation state and a burgeoning global economy that saw the chain of imperialism broken at its weakest link in the USSR, due to the extreme economic autarky practiced by the Stalinist bureaucracy, opened up new revolutionary possibilities for Trotskyism as the sole tendency that had opposed Stalinism from the standpoint of defending the programme of world socialist revolution.

Grant's Militant Tendency in contrast took the position that Gorbachev represented a "'reforming' wing of the bureaucracy, not a conscious agent of imperialism". Even as the Soviet Union was being liquidated, Grant claimed that the August 1991 coup attempt showed that sections of the bureaucracy were still defending socialism, writing in an internal bulletin, "If, as was entirely possible, the regime had been compelled to carry out a policy based on recentralisation and the planned economy, accompanied by terror, this would also give a certain impetus to the productive forces for a period of time." [4] It was Grant and Woods' position for the next decade "that the movement towards capitalism in Russia has not yet been carried to a definitive conclusion, and may yet be reversed." [5]

From this perspective Grant not only posited the re-establishment of the former Stalinist regime but proposed his tendency as a partner in this goal. He wrote:

Let us be clear, even if there is a struggle between rival wings of the bureaucracy, one wing openly pro-capitalist and another wing - for their own purposes - trying to defend the basis of the nationalised economy, it would be a fundamental mistake to think that we would be neutral in that situation, even if you had a situation where sections of workers were supporting the other

wing... Trotsky said that in principle you couldn't rule out in advance the possibility of a united front, a temporary and partial united front, between the Trotskyists and the Stalinist bureaucracy, if it came to an open civil war and an attempt to restore capitalism in the USSR. [6]

Grant and Woods rejected Trotsky's designation of Stalinism as counterrevolutionary through and through. Trotsky had explained that the consolidation of the nationalist bureaucracy was the first stage of the bourgeois counterrevolution in the USSR. In *The Revolution Betrayed* he predicted the bureaucratic caste would seek to root its privileges more firmly in bourgeois forms of property. On this basis he advocated not alliances with so-called "reforming wings" of the bureaucracy, but its overthrow by the working class in a political revolution.

The restoration of capitalism by the Stalinist bureaucracies was the sharpest expression of the transformation of all the old national reformist labour organisations and their renunciation of any, even limited, defence of the working class. But Grant and Woods rejected drawing any lessons regarding the character of the Labour Party, which they insisted remained a "bourgeois workers party", or the corporatist trade unions which they insisted remained the essential organisations of the working class on which the socialist project must be based.

Nevertheless, the entire political perspective the Militant Tendency had pursued since the end of World War II—based on the assumption that the Kremlin bureaucracy, the social democratic parties and trade unions in the West, and the national movements in the former colonial and semi-colonial countries, would maintain their political hegemony—had been fatally undermined.

This led to a factional conflict between *Militant* editor Peter Taaffe and Grant and Woods, first over the appraisal of Russia and then over Taaffe's suggestion, formulated as a political adaptation to a rise in support for the separatist agenda of the Scottish National Party and called "the Scottish turn", that it was necessary to engage in an initial tactical experiment of work outside of the Labour Party.

In 1992, this ended in a split, with Grant and Woods forming the Socialist Appeal group. The split was mirrored internationally, leading to the formation of the International Marxist Tendency.

The IMT continued to operate as entryist groups within whatever social democratic or Stalinist party they could find a berth, and to encourage illusions that various bourgeois formations and individuals could be transformed into the vehicle for realising socialism. In "A New Stage in the World Revolution", written July 25, 1996, the IMT decried:

the ultraleft idea that it is possible to find a short cut by raising the banner of the 'independent party' [as] false to the core...

All history shows that, when the masses move into action, they first express themselves through the traditional mass organisations... The crisis of the reformist parties, especially when in government, will prepare the way for a swing to the left and the emergence of mass left reformist currents everywhere. It is the task of the Marxists to penetrate these currents and, by patient explanation and friendly criticism, win over the workers to a genuine Marxist programme. [7]

The most significant example of the IMT's efforts at "penetration" was its boosting of the bourgeois nationalist movements in Latin America, which claimed to represent a "Bolivarian socialism". Woods became a prominent cheerleader for Hugo Chavez in Venezuela.

Explaining the class character of Chavez politics, *World Socialist Web*

Site writer Bill Van Auken wrote on the occasion of his death in 2013:

Chavez was a bourgeois nationalist, whose government rested firmly on the military from which he came and which continues to serve as the crucial arbiter in the affairs of the Venezuelan state...

Chavez had ample reason to promote his policies with the left rhetoric of an ill-defined "21st Century Socialism." The aim, first and foremost, was to divert and contain the militancy of the Venezuelan workers, whose struggles, to the extent they escape the control of the ruling PSUV (Unified Socialist Party of Venezuela) and its affiliated Bolivarian trade union federation, are often branded as "counterrevolutionary."

However, an entire layer of the international pseudo-left—including various organizations and individuals who have in the past cast themselves as "Trotskyists"—attempted to lend credence to this "socialist" rhetoric.^[8]

Woods stood in the front ranks of such apologists. Writing in May 2005, under the headline, "Encounters with Hugo Chavez," Woods insisted, "For the first time in the almost 200 years history of Venezuela the masses feel that the government is in the hands of people who wish to defend their interests..."

"And Chavez? Chavez clearly draws his strength from the support of the masses, with whom he identifies fully... If there is sometimes a lack of clarity, even this reflects the stage in which the mass movement finds itself. The identity is complete."^[9]

Such apologies for a bourgeois capitalist regime earned Woods a friendly meeting with Chavez, who recruited him to speak at a pro-government rally. He concluded the piece by stating, "I believe that a growing number in the Bolivarian Movement are looking for the ideas of Marxism. I am sure that this applies to many of its leaders. And Hugo Chavez? He told me that he was not a Marxist because he had not read enough Marxist books. But he is reading them now. And in a revolution people learn more in 24 hours than in 20 years of normal existence."

Those criticising Chavez from a socialist standpoint, Woods denounced for their "haughty attitude, as if the masses whose name they were always invoking were ignorant children who needed to be educated by them. Unfortunately for these 'lefts', the masses showed not the slightest interest in these would-be-educators or their lessons."^[10]

Syriza and the "Corbyn revolution"

Events were, however, catching up with the IMT, as millions of workers drew their own opposed conclusions as to the "reformability" of the old social democratic and Stalinist parties, deserting them in droves.

The chief response of the pseudo-left groups internationally was to organise and promote a series of supposedly "broad left" formations made up of themselves and various Stalinist and reformist groups, advanced as a "populist" inheritor of the mantle of their parent parties—including the New Left Bloc in Portugal, Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain, Die Linke in Germany and the New Anti-capitalist Party in France.

The IMT joined in this project, including setting up the Communist Tendency of Syriza that urged the "Coalition of the Radical Left" to carry out "the socialist transformation of society."

After Syriza came to power in January 2015, based on pledges to oppose EU-backed austerity measures and after months of pleading with the European Union (EU) for paltry concessions, it repudiated the landslide

vote against further austerity in the July referendum and agreed even harsher spending cuts than its predecessors.

Politically exposed by this betrayal, no tendency was more enthused than the IMT when Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader of Britain's Labour Party in 2015, or more supportive of his victory speech to Labour's 2016 Special Conference in which he boasted, "Since the crash of 2008, the demand for an alternative and an end to counter-productive austerity has led to the rise of new movements and parties in one country after another... In Britain, it's happened in the heart of traditional politics, in the Labour Party, which is something we should be extremely proud of."

The IMT and *Socialist Appeal* urged workers, young people and trade unions alike to join or affiliate to Labour to help the "Corbyn revolution" transform the party. In October 2017, the IMT wrote of Corbyn's "government in waiting" and efforts by "The Establishment" to control "the next PM", with specific reference to how Corbyn would not buckle like Syriza and its leader Alexis Tsipras had done:

There is no doubt that a Left Labour government would face similar pressure from all quarters if in power... However, Britain is not Greece; Labour is not Syriza; and Corbyn is not Tsipras. The Labour Party has a far greater historical weight and much deeper roots within the working class than Syriza ever had. It is not an ephemeral trend, but the traditional mass party of the British working class, with strong links to the trade unions.^[11]

Even as Corbyn made one retreat after another, the IMT wrote of the Blairites being "in full retreat" and of the 2018 Labour Party conference reminding "the Labour right wing who's really in charge now." It noted that "Corbyn also used his conference speech to hold out an olive branch to his opponents, promising to 'draw a line under... the row over anti-Semitism', and asserting that Labour is now 'united and ready to govern'. In reality, however, these conciliatory remarks to his critics were the words of a man who knows that he is now firmly in the driving seat."^[12]

By December 2019 the "Corbyn revolution" was over. Having lost a second general election to the Tories he resigned as party leader, paving the way for Sir Keir Starmer. Even then the IMT tried to hold the line, with Woods writing of the Blairites' "last desperate attempt at regaining control. At a certain point, the right wing will either split, or be vomited out. This will push Labour far to the left, opening up serious possibilities for the Marxist tendency."^[13]

As late as September 11, 2020, Woods' group was insisting still that "The left leaders need to acknowledge that this is a gloves off, no-holds-barred battle" to "drive the Blairites and bureaucrats out of the PLP and Labour HQ, and transform Labour back into the mass social movement that it was becoming at the height of the Corbyn era."^[14]

The Woods group tacks left: What does the Revolutionary Communist International represent?

It is the aftermath of the ignominious collapse of Corbynism and related movements such as Syriza and Podemos, against a background of continued decline in support for the rightward careening Social Democratic parties such as Labour, that has driven the IMT's turn to creating "Revolutionary Communist" parties and to proclaim itself as a new Revolutionary Communist International.

The IMT's article announcing the RCI states, "The mass reformist

parties dominated by the right wing, the Stalinists and sects are in crisis, the left reformists in many countries have been smashed because of their vacillations and betrayals, and there is a deep vein of radical workers and youth ready to embrace communism. The situation is crying out for a new point of reference.”^[15]

But in recognising this historic shift in the political loyalties of the working class, the Woods tendency’s objective role is to stop the young people attracted to its superficial revolutionism from drawing the essential lessons of the Trotskyist movement’s historic struggle to build such a revolutionary leadership, as embodied in the International Committee of the Fourth International.

They offer a counterfeit, which still seeks to subordinate the working class to the old social democratic and trade union bureaucracies while advancing the proposition that a revolutionary tendency is in formation from out of the shattered fragments of Stalinism.

Prior to the founding conference, Woods delivered a keynote report to a January international meeting of the IMT, “World Perspectives: Crisis, Class Struggle, and the Tasks of the Communists—Socialist Revolution”, that was published February 14. This did address the central themes of the RCI’s founding manifesto and helps to illustrate how the Woods tendency politically disarms the working class. The central characteristic defining the newly created RCI is a continuation of an objectivist falsification of Marxism.

The difference is this: For decades, the forerunners of the RCI pointed to genuine problems in the development of a revolutionary movement in the working class—the ability of imperialism to grant certain social concessions and the resulting political domination of the reformist and Stalinist parties—to justify constant opportunist adaptations to these self-same bureaucratic, as well as various bourgeois nationalist, formations.

Now, the RCI proclaims the escalating crisis of world imperialism as driving forward a revolutionary development irrespective of the necessary political struggle to develop in the working class a conscious understanding of its revolutionary tasks. The RCI’s new-found “revolutionism”—its recognition of the global crisis of world imperialism—now becomes a new rationale for a wholesale adaptation to non-proletarian and even the most reactionary forces imaginable.

Woods’ earlier remarks are an extraordinary outburst of wild subjectivism and political impressionism, which make no reference to the history of the workers’ movement. He focuses almost exclusively on a belated recognition of the discrediting of the social democratic parties that his tendency for decades insisted must be transformed into the instrument for achieving socialism. Most significantly, this is combined with a paean to the supposedly automatic transformation of militant youth into communist cadre that rejects any necessity for their political education.

Before turning to this central issue, however, it is necessary to illustrate the form in which Woods’ objectivism disarms the international working class in the face of the central dangers it faces as a consequence of world capitalism’s escalating crisis: war and right-wing reaction.

On these issues, he urges only complacency, insisting that nothing is as bad as it seems and that everything is preparing in a semi-automatic fashion a revolutionary development of the working class.

Woods begins by stating, “I will not deal at any length with the economic analysis, which we’ve done thoroughly elsewhere.” This declaration is linked to an August 2023 statement, “The world in 2023: crisis, war and revolution,” which argues that US aims in the war in Ukraine are strictly limited to weakening Russia and that “A direct confrontation between NATO and Russia, with all its nuclear implications, will be avoided by both sides at all costs,” with Washington “straining to put definite limits to the present war and open the path toward negotiations.”

Woods reduces NATO’s war against Russia in Ukraine, and US backing of Israel’s genocide in Gaza—the response of US imperialism to

its economic decline and the challenge to its global hegemony, especially from China—to the mistaken actions of political representatives of world imperialism. These are all, he says, “complete idiots” for not acting “in a logical manner” and creating “serious problems... caused by miscalculations on the part of the ruling class.”

He asks, “What is the strategic importance of Ukraine for US imperialism?” and replies, “Read my lips: Ukraine, from the general standpoint of the global interests of American imperialism, is of zero importance.”

He conceals the fact that the Biden administration sees the expansion of NATO as a strategic goal necessitated by the desire to reconquer the territory and resources lost to imperialism in 1917. Instead, the war deliberately instigated by the NATO powers is portrayed as the result of Biden’s mistake of not doing “a deal” with Putin that “would have established a stable relationship with Russia in order to concentrate on the central problem, which is, of course, China.” He adds, to consider the “expansion of NATO to be a matter of principle... was a very stupid assumption to make in the first instance. Why should it be so important? Really speaking, it is not important.”

Woods then praises Putin’s regime for having “learned from their mistakes” and being on the verge of winning the war, which he argues will bring the working class into conflict with the Zelensky regime with the “mood in Ukraine... pregnant with revolutionary implications.”

Biden’s second “mistake” is his unconditional support for “this monster Netanyahu,” asking, “What necessity was there for the man to do such a thing?” He then continues, “The next *illogical* step—but one they will take, in all likelihood, in my opinion—is to bomb Iran...”

He makes no call to oppose such a development, arguing instead that such a war will lead to a progressive outcome, setting the Middle East “on fire” and, in “the course taken by events”, provoking revolutionary explosions that will see “the overthrow of one rotten Arab regime after another.”^[16]

This is an accurate appraisal of the position on war taken by the *Manifesto of the Revolutionary Communist International*, which also identifies various examples of the declining world position of US imperialism to paint a picture of its inevitable eclipse by China as the global hegemon.

There is no attempt to alert the working class as to how the US drive to maintain its hegemony has become the main accelerant of a global military conflagration. Instead, the manifesto explicitly rejects any possibility of this conflict ending in war because “changing conditions have removed this from the agenda—at least for the present.

“The capitalists do not wage war for patriotism, democracy, or any other high-sounding principle. They wage war for profit, to capture foreign markets, sources of raw material (such as oil), and to expand spheres of influence.

“Is that not absolutely clear? And is it also not very clear that a nuclear war would signify none of these things, but only the mutual destruction of both sides?”^[17]

With nuclear war ruled out because it would be “illogical”, also ruled out is any necessity for the working class to answer this threat. In its stead, Woods and the RCI offer up Russian and Chinese capitalism as a counterweight to the imperialist powers. This took yet more grotesque forms in Woods’ opening report to the RCI founding conference, in which he declares, “Say what you like about Vladimir Putin, he’s a very bad man, he’s a gangster... But one thing he is not, he is not stupid. Same thing can be said of Xi Jing Ping in China.”

Xi is praised for telling Biden to effectively “go fuck yourself”, while the “senseless” and “quite unnecessary” war in Ukraine will be won by Russia, which “has a very powerful army indeed” that is “killing very large numbers of Ukrainian soldiers” while suffering only minor casualties. Russia will therefore win and impose “a humiliating defeat for

the West and for NATO.”^[18]

Woods’ praise for Putin and Xi is eclipsed by his grotesque embrace of and political apologia for Donald Trump.

He denies baldly that Trump constitutes a far-right threat to the working class, stating in his earlier IMT report, “Of course, the reaction of all the sects is predictable. They’ll all be beating the tom-toms again. ‘Fascism, fascism,’ they will cry. Of course, it is not fascism at all.”

Instead, he urges his members to see Trump’s ascendancy as an expression of the radicalisation of the working class and a necessary stage in their political development, stating, “But even the support for Trump in the United States, in a very peculiar way, has been based on how this horrible reactionary billionaire has been quite skilful in his rhetoric, in his demagoguery, attacking the establishment, the fat cats in Washington. And there’s no question that he’s struck a note.”

Trump gives expression to “a mood of blazing anger, of rage against the ruling class, against the rich and powerful, against the establishment, against the lying media” and is “likely to be swept to power in the next election.”

No one should be worried about this because, “You see, the masses need to go through this experience in order to expose this demagoguery for what it is. And that will prepare the ground for a new radicalization and a revival of the class struggle, which is beginning already in America. That’s the point.”^[19]

Woods will no doubt be congratulated by the RCI leadership for predicting Trump’s victory, portraying this as an expression of legitimate revolutionary hostility to Biden’s Democrats. But Woods has in fact politically embraced Trump—portraying his presidency as a guarantor against war and a legitimate alternative to the Democrats.

After repeatedly insisting that there is no danger of nuclear war because of a common belief in Mutually Assured Destruction, Woods wrote to finally acknowledge this threat in a November 19 article titled, “An angry old man, a deranged Ukrainian, and World War III”. However, he not only maintains the position that this threat exists solely because of the illogical actions of Biden and his stooge, Ukrainian President Zelensky, but casts Trump as the hero of the hour.

He writes of Biden agreeing to Ukraine’s use of long-range missiles to target Russia as actions “unworthy” of someone holding “the highest office of the United States of America”, akin to “the tantrums of a spoilt brat who has been deprived of his favourite toy, and in revenge systematically wrecks his bedroom. Only here, what Biden has done is not to smash up a room, but to place in mortal danger the entire population of the United States, and possibly the entire world.”

He then notes the “barrage of criticism” from Trump’s supporters, including Elon Musk, before describing the announcement as “a calculated insult and a blatant provocation” ... against Trump!

He finally offers his praise of and free advice to the would-be Fuhrer on how he can singlehandedly end the war danger:

Let us not forget that Trump won a resounding electoral victory having campaigned on a promise to end the US involvement in wars and instead use taxpayers’ money to improve Americans’ lives. He has said he will bring the Russia-Ukraine war to an end within 24 hours.

So far, as we have said, Trump has not made any comments about the latest developments. This is probably the right thing to do, since his political enemies in the media are circling like vultures, waiting to pounce on any mistake he might make.

If he comes out publicly against Biden’s decision, he will immediately be accused of disloyalty to the USA, supporting Putin, betraying Ukraine, and so on and so forth. Far better then, to let other people speak on his behalf, to bide his time for a few

weeks. Then, once he is safely installed in the White House, he can quite easily order his officials to ignore the irresponsible decisions of his predecessor.”^[20]

To be continued

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