

What is the Revolutionary Communist International proclaimed by the former International Marxist Tendency of Alan Woods?—Part 3

Part Three

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This is the third and concluding part of a series. Part One was published on December 27, and Part Two on December 29.

Fascism and the falsification of history

The RCI's attitude to Trump essentially replicates the disastrous errors of the Communist Party of Germany, infamously embodied in its slogan, "After Hitler, us!" As with war, when it comes to the threat of dictatorship and the growth of fascism, objectivist complacency and political passivity assume grotesque forms.

The RCI's manifesto accepts that "At a given stage, the bourgeoisie will be tempted to resort to open dictatorship in one form or another," but insists "this could only become a realistic prospect after the working class had suffered a series of severe defeats, as was the case in Germany following the First World War."

Answering the question, "Is there a risk of fascism?" the manifesto responds in the negative because today's far-right movements do not match the historic template of fascist movements in the 1930s. "Superficial impressionists on the so-called Left internationally foolishly see Trumpism as fascism... There are plenty of right-wing demagogues around, and some even get elected into power. However, that is not the same as a fascist regime, which is based on the mass mobilisation of the enraged petty bourgeois as a battering ram to destroy the workers' organisations."

The manifesto insists that, again as with war, the ruling class has become more cautious about a turn to fascism:

In the 1930s, the contradictions in society were resolved in a relatively short space of time, and could end only in either the victory of the proletarian revolution, or in reaction in the form of fascism or Bonapartism.

But the ruling class burned its fingers badly when it threw its weight behind the fascists in the past. It will not go down that road easily.

It argues: "More importantly, today, such a rapid solution is ruled out by the changed balance of forces. The social reserves of reaction are far weaker than in the 1930s, and the specific weight of the working class is far greater."

In addition, "The peasantry has largely disappeared in the advanced capitalist countries" and "wide layers that formerly saw themselves as middle-class... have drawn closer to the proletariat and become unionised; and the students who provided the shock troops for fascism, have swung sharply to the left and are open to revolutionary ideas."

Above all, "The working class, in most countries, has not suffered serious defeats for decades. Its forces are largely intact." Therefore, "The bourgeoisie finds itself faced with the most serious crisis in its history, but because of the enormous strengthening of the working class, it is unable to quickly move in the direction of open reaction."^[1]

To cite the declining social influence of the petty-bourgeoisie and the absence of major defeats suffered by the working class as a guarantee against political reaction is false to the core. Moreover, the RCI substitutes a falsified historical analogy for political analysis.

Trump and similar far-right figures and tendencies internationally do not have the mass base built by Hitler. But what they do have is the support of large sections of the bourgeoisie and of the state apparatus, including within the military and the police. This is what enabled Trump's attempted coup of January 6, 2021 to proceed as far as it did.

As has been proved in one country after another, including in Italy where the heirs of Mussolini are in government and in France and Germany where fascist tendencies are now the main opposition parties, the rightward lurch of imperialism is paving the way for the assumption of state power by the far-right through the wholesale adoption of their program by the official parties of the bourgeoisie.

Hitler's assumption of power was above all made possible by the political paralysis of the revolutionary vanguard of the working class by the Stalinist bureaucracy. Its policy of "social fascism"—which opposed collaboration between the Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in defending the working class against the Nazis—prevented any political challenge to social democracy that would have won the working class to a revolutionary perspective.

As a result, in January 1933, Hitler was appointed Reich Chancellor by representatives of the military, the media and the corporations, and then in March handed dictatorial powers by all the bourgeois parties. It was after being given control of the entire state apparatus by the bourgeoisie that

Hitler carried out the destruction of the workers' movement.

That is the warning that must be made to American workers, that they must not allow themselves to be paralysed by reactionary leaderships. Not soliciting complacency based on the favourable prospects for revolution, but mobilising the working class now on a perspective of revolutionary struggle against the Democratic and Republican parties of bourgeois reaction and war.

The “automatic communism” of the youth and the pro-Stalinist orientation of the RCI

In answer to every danger posed to the working class, Woods offers the prospect of an automatic growth of communism in the younger generation. Moreover, he and the RCI repeatedly offer as proof of this a growth in the influence of Stalinist tendencies to which they are clearly oriented.

In his January report, Woods cites with approval the claims of the Communist Party of the USA “to have recruited 8,000 young people in the last two years”. If this were indeed true, then anyone claiming to be a Trotskyist would be obliged to warn such youth that they have just made the worst political mistake of their lives due to their ignorance of the counter-revolutionary history of Stalinism. But Woods instead hails this as proof that “many people now, especially the youth” are “looking for an alternative, a revolutionary alternative.”

He states that since 2008, the turn by radicalised workers and young people “in the direction of what you might call ‘left reformists’... Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain, Bernie Sanders in the United States, and Jeremy Corbyn in Britain” which “aroused enormous expectations,” only to dash them, is now leading young people to embrace communism.

In the past, you had to struggle to persuade people as to the correctness of communist ideas and Marxist ideas. Not anymore. In all countries it's a fact, an empirically verifiable fact. I've not invented it: thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, probably millions of young people are already drawing the correct conclusions. They've already accepted the idea of communism. They desire communism.

Woods gives short shrift to any of his members who dare to question such a scenario of the automatic shift to revolution by the working class:

You say to me, “Well, these young kids are very green. They haven't studied. They don't know. They're not proper Marxists.” That's not correct. They are very proper Marxists. They are *real* communists. You know, I've been a communist since I was a kid, and [his brother] Rob [Sewell] also, we are from a communist, working-class family. I was a communist before I read any books... real communism doesn't come from the books. It comes from the soul. It comes from your gut instinct and the need to fight to change things. These young kids, they call themselves communists. They may have never read the *Communist Manifesto*. But they are communists. You don't need to convince these kids.

He demands: “Don't start off by trying to identify difficulties. It is not hard... All you need to do is to stand on the street corner, proclaim

communism, take a banner, take a newspaper if possible, and the gold will come to you.”

The “gold” Woods prospects for are young people who have joined the Stalinist parties. The “miserable sects”—who profess to support Trotskyism and oppose Stalinism—“never understood anything about communism... They're useless... We have to turn towards the communist parties. We have begun to do that in Brazil and some other places. This is the space which we will now seek to occupy.”^[2]

The attack on Lenin's *What is to be Done?*

Woods' diatribe is a root and branch repudiation of Marxism, the development of socialist consciousness, and the Leninist theory of the party. This is made explicit in the party's own educational material for members, “Lenin's *What is to be done*: A reading guide.” It states:

While correctly polemicising against the Economists' slavish worship of “spontaneity”, Lenin allowed himself to fall into the error of exaggerating a correct idea and turning it into its opposite. In particular, he asserts that socialist consciousness:

“[W]ould have to be brought to them [the workers] from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc.”

This one-sided and erroneous presentation of the relationship of the working class and socialist consciousness was not an original invention of Lenin, but was borrowed directly from Kautsky, whom he regarded at that time as the main defender of orthodox Marxism against Bernstein. Lenin himself later stated he had “bent the stick too far” one way to correct for an error of the opposite kind.^[3]

The victory of the October Revolution in 1917 was only made possible because Lenin built the revolutionary party required to imbue the working class with genuinely socialist consciousness and in this way created the basis for the socialist revolution. As Chairman of the WSW David North explains in his essay, “Lenin's Theory of Socialist Consciousness: The Origins of Bolshevism and What Is To Be Done?”: the “critical issue analyzed by Lenin is the nature of the relationship between Marxism and the revolutionary party on the one side and, on the other, the spontaneous movement of the working class and the forms of social consciousness that develop among workers in the course of that movement.”^[4]

In formulating this relationship, Lenin traced the evolution of the forms of consciousness among Russian workers in the 1860s and 1870s, from the primitive destruction of machinery up to highly organised strikes.

However, North explains:

The consciousness exhibited by workers in these struggles was of a trade unionist rather than social democratic character...

This limitation was inevitable, in the sense that the spontaneous movement of the working class could not develop on its own, “spontaneously,” social democratic, i.e., revolutionary, consciousness. It is at this point that Lenin introduces the argument that has provoked so many denunciations. He writes:

“We have said that there could not have been Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. By their social status, the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working-class movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia.”^[5]

North cites Lenin’s central conclusion on the necessity for the revolutionary party to develop genuinely revolutionary consciousness in the working class:

Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement, the only choice is—either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for mankind has not created a “third” ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or above-class ideology). Hence, to belittle the socialist ideology in any way, to turn aside from it in the slightest degree means to strengthen bourgeois ideology. There is much talk of spontaneity. But the spontaneous development of the working-class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology, to its development along the lines of the Credo programme; for the spontaneous working-class movement is trade-unionism, is *Nur-Gewerkschaftlerei*, and trade-unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie. Hence, our task, the task of Social-Democracy, is to combat spontaneity, to divert the working-class from this spontaneous, trade-unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social-Democracy.^[6]

What is central to Woods’ denigration of the struggle for socialist consciousness by the party is this: By glorification of the bourgeois consciousness of the working class, the IMT creates a theoretical justification for the political domination of the working class by the bourgeoisie. This is exercised above all through the mechanism of the bureaucratic, pro-capitalist trade unions and the Stalinist parties to which Woods’ instinctively communist youth give their political allegiance or who, through miseducation, are rendered incapable of seeing through the pro-Stalinist sophistries of the IMT.

The RCI, Stalinism and the denigration of Trotskyism

Following the template laid down by Woods, the RCI Manifesto also speaks of young people drawing revolutionary “conclusions instinctively...

They have not read the three volumes of Marx’s *Capital*, or maybe even *The Communist Manifesto*. But they are communists, heart and soul... Only a hopeless pedant will be offended by their lack of Marxist education. Ideas can be easily learned from books. But mere book-learning can never furnish us with the enthusiasm and revolutionary spirit, which is the flaming soul of proletarian revolutionism.”

This paean to youth is combined with a dismissal of all other generations of workers as “thoroughly demoralised” and “spending all their time moaning about the situation, which they all agree is hopeless. Many of the old generation are infected with the disease of scepticism and pessimism, for which no antidote exists. Consequently, most of them are fit for nothing.”^[7]

The insistence that the “communist” youth have no need of “book learning” and the attempt to cut them off from workers with actual experience of the class struggle and the political betrayal of the bureaucracies is politically sinister, given that those being spoken of are gravitating around the various remnants of the old Stalinist parties, the most consciously counter-revolutionary tendency on the face of the earth.

Fundamentally, the manifesto makes explicit the Woods tendency’s de facto repudiation of Trotsky’s struggle to build the Fourth International and its orientation to the Stalinist remnants of the now non-existent Third International. It essentially tries to resurrect the perspective of reforming the Stalinist parties and winning them to revolution—more than 90 years after Trotsky declared such parties “dead for the purposes of revolution” in 1933—after the Comintern allowed Hitler to come to power without opposition.

The RCI manifesto states that “since the Stalinist degeneration of the Communist International,” no revolutionary international has existed. It continues, “At this critical moment in world history, the international communist movement finds itself in complete disarray,” by which is meant the “Communist Parties across the world.”

This general description is countered by reference to the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), infamous for its virulent nationalism and support for Stalin’s crimes. The RCI portrays the KKE as having “undoubtedly taken important steps in rejecting the old discredited Stalinist-Menshevik idea of two stages” and of adopting “a correct internationalist stand on the Ukrainian war, which it characterises as an inter-imperialist conflict.”

The task of the Revolutionary Communist International is to ensure that the KKE and “other Communist Parties that share its position on the Ukraine war” are engaged in a “Leninist united front” and “an open and democratic debate”:

It is our task to return the movement to its genuine origins, to break with cowardly revisionism and embrace the banner of Lenin. To this end, we extend a hand of friendship to any party or organisation that shares this aim.

When Trotsky launched the International Left Opposition, he envisaged it as the left opposition of the international communist movement. We are genuine communists – Bolshevik-Leninists – who were bureaucratically excluded from the ranks of the communist movement by Stalin.

We have always fought to maintain the red banner of October and genuine Leninism, and now we must reclaim our rightful place as an integral part of the world communist movement.

The time has come to open an honest discussion in the movement about the past, which will finally break with the last remnants of Stalinism and prepare the ground for lasting communist unity on the solid foundations of Leninism.^[8]

This orientation to the Stalinist parties is underway.

In November 2023, the IMT reported a joint meeting between Marxist Left and the Brazilian Communist Party—Revolutionary Reconstruction (PCB-RR) on Ukraine and Palestine during which the leader of the IMT’s Brazilian section Jorge Martin praised the PCB-RR’s “campaign in defence of proletarian internationalism” and declared that all “true communists find ourselves on the same side of the barricade.”^[9]

Jorge Martin was given pride of place at the Revolutionary Communist International’s founding conference.

On March 27 this year, an open letter to “activists of the Portuguese Communist Party [PCP]”—issued by *Colectivo Marxista* following snap elections on March 10—began by reassuring the Stalinists that “this criticism is not aimed at attacking the PCP. On the contrary, *Colectivo Marxista* is deeply concerned about the crisis of the most important workers’ party in the history of Portugal, a party that brings together some of the best and most class-conscious fighters of the Portuguese proletariat.”

It urged PCP activists to “study the ideas of Marx and Lenin that gave life to your organisation more than a century ago” and “revolutionary members of the PCP and the Portuguese Communist Youth to fight shoulder to shoulder to regenerate communism in Portugal, for a truly revolutionary communist party, on the basis of Lenin’s Communist International and the principles of Marx and Engels”.^[10]

The manifesto of the new Revolutionary Communist International also makes clear that the Woods tendency has by no means abandoned its traditional orientation to the social democratic parties and the trade union apparatus. It denounces “pseudo-Trotskyist sectarians” who “imagine that the mass organisations can merely be written off as historical anachronisms” and confine themselves “to shrill denunciations of betrayal,” insisting that the “great majority of the working class... remain under the influence of the traditional reformist organisations” and “there is no way that the working class can avoid passing through the painful school of reformisms.”

The new Revolutionary Communist Parties must therefore do nothing that leads workers to see the Woods group as “alien elements or enemies” and proposes in some circumstances to send “all our forces into the reformist organisations in order to win over the leftward-moving workers to a firm revolutionary position.”^[11]

To such positive developments, and as proof of the radicalisation of a section of the trade union bureaucracy, is added the “very interesting public declarations by a man called Shawn Fain, who’s the president of the UAW, that’s the powerful United Auto Workers of America, a very powerful Union...”

Woods cites Fain’s statement supporting “the students against repression about the Palestine movement” and the UAW’s May Day video “where this man actually calls for a general strike in America” by inviting other unions to align their contract expiration dates with the UAW’s.

He says of Fain that he “is not a Marxist and he’s very confused and he makes contradictory declarations,” but then insists again that “The working class is not the unions, nor is it the Labour Party.”

But “we do not write off either the unions or the Labour Party. We don’t do that. We don’t make that sectarian mistake.”^[12]

Draw the lessons of history: Build the International Committee of the Fourth International

For the former IMT to proclaim its political farsightedness in recognising that a leftward movement, especially among the youth, is developing—animated by loathing of the Labour Party and contempt for

the “lefts”—is breathtaking hypocrisy.

But that is what it does, with the Manifesto of the Revolutionary Communist International now boldly proclaiming “The bankruptcy of the ‘Left’,” and citing Syriza, Podemos in Spain, Bernie Sanders in the USA, and Corbyn as having “initially aroused the hopes of many people” before they “capitulated to the pressures of the right wing.”

This too is a necessary political conceit, an attempt to conceal the actual political record of the Grant-Woods tendency and to lend it a degree of credibility among young people who do not know enough to call them out.

This only underscores the dangers posed by the lack of historical knowledge among young people that is positively celebrated by Woods. The road to socialism does not run through the formation of a new (non) Revolutionary Communist International led by political bankrupts such as Woods, pursuing a regroupment with the flotsam and jetsam of Stalinism.

For much of the post-war period, the genuine representatives of Trotskyism waged a protracted struggle not only against the Stalinist and social democratic parties and trade unions, but a plethora of pseudo-left groupings that dedicated themselves to opposing an independent revolutionary turn by the working class.

What Woods, et al, now dare to dismiss as the defence by a “sect” of an “orthodoxy” disproved by events, as they themselves oriented to the counter-revolutionary bureaucracies, represented the essential struggle for the perspective of world socialist revolution and the international party required for its realisation.

That struggle has been vindicated by the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union and the collapse and right-wing transformation of all the old bureaucratic organisations into advocates of austerity and war.

When the ICFI made its analysis of globalisation in 1988 in its world perspectives document, it drew the conclusion that the resulting internationalisation of the class struggle laid the objective basis for the construction of the Fourth International as the new leadership of the working class.^[13] In the ensuing period, while the IMT was clinging to the wreckage of Stalinism and social democracy, the ICFI set out to not only analyse the unfolding crisis of world imperialism but to educate a cadre on the central lessons of the historic struggle for Trotskyism spanning over a century since the founding of the Left Opposition in 1923.^[14]

World imperialism has now entered a period of revolutionary crisis. A decades-long assault on the working class imposed primarily through the trade unions, the ongoing destruction of democratic rights, the deliberate cultivation of far-right forces and the launching of a series of bloody wars that threaten nuclear annihilation are creating the basis for a revolutionary confrontation between the working class and the bourgeoisie.

Stopping the imperialist powers from plunging humanity into a catastrophe demands nothing less than the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. But the development of the spontaneous movement of the working class cannot accomplish this task. It requires revolutionary leadership.

For young people seeking a way forward, this means rejecting the insincere flattery of the Revolutionary Communist International and beginning a conscious assimilation of all the lessons to be drawn from the history of the struggle for socialism that are embodied in the ICFI.

Concluded

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