



REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNISM

Theoretical Review of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency



www.thecommunists.net

New Series Issue Nr.84

January 2023

The Poverty of Neo-Imperialist Economism

Imperialism and the National Question -
a Critique of Ted Grant and his School (CWI, ISA, IMT)

By Michael Pröbsting

English-Language Theoretical Review of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), New Series No.84, January 2023

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Picture on the cover: First-year students of the Kharkiv National Air Force University, 2018
(Source: Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_the_Ukrainian_military)

Revolutionary Communism is the monthly English-language journal published by the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT). The RCIT has sections and activists in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, South Korea, Pakistan, Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Yemen, Israel / Occupied Palestine, Russia, Nigeria, Britain, Germany, and Austria.

www.thecommunists.net - rcit@thecommunists.net
Tel/SMS/WhatsApp/Telegram: +43-650-4068314

The Poverty of Neo-Imperialist Economism

Imperialism and the national question - a critique of Ted Grant and his school (CWI, ISA, IMT)

By Michael Pröbsting, International Secretary of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 9 January 2023

INTRODUCTION

The Ukraine War has demonstrated once more the political bankruptcy of those organisations which stand in the tradition of Ted Grant like the ISA, IMT and the CWI. Not a single one of these recognises the imperialist nature of Russia's invasion and the duty of socialists to defend the Ukraine. They rather characterise the conflict as a "proxy war" and take a reactionary abstentionist position. In fact, they strongly oppose any military aid for the Ukrainian resistance. Furthermore, two of these currents – Alan Woods' IMT and Peter Taaffe's CWI – do not even comprehend the imperialist character of Russia (or China).

And while the ISA's leadership formally recognises the existence of Russian imperialism, it still refuses to side with the Ukraine. Not only this, it even calls workers in Western countries to block any weapons deliveries to the Ukraine.

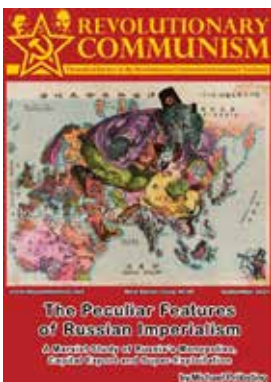
The IMT and its Russian section are certainly the worst of the three as they conceal only superficially their sympathy for Russian imperialism and closely collaborate with Zyuganov's Stalinist KPRF, a major social-chauvinist party in Russia which ferociously supports Putin's invasion.

The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) and its section in Russia – *Socialist Tendency* – have supported the Ukraine's just war of national defence since the very beginning and (co-)organised three solidarity convoys.¹ We combined such support with an uncompro-

missing political opposition against the bourgeois Zelensky government.

Furthermore, taking the *dual character* of the conflict into account, we advocated a *dual tactic*. While defending the Ukraine, socialists are obliged at the same time to take a *revolutionary defeatist* position against all imperialist powers – the U.S., Russia, China, Western Europe and Japan. Such a stance includes intransigent opposition against the chauvinist-militarist policy of all Great Powers (e.g. armament, sanctions, etc.). We have summarised our internationalist and anti-imperialist program in the slogan: "*Defend the Ukraine against Putin's invasion! Against Russian and against NATO imperialism!*"²

The refusal of the ISA, IMT and the CWI to recognise the just character of the Ukraine's war of national defence replicates the policy of large sectors of "socialist" forces which negate or downplay the significance and the progressive character of national liberation (or, in general, of democratic) struggles. Lenin once called such a policy "*economism*" and, applied in the epoch of imperialism, as "*imperialist economism*" (more on this below). The policy of the ISA, IMT and the CWI – and their attempts to theorise it – is basically the same method applied under the world political conditions of the inter-imperialist rivalry in the early 21st century. Hence, we consider it as appropriate to call this method "*neo-imperialist economism*".



Publications of the RCIT

The Peculiar Features of Russian Imperialism

A Study of Russia's Monopolies, Capital Export
and Super-Exploitation in the Light of Marxist Theory

By Michael Pröbsting, August 2021

Introduction * Another Denial of Russia's Imperialist Character * The Methodological Failure of our Critics * Russia's Economy: Dominated by Domestic, not Foreign, Monopolies * Capital Export and the Problem of "Round-Tripping" Foreign Direct Investments * "Phantom FDI": No Russian Peculiarity but a Global Phenomenon * Russia's Leading Multinational Corporations and their Foreign Investments * Imperialist Super-Exploitation via Capital Export * Imperialist Super-Exploitation via Migration * Conclusions * Footnotes

A RCIT Pamphlet, 20 pages, A4 Format

PART I. THE GRANTITES' MAIN FLAWS ON IMPERIALISM AND NATIONAL OPPRESSION

It is no accident that all three organisations – the ISA, IMT and the CWI – have failed to take such an internationalist and anti-imperialist position in the Ukraine War. Their approach is deeply rooted in the theoretical method of their tradition as it was elaborated by their founder Ted Grant. We shall start with a brief overview of the main flaws of the Grantite tradition in relation to imperialism and the national question.

* Confusion about the nature of imperialism and its division of the world in imperialist and (semi-)colonial countries.

* Resulting from this, confusion about the nature of states involved in major wars (e.g. Argentina 1982, Iraq 1991 and 2003, Ukraine 2022).

* Resulting from this, failure to support the struggle of oppressed peoples in (semi-)colonies and to apply the anti-imperialist united front tactic to the non-revolutionary leaderships of such struggles.

* Confusion about the nature of national oppression; refusal to side with the struggle of oppressed nations and to apply the united front tactic to the non-revolutionary leaderships of such struggles. (e.g. in Palestine, Northern Ireland)

Since we have dealt with most of these issues extensively in other works, we will limit ourselves at this place to discuss a few examples and refer to the respective literature.³

1. Confusion on imperialism and the class character of states

Grantism was born in the school of Anglo-Saxon eclecticism and such method has become its inextinguishable trademark since then. Sure, formally it accepts Lenin's theory of imperialism – as it is customary for Trotskyists, Stalinists and Maoists. However, the writings of the Grantite theoreticians have remained unaffected from Lenin's and Trotsky analysis of imperialism as a system which is characterised by the division of the world in imperialist and (semi-)colonial countries.

As the Marxist classics emphasised repeatedly, economic super-exploitation of (semi-)colonies and national oppression are key features of imperialism. „Imperialism means the progressively mounting oppression of the nations of the world by a handful of Great Powers (...) That is why the focal point in the Social-Democratic programme must be that division of nations into oppressor and oppressed which forms the essence of imperialism, and is deceitfully evaded by the social-chauvinists and Kautsky. This division is not significant from the angle of bourgeois pacifism or the philistine Utopia of peaceful competition among independent nations under capitalism, but it is most significant from the angle of the revolutionary struggle against imperialism.“⁴

Hence, Lenin concluded that the division between oppressed and oppressor nations must constitute a central feature of the Marxist program: “The programme of Social-Democracy (this is how the Marxists called themselves at that time, Ed.), as a counter-balance to this petty-bourgeois,

opportunist utopia, must postulate the division of nations into oppressor and oppressed as basic, significant and inevitable under imperialism.”⁵

Grant & Co never understood this essential characteristic of imperialism. In fact, one can rarely find the very word “semi-colony” in Grantite documents. Usually, they prefer alternative terms like “ex-colony” (which says what such countries were in the past but not what they are today) or “neo-colony” (a popular descriptive category in literature about the so-called III. World).⁶

Semi-Colonies are capitalist countries which are formally independent but, effectively, they are dependent on Great Powers and economically super-exploited by the imperialist monopolies. Since we elaborated our analysis of the imperialist world system and semi-colonial countries in much detail in our book *The Great Robbery of the South*, we limit ourselves at this place to cite the RCIT's definition of semi-colonies, in accordance with the understanding of the Marxist classics: *A semi-colonial country is a capitalist state whose economy and state apparatus have a position in the world order where they first and foremost are dominated by other states and nations. As a result, they create extra-profits for and give other economic, political and/or military advantages to the imperialist monopolies and states through their relationship based on super-exploitation and oppression.* Most countries in Latin America, Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe are such semi-colonies.

Such type of countries is not a recent phenomenon but existed already at the time of Lenin and Trotsky. Lenin cited “China, Persia, Turkey” as examples of such semi-colonies in 1916.⁷ Other examples were the countries in Latin America.

In his well-known book on imperialism, Lenin wrote: “As to the “semi-colonial” states, they provide an example of the transitional forms which are to be found in all spheres of nature and society. Finance capital is such a great, such a decisive, you might say, force in all economic and in all international relations, that it is capable of subjecting, and actually does subject, to itself even states enjoying the fullest political independence; we shall shortly see examples of this. Of course, finance capital finds most “convenient”, and derives the greatest profit from, a form of subjection which involves the loss of the political independence of the subjected countries and peoples. In this respect, the semi-colonial countries provide a typical example of the “middle stage”. It is natural that the struggle for these semi-dependent countries should have become particularly bitter in the epoch of finance capital, when the rest of the world has already been divided up.”

And he continued a few pages later: “Since we are speaking of colonial policy in the epoch of capitalist imperialism, it must be observed that finance capital and its foreign policy, which is the struggle of the great powers for the economic and political division of the world, give rise to a number of transitional forms of state dependence. Not only are the two main groups of countries, those owning colonies, and the colonies themselves, but also the diverse forms of dependent countries which, politically, are formally independent, but in fact, are enmeshed in the net of

*financial and diplomatic dependence, typical of this epoch. We have already referred to one form of dependence — the semi-colony. An example of another is provided by Argentina.”*⁸

In the period after World War II, with the wave of anti-colonial uprisings, the decline of British and French imperialism and the rise of their American rival, most colonies became formally independent and transformed into capitalist semi-colonies. While socialists welcomed the destruction of these colonial empires, it has been always clear that capitalist semi-colonies have basically remained dependent and exploited by the imperialist monopolies and powers.

As we elaborated in *The Great Robbery of the South*, semi-colonies share with colonies the essence of their dependent relationship with imperialist states which is characterised by super-exploitation and oppression. However, it would be mistaken to ignore the differences which are, in short, the formal political independence of semi-colonial countries and, following from this, a higher degree for room of manoeuvre between different Great Powers. This is even more the case in a period like the present one where the inter-imperialist rivalry between the U.S., China, Western Europe, Russia and Japan is accelerating.

In the above-mentioned book we noted that in the current historic period two fundamental, contradictory, tendencies are working at the same time. On one hand, there is the *tendency towards colonialization* since “*order to stabilize economic exploitation in a period of growing instability, the imperialists must enforce their control via political and military means.*” However, at the same time, there exists also another, counter-veiling, tendency. “*The combination of the shift of the capitalist production to the South and the increasing rivalry between the Great Powers have the effect, that they might allow the bourgeoisie in the semi-colonial countries sometimes a certain room to maneuver. The bourgeoisie of a given semi-colonial country can look for support from the Great Power B, if Great Power A puts more pressure on it. We have already seen in the past years that various Latin American and African countries have looked increasingly for trade agreements and foreign direct investments from China to counter the pressure from the USA. Our thesis might seem to some readers as a formal contradiction. On one hand we speak about an increasing subjugation of the semi-colonies to imperialism. And on the other side we speak about an increasing room to maneuver for the semi-colonies. But in reality, it is a dialectical contradiction, born out of the essence of the contradictions in imperialist capitalism itself. They are just two sides of the same coin. The imperialists are forced — because of the economic shift to the South and the increasing rivalry between themselves — to increase their attempts for more subjugation of the semi-colonies. But the same shift leads to a contrary dynamic — more room to maneuver for the semi-colonial bourgeoisie. In fact, this contradictory situation bears certain similarities with the state of the relationship of the Latin American semi-colonies during the 1930s on which Leon Trotsky wrote: “This is the period in which the national bourgeoisie searches for a bit more independence from the foreign imperialists.”*⁹

It has always been a pillar of the orthodox Marxist theory of imperialism that, in the age of imperialism, the world has been divided in imperialist states as well as (semi-) colonial countries. In addition, there existed a series of (degenerated Stalinist) workers states in the period from 1917 to the early 1990s. In a programmatic Manifesto, writ-

ten by Trotsky, the Fourth International emphasised the importance for socialists to understand the division of the world in countries with such different class characters: “*To teach the workers correctly to understand the class character of the state — imperialist, colonial, workers’ — and the reciprocal relations between them, as well as the inner contradictions in each of them, enables the workers to draw correct practical conclusions in situation.*”¹⁰

Of course, the form of the imperialist world system has undergone important changes in the past century. But in its essence, it has remained the same system which is dominated by monopolies and Great Powers, the same system which rests on the economic super-exploitation of the peoples in the (semi-) colonial world, national minorities and migrants in the imperialist metropolises. Imperialist exploitation and national oppression remain a key feature of modern imperialism without which it could not exist. Likewise, there is no imperialism without Great Power rivalry. Hence, the struggle against imperialist domination and national oppression and against all Great Powers was and remains an essential element of the revolutionary program.

Unfortunately, the Grantites never internalised such an approach. They have remained fixated and confused by superficial, secondary elements of the *outward appearance* but ignore the *essence* of imperialism. Lenin once noted in an article on materialist dialectic: “*The concept (cognition) reveals the essence (the law of causality, identity, difference, etc.) in Being (in immediate phenomena) — such is actually the general course of all human cognition (of all science) in general.*”¹¹ Unfortunately, the Grantites never tasted the sweet fruit of such knowledge!

This has become particularly obvious in times of conflict between imperialist and semi-colonial countries. War, apart from revolution, has always been the greatest test for socialist organisations. The armed clash between states or camps forces every tendency to translate its theory and program into concrete tactics and actions. Trotsky once noted: “*The best criterion of the tendencies of a given organization is its attitude in practice, in action, toward national defence and toward colonies, ...*”¹²

The class nature of Argentina, Iraq, and Israel

Disarmed with a flawed theory of imperialism, the Grantites failed to apply a correct policy in nearly every military conflict of modern times. During the conflict between Britain and Argentina in 1982 — the Malvinas War — the Grantites (still united at that time) explicitly denied Argentina’s semi-colonial character in order to justify their refusal to defend this country against the imperialist aggression.¹³

The Grantite leaders have always stood by their analysis and tactics since then. Two decades later, Peter Taaffe, a central CWI leader, argued that “*Argentina was a relatively developed capitalist power (which was, Ed.) itself ‘imperialist’ towards other countries in Latin America.*”¹⁴ Another CWI leader called the Malvinas War as a “*minor war between two fading second or third division powers*”¹⁵ In other words, the Grantites placed Britain — a centre of global finance capital and one of the few nuclear armed imperialist powers at that time — and semi-colonial Argentina on the same level!

As we demonstrated with a number of facts in our

above-mentioned *Great Robbery* book, such an analysis of Argentina has been complete nonsense. Hence, the RCIT and its predecessor organisation always recognised the semi-colonial nature of Argentina and, consequently, defended it against British imperialism.

When the Iraq War approached in 1990/91, the CWI was close to a similar absurd assessment. Its German section published a pamphlet which characterised Iraq as a “*regional imperialist power*”.¹⁶ While this did not become the official position of the CWI, it reflects the utter confusion in its ranks about the class character of Iraq and its organic tendency to take a neutral position.

In the real world, Iraq has been a capitalist semi-colony since it became formally an independent state. Consequently, authentic Marxists defended this country during the two wars in 1991 and 2003 against U.S. imperialism and its allies.

Likewise, the Grantites have failed to recognise the peculiar nature of Israel as reactionary settler state, i.e. a state which only exists – and can only continue existing – because of the oppression and the expulsion of the native population. But for the Grantites, Israel is a “normal” capitalist state. Such wrote the CWI one year ago: “*Israel is a class-based society, as are all capitalist countries.*”¹⁷

Naturally, they cannot deny the historical fact of the *Nakba* – the expulsion of the Palestinian people from 1948 onwards. However, they claim that, as horrible as it might have been, the Palestinians should accept the existence of a Jewish majority in historic Palestine which lives on their land. In order to justify their capitulation to Zionism, the Grantites belittle the historic oppression of the Palestinian people and compare it with countries like Greece or Türkiye. Such wrote Peter Taaffe some years ago: “*A state or a series of states can be established by the brutal displacement of peoples. Look at the removal of the Greek population from many parts of Asia Minor and of Turks from Greece following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. If you went back and redrew the map, you would now have huge exchanges of populations. (...) However, the reality now is that, in the course of time, a Jewish or Israeli national consciousness has been created. What do Marxists say to this? Just ignore the real situation and continue with the old position?*”¹⁸

As a matter of fact, in contrast to Greece or Türkiye, the very existence of Israel is based on the liquidation and expulsion of the indigenous population. By its very nature, Israel is an illegitimate settler state which must permanently wage wars and oppression against the Palestinian and Arab people in the region in order to keep its existence. It has the same “legitimacy” as the French occupation of Algeria from 1830 to 1962 which had one million white settlers.

The Grantites justify their refusal to support the Ukrainian resistance today by claiming that this would be motivated by their opposition to Western imperialism. This is utter nonsense as they are the only “Trotskyist” current in the world which supports the existence of the Israeli state – which has been a creature of Western imperialism – on Palestinian land. No, the common denominator of the Grantites’ positions is not seeking independence from Western imperialism but rather seeking independence from legitimate liberation struggles.

However, as the Grantites fail to understand the Marxist theory of imperialism and the class character of the states

in this system, they confuse a colonial settler state with a “normal” capitalist state. Consequently, they defend the existence of a Jewish state on Palestinian soil and advocate a two-state solution (a “Jewish and a Palestinian socialist state”).

In contrast, the RCIT and all authentic Marxists call for the right of return of the millions of Palestinian refugees, the abolition of the Zionist state and a single workers and poor peasant republic in historic Palestine from the river to the Sea with a Palestinian majority and a Jewish minority population (with cultural rights for the latter). As we – in particular our comrade Yossi Schwartz, a Jewish Anti-Zionist since nearly six decades living in Occupied Palestine – have dealt extensively with the Zionist state and the Marxist program, we refer readers to our works on this issue.¹⁹

Russia and China: imperialist or non-imperialist powers?

The same confusion about the nature of imperialism led the Grantites to fail recognising the imperialist character of Russia and China for many years. At some point, an opposition emerged within the CWI (which would later become the ISA after their split in 2019) which correctly identifies Russian and Chinese imperialism. However, while the ISA leadership – in contrast to the CWI – has empirically recognized, albeit belatedly, these important changes in the world situation, this did not result in a re-appraisal of the Grantite theory of imperialism and, hence, this method continues to dominate their politics (more on this below).

The IMT leadership effectively ignores the imperialist nature of Russia. And even in the few occasions where it mentions this fact in an embedded sentence, it treats Russia as a minor “imperialist” power which would be not as bad as the U.S. – “*the most counterrevolutionary force on the planet*” as its leader Alan Woods can’t stop repeating.²⁰

Since we have dealt with the emergence of Russian and Chinese imperialism extensively in other works (including our critique of the Grantites’ failure to recognise these), we will limit ourselves at this place to just one more note.²¹

It is no accident that the CWI and IMT have refused to acknowledge the existence of Russian and Chinese imperialism. They have never analysed imperialism in a scientific way but limited themselves to quote Lenin’s famous five criteria (which, by the way, was never a definition of an imperialist power but rather of the imperialist epoch). They view states rather superficially, not by their class character but rather by politically developments. This is why they considered Argentina and Iraq as kind of (semi-) imperialist states. This is why China might not appear as imperialist to them since it has not invaded other countries (yet). This is why Russia might not be imperialist since it is weaker than the U.S.

The RCIT has always opposed such a confused and unscientific approach. Following Lenin’s method, we have emphasized that the class character of a given state is based not solely on a single criterion (like the volume of capital export) but rather on the *totality of its economic, political and military features*. Hence, the RCIT considers the following definition as most appropriate: *An imperialist state is a capitalist state whose monopolies and state apparatus have a posi-*

tion in the world order where they first and foremost dominate other states and nations. As a result, they gain surplus-profits and other economic, political and/or military advantages from such a relationship based on super-exploitation and oppression.

Based on such an understanding, the RCIT (resp. its predecessor organization) has been able to analyse in time the emergence of Russian imperialism (in the early 2000s)²² and of Chinese imperialism (in the late 2000s) as we documented in a number of studies.²³

In the context of the current Ukraine War, it is also interesting to see that none of the three Grantite organisations – ISA, CWI, and IMT – has been able to give a correct class characterisation of the Ukraine. Is it an imperialist state, a semi-colonial country, or something else? They have no clue or if they know they keep it secret. In contrast, the RCIT has always insisted that the Ukraine is an industrialised, capitalist semi-colony.²⁴

Such confusion by the Grantites about Russia's and the Ukraine's class character is no accidental. It is the theoretical fundament for their denial that this is a war of an imperialist power against a semi-colonial country in which socialists need to defend the latter. As Trotsky once noted, proponents of such a policy are agents of imperialism. "... it is a bad Marxist who tries to fix common rules for imperialist France and colonial China. Not to distinguish oppressor countries from oppressed countries is the same as not to distinguish between the exploiting class and the exploited. Those who place imperialist and colonial countries on the same level, no matter what democratic phrases they might use to conceal this fact, are nothing but agents of imperialism."²⁵

In conclusion, the experience of the Grantites demonstrates that a theory of imperialism which makes an organization blind for fundamental changes in the imperialist world order and for the emergence of new imperialist powers (at least for many years) is totally useless and wrong!

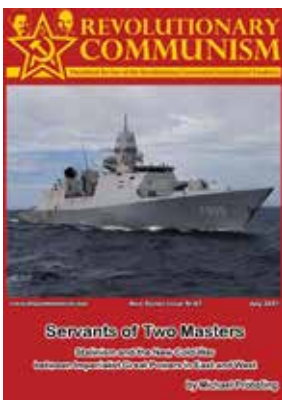
2. Failure to recognise the nature of national oppression

The Grantites' flawed theory of imperialism results in complete confusion on national oppression caused by imperialism. Consequently, they refuse the Leninist program of national self-determination. This starts already by their denigration of the right of national self-determination. Some years ago, Peter Taaffe claimed (in a polemic against another organisation): "*The right of self-determination is not a "socialist principle", as the ISO asserts, but a democratic task.*"²⁶

This is utter nonsense which shall justify the Grantite policy of denying this very right to several oppressed nations. As a matter of fact, Marxists consider the right of national self-determination as a crucial principle of the socialist program. This was also the approach of Lenin and the Bolsheviks. "*On the other hand, in contrast to the Proudhonists, who 'repudiated' the national problem 'in the name of the social revolution,' Marx, having in mind mainly the interests of the proletarian class struggle in the advanced countries, put into the forefront the fundamental principle of internationalism and socialism, viz., that no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations.*"²⁷

Of course, it is certainly true that, in times of war or revolution, the right of national self-determination – like many other elements of the socialist program – can be superseded by more burning tasks of the class struggle. Let us take the example of Serbia during World War I. If the conflict would have existed in isolation, socialists would have defended it against the imperialist aggression of Austria-Hungary. However, due to the nature of WWI as a global inter-imperialist war, the Serbians' right of national self-determination became a subordinated element.

Or, to take another example, in the course of a successful proletarian revolution it might become necessary to in-



PUBLICATIONS OF THE RCIT

Servants of Two Masters

*Stalinism and the New Cold War
between Imperialist Great Powers in East and West*

by Michael Pröbsting

A RCIT Pamphlet, 24 pages, A4 Format

Introduction * The New Inter-Imperialist Cold War * A View on the Military Strength of the Great Powers * The Main Point of both Statements: Siding with Chinese and Russian Imperialism * Stalinist Fantasies Shredded in the Light of Reality: The Rise of Chinese Imperialism * The KKE's "criticism" and its fraternal bonds with the Chinese CP * Beside the Servants of Assad the Butcher - Who Signed the KKE-initiated Joint Statement? * The Xi Fan Club: Signatories of the CPUSA-initiated Joint Statement * The Concept of Multilateralism and Peaceful Coexistence: A Reactionary Illusion * "Socialism in One Country": The Historical Roots of the Stalinist Concept of "Peaceful Coexistence" * Serving Two Masters: The Eastern Imperialists as well as Sectors of the Domestic Bourgeoisie * A Note on the tight-lipped "Trotskyists" (CWI, IMT, ISA) * Conclusions * Footnotes

vade another country, and thereby temporarily suppress its population's right of national self-determination, in order to spread the world revolution. Similarly, it may become necessary to temporarily suspend the democratic right of factory workers to elect their superiors; or that of rank-and-file soldiers to select their commanders. However, taking such temporarily necessary steps does not alter the fact that the right of national self-determination is an indispensable part of the socialist program for working class power.

Furthermore, the Grantites don't understand the Leninist program of national self-determination in a revolutionary but in a bourgeois-liberal way. For them, the right of national self-determination applies, in principle, to each and every nation irrespective if they are an oppressed or an oppressor nation.

In contrast, the RCIT – following the Marxist classics – has always advocated the right of national self-determination as a demand applicable for oppressed nations but not for oppressor nations.

*"That is why the focal point in the Social-Democratic programme must be that division of nations into oppressor and oppressed which forms the essence of imperialism, and is deceitfully evaded by the social-chauvinists and Kautsky. This division is not significant from the angle of bourgeois pacifism or the philistine Utopia of peaceful competition among independent nations under capitalism, but it is most significant from the angle of the revolutionary struggle against imperialism. It is from this division that our definition of the "right of nations to self-determination" must follow, a definition that is consistently democratic, revolutionary, and in accord with the general task of the immediate struggle for socialism."*²⁸

*"The right of nations to self-determination implies exclusively the right to independence in the political sense, the right to free political separation from the oppressor nation. (...) It implies only a consistent expression of struggle against all national oppression."*²⁹

This is also how Trotsky understood both the Bolshevik and his own approach towards the national question: *"But the very conjuncture of the national movements with struggle of the proletariat for power was made politically possible only thanks to the fact that the Bolsheviks during the whole of their history carried on an irreconcilable struggle with the Great Russian oppressors, supporting always and without reservations the right of the oppressed nations to self-determination, including separation from Russia. The policy of Lenin in regard to the oppressed nations did not, however, have anything in common with the policy of the epigones. The Bolshevik Party defended the right of the oppressed nations to self-determination with the methods of the proletarian class struggle."*³⁰

Brussels, the Falkland settlers, and Palestine

In contrast, the Grantites understand the right of national self-determination not as a program of struggle against national oppression but rather as a liberal slogan which might be applied even for "a city or smaller entity". *"In general, the right of self-determination applies to a nationality, linked to a distinct territorial entity. However, sometimes this can take the form of a city or smaller entity which considers itself separate and apart from other countries or regions. For instance, we have envisaged the future possibility of an entity for Brussels – within a Belgian socialist confederation – whose*

*population consider themselves different from Wallonia or the Flemish region."*³¹

While the issue of "self-determination" for Brussels is rather funny than dangerous, the Grantites approach becomes reactionary when they apply it to justify national oppression. During the above-mentioned Malvinas War between British imperialism and semi-colonial Argentina, the CWI did use the existence of 1,800 British settlers on the islands off the coast of Argentina as a key argument for their capitulation to British imperialism.

In his book on the history of Militant, CWI leader Peter Taaffe argues: *"The democratic rights of the 1,800 Falklanders, including the right to self-determination, if they so desired, was a key question in the consciousness of British workers. (...) Marxists could not be indifferent to the fate of the Falklanders, particularly given the consciousness of the British working class as it developed over this issue."*³²

We see the same approach when it comes to Israel / Occupied Palestine. The Grantites justify their support for a Jewish state in historic Palestine with the argument that this is what the Israeli Jews would want. As Peter Taaffe said, the CWI can not support the destruction of the Israeli Apartheid state and its replacement by a Palestinian state with minority rights for the Israeli Jews because the Israeli Jews would oppose this: *"... the idea of a Palestinian state with minority rights for Israelis still appears. Such an abstract slogan would never be accepted by the Israeli population."* As a consequence, the Grantites *"recognise the national rights of the Israeli people for their own state."*³³ Hence, both the victim of oppression as well as those gaining from such have the same "rights". The consequence is the CWI/ISA's advocacy of a two-state solution. *"The Maavak Sozialisti comrades also support the right of Palestinians to self-determination, and advocate an independent, socialist Palestine, alongside a socialist Israel, as part of a socialist confederation of the region."*³⁴

Such a program is reactionary in several aspects. First, it puts the right of national self-determination of an oppressor group (the Israeli Jews) on the same level as the right of national self-determination of an oppressed nation (the Palestinians). Effectively, this means that millions of Palestinian refugees who have been expelled from their homeland have no right to return. At the same time, Jews from all over the world can move to Israel and settle on Palestinian land.

Furthermore, the Grantite program proposes to keep the control of Israeli Jews of the wealthy lands while the Palestinians are reduced to the poor regions in Gaza and West Bank. Finally, one wonders what the position of the Grantites will be if the current, extremely right-wing government of Netanyahu carries out the threat of some of its members and starts another Nakba, i.e. when it starts annexing more Palestinian land and drives the remaining Palestinians in Jerusalem, Haifa, Westbank and Gaza out of their homeland? The RCIT and all authentic Marxists will support the Palestinians' armed struggle irrespective if such is led by Hamas or other resistance factions. And the Grantites? Will they again betray the Palestinian people by refusing to support such struggle by claiming that Hamas is a "right-wing Islamist organisation"?!

Northern Ireland: The CWI's fear of "Lebanonisation" and "the bones of a million Protestants"

Another example where the Grantites distortion of the Leninist program becomes particularly evident is Ireland. As it is well-known this island was occupied by English kings and brutally colonialised. For centuries, the island was plundered which catastrophic consequences for the indigenous population. The *Great Famine* (1845-1851) resulted in the death or emigration of over two million people. The Irish people waged a long-lasting resistance and, after years of mass protests, armed insurrection and civil war, they succeeded in expelling the British occupiers from most of their country and created an independent state in 1921.

However, British imperialism managed – with the help of the capitulationist wing of Sinn Fein/IRA – to carve-out a small part of the island which it continued to occupy since then. This region – called "Ulster" by the British occupation and "Six Counties" or Northern Ireland by the Irish people – has been artificially created in such a way that it had a small majority of people descending from English and Scottish Protestants who had been settled by the British colonizers.

The Communist International at that time strongly opposed such division of the island and called for the expulsion of the British occupiers and the unification of Ireland. They supported the struggle against the occupation in the North and collaborated with the Irish Republicans.³⁵

Hence, the RCIT (resp. its predecessor organisation) and all authentic Marxists have always called for a reunification of Ireland and combined this with the slogan of a 32 *County Socialist Workers Republic* (i.e. the unification of the 26 counties in Southern and the 6 counties in Northern Ireland). Consequently, we have supported the anti-colonial resistance of petty-bourgeois nationalist forces – like Sinn Fein and the IRA – against the occupiers. Naturally, while we supported their practical actions, we did not give them no political support but raised an independent working-class program.³⁶

Our program has been in complete contrast to that of the Grantites. Militant/CWI always denounced the struggle of the nationalist IRA against the British occupiers as "individual terrorism". They argued that the IRA's resistance would be a "negative ... net contribution to the genuine 'anti-imperialist' struggle."³⁷ Hence, they lent no support whatsoever to the practical resistance of the Irish people in the North against the British imperialists.

While the Grantites formally expressed support for the reunification of Ireland, they made a socialist transformation a precondition for such support. First, socialism must be introduced in Ireland and Britain, only then they would support reunification. They also advocated a federation of traditional colonial power and its historic victim. This was expressed in the key slogans of Militant/CWI like: "... out of this common struggle for socialism the ending of partition and the creation of a socialist Ireland. (...) The establishment of a Socialist Federation of Britain and Ireland."³⁸

Hence, the Grantites make a socialist transformation a precondition for supporting Ireland's reunification. "Only on a socialist basis can partition be overcome."³⁹ This is an economist and ultimatum approach since it treats the national unification not as a revolutionary-democratic de-

mand but rather as a maximalist program which could be realised only after the establishment of socialist states.⁴⁰

Consequently, the Grantites viewed a reunification of Ireland under capitalist condition as something worse than the British occupation of the North! In a key pamphlet which Militant/CWI published in 1984, they hysterically warned that such a reunification would result in the "Lebanonisation" of the country, that it would "turn of Belfast into a Beirut" and the consequences for the Irish people would be "a mixture of all the horrors of Lebanon and of the Palestinians, except worse."

"The road to capitalist reunification actually leads away from unity and towards civil war. The further along this road the ruling class might try to go the more serious would be the resistance and the more disastrous the consequences. At best the outcome would be a Lebanonisation, with the Cantonisation of the North and the turning of Belfast into a Beirut. At worst, if the conflict was fought out to the end, the result would be repartition, the setting up of an entirely Protestant state in the North-East, the driving of Catholics from this area and the expulsion of the Protestant population from the border districts which would be ceded to the South. All that would have been achieved would be the reinforcement of division, the setting back of the class struggle for a whole period, the creation of a huge refugee population and the coming to power of vicious Bonapartist regimes North and South. It would be a mixture of all the horrors of Lebanon and of the Palestinians, except worse."⁴¹

In another pamphlet, published in 1987, Militant/CWI repeated the idea that the expulsion of the British occupiers by the petty-bourgeois nationalists would create a worse situation for the working class and the Irish people. "A civil war would not result in the driving of the Protestants into the sea as some republican elements imagine. There will be no united Ireland built on the bones of a million Protestants. Instead, the Protestant community would become an armed camp and, fighting for survival, would win just as the Jews won in Palestine in 1947. The outcome would be re-partition, refugee camps, and a new Middle East on the edge of Europe. It would be a colossal setback for the working class throughout Ireland and for the working class in Britain."⁴²

This statement is revealing in two aspects. First, it implicitly admits that the role of loyalist Protestants defending British occupation is on the same level as the pro-imperialist Jewish settlers in Palestine. Secondly, it invents a bizarre and phantastic scenario based on comparting the petty-bourgeois anti-imperialist IRA with mass murders like Hitler.

As a matter of fact, the IRA never directed its armed struggle against the Protestant population but against the British occupiers and their supporters. Here are the findings of two official reports, summarised on Wikipedia: "Two detailed studies of deaths in the Troubles, the Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN), and the book *Lost Lives*, differ slightly on the numbers killed by the IRA and the total number of conflict deaths. According to CAIN, the IRA was responsible for 1,705 deaths, about 48% of the total conflict deaths. Of these, 1,009 (about 59%) were members or former members of the British security forces, while 508 (about 29%) were civilians. According to *Lost Lives*, the IRA was responsible for 1,781 deaths, about 47% of the total conflict deaths. Of these, 944 (about 53%) were members of the British security forces, while 644 (about 36%) were civilians (including 61 former members of the security forces). The civilian figure also includes civilians employed

by British security forces, politicians, members of the judiciary, and alleged criminals and informers. Most of the remainder were loyalist or republican paramilitary members, including over 100 IRA members accidentally killed by their own bombs or shot for being security force agents or informers.”⁴³

Compare these facts of nearly three decades of armed struggle by the IRA with the crazy phantasy of Militant/CWI about “the bones of a million Protestants”! It is a scandal that the Grantites tried to cover their capitulation to (British) social-imperialism with wild slander of those organisations who led – albeit with a wrong strategy – a legitimate national liberation struggle!

ISA: Still no support for the struggle against the British occupiers

Shamefully, the Grantites still consider British occupation as a lesser evil compared to reunification of Ireland under capitalist conditions. In a recently published statement of its Irish section, the ISA explicitly put the Irish nationalist militant organisations and the pro-British loyalist paramilitaries as equal enemies of the working class. (“We will not allow sectarian forces on either side, including paramilitaries, to drag us back.”)

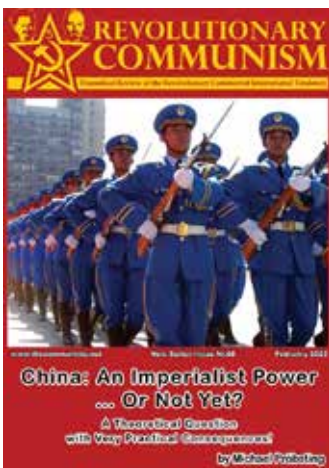
The ISA is strongly alarmed about the danger of resurgence of the armed resistance against the British occupiers as support for Irish nationalists is growing in working-class communities. “In response, the IRSP, the political wing of the INLA, stated that they are “monitoring” loyalist paramilitaries: a clear warning on their part that if loyalist violence escalates they will retaliate. Previously the dissident republican group, Óglaigh na hÉireann, in their Easter commemoration statement, said that they would target loyalist figures in retaliation if loyalists targeted nationalist politicians, at an event where newly-acquired automatic weapons were displayed, the first armed display in Milltown cemetery since the Provisional IRA ceasefire in the 1990s. This shows that if violence does flare up it could quickly lead to retaliation but also would not be contained to the North, instead directly impacting the South and potentially also Britain, as in the past. Alarming, in this context of economic and po-

litical turmoil, we can already see the potential for some young people, in particular in hard-pressed, working-class communities to once again be dragged into the dead-end of sectarian paramilitarism. We cannot rely on the PSNI or other parts of the state to challenge this. The strengthening of paramilitary organisations in our communities will not only intensify sectarian polarisation but they have the capacity to play a regressive role in every manner. The secretive and unaccountable nature of these forces drives gender violence and domestic abuse. Women and LGBTQI+ people, therefore, have a particular role in building movements that can drive paramilitaries out of working-class areas.”⁴⁴

In order to justify its reactionary position, the ISA hypocritically invents the artificial argument that the nationalist resistance against the British occupiers and their supporters would result in ... more violence against women and LGBTQI+ people!⁴⁵ What a nonsense! It is oppression, including national oppression, which worsens the living condition for women and LGBTQI+ people – not the resistance against such oppression!

Naturally, socialists don’t advocate the methods of petty-bourgeois nationalists (like various splitters of the IRA). The RCIT supports the methods of class struggle – from mass protests to strikes and armed resistance – against the British occupiers and their supporters. However, as a matter of fact, such organisations of militant struggle – including armed workers militias – do not exist currently. As long as socialists are a small minority and as long as the actual resistance against the colonial masters is led by petty-bourgeois nationalists, socialists are obliged to lend critical support to their struggle.

We conclude this chapter by drawing attention to the telling fact that, despite its considerable length of more than 3,300 words, the ISA statement about the “sectarian tensions” does not contain a single word in favour of the expulsion of the British troops or in support of the reunification of Ireland! In summary, we see that the Grantites still view the division of Ireland and the British occupation of the North as a lesser evil than the expulsion of the occupiers and the reunification (under capitalist conditions).



Publications of the RCIT

China: An Imperialist Power ... Or Not Yet?

Continuing the Debate with Esteban Mercatante and the PTS/FT on China’s class character and consequences for the revolutionary strategy

By Michael Pröbsting, January 2022

Introduction * I. The importance of the dialectical method * II. A summary of our characterization of China as an imperialist Great Power * III. On China’s unevenness and vulnerability * IV. The Taiwan question in its historical and geostrategic context * V. Is China a Great Power without imperialist features? * VI. Can China’s development as an imperialist power be aborted? * VII. China, imperialist wars, and revolutionary tactics * Footnotes

A RCIT Pamphlet, 24 pages, A4 Format

3. Refusal to support liberation struggles as they take place

The failure to understand imperialist oppression inevitable results in the failure to support the struggle of oppressed nations. If the victim of imperialist aggression is equally bad as the imperialist aggressor itself (e.g. Britain vs. Argentina), if there is a struggle between two people which have both the same claim to the right of national self-determination (e.g. Israeli Jews vs. Palestinian people, pro-British Protestants vs Irish nationalist people), it is only logical that the Grantites see no reason to oppose the oppressor and to side with the oppressed.⁴⁶

Even in those cases where the Grantites formally recognise, in one way or another, the existence of national oppression, they refuse to support the national liberation struggles as they actually take place. They claim that they (abstractly) support an algebraic “right to resist” (mind these words!) but that they could not support the resistance as it takes place on the basis that such is led by (petty-)bourgeois nationalist or Islamist forces.⁴⁷

Furthermore, the Grantites claim that “the workers would not understand” such support for anti-colonial resistance. (This is, by the way, an crucial argument for all kinds of opportunists in the rich imperialist countries.) Based on such a coward and social-imperialist policy, the Grantites refused supporting the resistance in Iraq and Afghanistan against the imperialist occupation.⁴⁸

Peter Taaffe and the CWI made this very clear in several statements. In 2002, after the imperialist invasion of Afghanistan, he wrote: “If, therefore, we perceive this war as thoroughly reactionary on the part of imperialism, does this mean that we throw in our lot, albeit ‘critically’, with those who have allegedly ‘resisted’ the US juggernaut, namely bin Laden, his al-Qa’ida and the Taliban government? Unbelievably, this is the position of some small Trotskyist groups, such as Workers Power (our predecessor organization, Ed.) and the Morenoite LIT. The latter is largely based in Latin America. Their approach will find absolutely no echo amongst the world working class, particularly the proletariat in the developed capitalist countries.”

“We clearly differentiate between the advanced imperialist countries and those in the colonial or the neo-colonial world. In general we still support the peoples in the neocolonial world in the struggle against imperialist domination, particularly when this takes on the form, as it did in Afghanistan, of military intervention. In this case we were clearly on the side of the Afghani people and in the imperialist countries we opposed the war. Support for the Afghani people and their resistance against the armed incursions of imperialism is not the same as support for the Taliban, even if this support is ‘critical’, as some left organisations have posed it.”⁴⁹

The CWI repeated the same approach in the case of Iraq after the invasion by U.S. and British imperialism in 2003. As Peter Taaffe proudly states, they always opposed the idea “that Iraqis had the right to resist ‘by whatever means they find necessary’.”⁵⁰ Given the organic opportunism of the Grantites, based in Western imperialist countries, such an approach is only consequential given the fact that any support for the Iraqi resistance could provoke horror among the trade union bureaucrats and the political establishment of British imperialism. (This is the real meaning of their opportunist excuse that “the workers would not under-

stand”!)

They take the same line concerning the Palestinian resistance. While they (abstractly) support an algebraic “right to resist”, they never support the actual resistance which is taking place since decades! They rather denounce any support for the resistance activities of (petty-)bourgeois nationalist or Islamist forces against the oppressor! Hence, for the Grantites, Hamas is just “a right-wing Islamist party” – a typical bourgeois-eclectic characterisation without a grain of Marxist class analysis!⁵¹ Likewise, the Grantites are proud of their record that they never lent support to the Irish resistance led by Sinn Fein and the IRA. “Unfortunately, this has not been the case with many of the organisations of the left. Some of them wrongly supported the IRA in Ireland and in Britain, something which the Socialist Party has never done.”⁵²

They unashamed defend their stance until today as they confirmed in a recently published article. Criticising the Cliffites for their support for the Iraqi resistance against the invasion and occupation by U.S. and British imperialism, the CWI writes: “This approach was sometimes reflected in Stop the War material. One press statement that ended up being circulated, despite attempts by the Socialist Party to get it withdrawn, called for ‘unconditional support for the Iraqi resistance’. The Socialist Party fully supported the right of the Iraqi people to resist, including with arms, the US and British invasion of their country, just as we support the right of the Ukrainian people to do so against Putin’s invasion. But that does not equate to giving unconditional support to all the forces – which included Al Qaida – that made up the resistance in Iraq, any more than it means giving support to the Ukrainian government today.”⁵³

In short, the Grantites’ method is one which we have characterized as “platonic anti-imperialism”, i.e. an abstract “anti-imperialism” without any support for the actual activities against this or that imperialist aggressor. Consequently, the CWI/ISA/IMT has never supported any organization with mass influence in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Argentina, or the Ukraine which waged armed resistance against the imperialist aggressor! Such a kind of “anti-imperialism” is, in fact, equal to capitulation to imperialism, i.e. it is a form of social-imperialism.

If one would transfer the same logic to the struggle of women against gender violence, it would mean to fall into the misogynist trap to only support “perfect victims”. If CWI/ISA/IMT reject such logic from a feminist perspective, why do they apply it to anti-imperialism?

Ignoring the class character of anti-imperialist struggles

The approach of authentic Marxists is very different. Our starting point is a correct class analysis of the camps involved in a conflict. As a general rule, we side with the (semi-)colonial country against an imperialist state or with the oppressed nation against the oppressor. (As indicated above, there can be exceptional circumstances where other contradictions become more dominant in a given conflict – like the inter-imperialist conflict in World War I which made the legitimate struggle of Serbia against Austria-Hungary a subordinated element).

Given the deep crisis of revolutionary leadership, revolutionary socialists are usually not in a position to lead the class struggle, including legitimate national and anti-imperialist

wars. Such struggles are therefore led by (petty-)bourgeois forces – trade union bureaucrats, reformist parties, petty-bourgeois nationalist or Islamist forces, sometimes even by bourgeois semi-colonial states. Marxists must analyse the concrete class basis of such forces. In (semi-)colonial countries, the struggle against imperialist powers is usually led by petty-bourgeois forces with mass support among the workers and/or the urban petty-bourgeois and poor peasantry. Where such a conflict involves a state (like in Argentina 1982 or Iraq 1991 and 2003), such anti-imperialist resistance is led by the national bourgeoisie of such state.

In such (semi-)colonial countries, it is not only the working class but all popular classes which are oppressed by imperialism. Even the semi-colonial bourgeoisie is, to a certain degree, an oppressed class. Such wrote Trotsky: *“The internal regime in the colonial and semicolonial countries has a predominantly bourgeois character. But the pressure of foreign imperialism so alters and distorts the economic and political structure of these countries that the national bourgeoisie (even in the politically independent countries of South America) only partly reaches the height of a ruling class. The pressure imperialism on backward countries does not, it is true, change their basic social character since the oppressor and oppressed represent only different levels of development in one and the same bourgeois society. Nevertheless, the difference between England and India, Japan and China, the United States and Mexico is so big that we strictly differentiate between oppressor and oppressed bourgeois countries and we consider it our duty to support the latter against the former. The bourgeoisie of colonial and semi-colonial countries is a semi-ruling, semi-oppressed class.”*⁵⁴

The decisive issue is the class character of the camps involved in such a conflict, not their political form or their ideology. When the Grantites introduce such characterizations like *“ Hamas is a right-wing Islamist party ”*, this serves only to equate such an organisation, standing at the top of a liberation struggle, with imperialist right-wing parties like the Lega in Italy or Le Pen in France, i.e. it serves as justification for the Grantites treacherous refusal to defend forces like Hamas against the Zionist state. Such social-imperialist capitulation would be much more difficult to conceal if they would have to admit that Hamas is a (petty-)bourgeois Islamist force based on the popular masses in occupied Palestine!

The tradition of Trotsky and the Communist International

It is because of such a Marxist approach that the RCIT and all authentic Marxists have repeatedly sided with liberation struggles in (semi-colonial) countries which were led by (petty-)bourgeois forces, by “right-wing” nationalists or Islamists or even authoritarian regimes. This has always been the approach of the revolutionary workers movement.

Such Trotsky explained in the 1930s that he would *“be on the side of “fascist” Brazil against “democratic” Great Britain”*. *“I will take the most simple and obvious example. In Brazil there now reigns a semifascist regime that every revolutionary can only view with hatred. Let us assume, however, that on the morrow England enters into a military conflict with Brazil. I ask you on whose side of the conflict will the working class be? I will answer for myself personally – in this case I will be on the side of “fascist” Brazil against “democratic” Great Britain. Why?*

*Because in the conflict between them it will not be a question of democracy or fascism. If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and will place double chains on Brazil. If Brazil on the contrary should be victorious, it will give a mighty impulse to national and democratic consciousness of the country and will lead to the overthrow of the Vargas dictatorship. The defeat of England will at the same time deliver a blow to British imperialism and will give an impulse to the revolutionary movement of the British proletariat. Truly, one must have an empty head to reduce world antagonisms and military conflicts to the struggle between fascism and democracy. Under all masks one must know how to distinguish exploiters, slaveowners, and robbers!”*⁵⁵

Likewise did the Fourth International defend Ethiopia against Italy in 1935-36, despite the fact that the former had an absolutist monarchy led by Emperor Haile Selassie. *„Of course, we are for the defeat of Italy and the victory of Ethiopia, and therefore we must do everything possible to hinder by all available means support to Italian imperialism by the other imperialist powers, and at the same time facilitate the delivery of armaments, etc., to Ethiopia as best we can.”*⁵⁶

And in China, where the national liberation war against Japanese imperialism was led by the reactionary General Chiang Kai-shek who had slaughtered tens of thousands of communist workers in 1927, the Trotskyists advocated also support for such anti-colonial resistance. *“Quite so: as against imperialism it is obligatory to help even the hangmen of Chiang Kai-shek.”*⁵⁷

As Trotsky pointed out, Marxists will often be obliged to support a legitimate struggle – economically, politically or military – which is led by non-revolutionary, treacherous forces. In most cases, workers strikes are led by corrupted trade union bureaucrats. Still, it would be utterly reactionary to refuse support for such strikes for, let us say, higher wages. In principle, the same is true for legitimate national liberation struggles led by (petty-)bourgeois forces.

“But Chiang Kai-shek? We need have no illusions about Chiang Kai-shek, his party, or the whole ruling class of China, just as Marx and Engels had no illusions about the ruling classes of Ireland and Poland. Chiang Kai-shek is the executioner of the Chinese workers and peasants. But today he is forced, despite himself, to struggle against Japan for the remainder of the independence of China. Tomorrow he may again betray. It is possible. It is probable. It is even inevitable. But today he is struggling. Only cowards, scoundrels, or complete imbeciles can refuse to participate in that struggle.

Let us use the example of a strike to clarify the question. We do not support all strikes. If, for example, a strike is called for the exclusion of Negro, Chinese, or Japanese workers from a factory, we are opposed to that strike. But if a strike aims at bettering – insofar as it can – the conditions of the workers, we are the first to participate in it, whatever the leadership. In the vast majority of strikes, the leaders are reformists, traitors by profession, agents of capital. They oppose every strike. But from time to time the pressure of the masses or of the objective situation forces them into the path of struggle.

Let us imagine, for an instant, a worker saying to himself: “I do not want to participate in the strike because the leaders are agents of capital.” This doctrine of this ultraleft imbecile would serve to brand him by his real name: a strikebreaker. The case of the Sino-Japanese War, is from this point of view, entirely analogous. If Japan is an imperialist country and if China is the victim of imperialism, we favor China. Japanese patriotism is the

hideous mask of worldwide robbery. Chinese patriotism is legitimate and progressive. To place the two on the same plane and to speak of "social patriotism" can be done only by those who have read nothing of Lenin, who have understood nothing of the attitude of the Bolsheviks during the imperialist war, and who can but compromise and prostitute the teachings of Marxism." ⁵⁸

In supporting such struggles led by non-revolutionary forces, Marxists apply the principles of the united front tactic. This means, as we discussed in detail in our book *"Marxism and the United Front Tactic Today"*, that socialists combine support for practical activities with advocating an independent working-class program and, at the same time, criticizing (petty-)bourgeois forces for their mistakes and treacheries. ⁵⁹ In the same article, Trotsky explained: *"In participating in the military struggle under the orders of Chiang Kai-shek, since unfortunately it is he who has the command in the war for independence – to prepare politically the overthrow of Chiang Kai-shek ... that is the only revolutionary policy."*

Such an approach was based on the concept of the *anti-imperialist united front* as it was elaborated by the Communist International in the times of Lenin and Trotsky. Such stated the *Theses on the Eastern Question*, adopted at its Fourth Congress in 1922, about the importance of the anti-imperialist united front tactic: *"The expediency of this slogan follows from the prospect of a prolonged and protracted struggle with world imperialism which demands the mobilization of all revolutionary elements. This mobilization is the more necessary as the indigenous ruling classes are inclined to effect compromises with foreign capital directed against the vital interests of the masses of the people. And just as in the West the slogan of the proletarian united front has helped and is still helping to expose social-democratic betrayal of proletarian interests, so the slogan of the anti-imperialist united front will help to expose the vacillation of various bourgeois-nationalist groups. This slogan will also promote the development of the revolutionary will and the clarification of the class consciousness of the working masses and put them in the front ranks of those who are fighting not only against imperialism, but also against the survivals of feudalism."* ⁶⁰

It is on the basis of such principles that the RCIT (resp. its predecessor organisation) has always lent critical but unconditional support to the struggles of (semi-)colonial countries or nationally oppressed people led by (petty-)bourgeois forces. We did so in Argentina during the Malvinas War against Britain, despite the fact that it was led by a reactionary military regime; in Iraq in the two wars 1991 and 2003 (and the subsequent occupation) against U.S. imperialism and its allies, despite the fact that the resistance was led by (petty-)bourgeois Baathist and Islamist

forces; the Taliban-led resistance in Afghanistan against the imperialist occupiers in 2001-21; the Irish resistance, led by Sinn Fein / IRA, against the British occupiers, the Palestinian resistance led by Hamas and other nationalist and Islamist organisations or the resistance of the Ukrainian people, led by the pro-Western Zelensky government, against the Russian invasion. ⁶¹

In summary, the Grantites either outrightly deny the existence of the imperialist (or national) oppression or they claim that such would be superseded by (or subordinated to) other factors such as a "proxy war", the right of national self-determination of a few settlers (Malvinas) or the "rights" of an oppressor national group (Israel/Palestine, Northern Ireland). In any case, they never support the struggles of the oppressed as they concretely take place under a non-revolutionary leadership.

While the Grantites are prepared to support each and every struggle for economic demands led by trade union bureaucrats (including the most corrupted and backward types of bureaucrats!), they would never, under no circumstances, support a national liberation struggle led by (petty-)bourgeois forces!

In this context, it is worth reminding to the shameful fact that the CWI's leading section – Socialist Party in England and Wales – supported the chauvinist *"British Jobs for British Workers"* strike in 2009. This purpose of this "strike" of British workers at the Lindsey Oil Refinery was to stop the hiring of migrant workers and, unsurprisingly, received support from right-wing tabloids and parties. Various British left-reformists and centrists – like the Stalinist CPB, the CWI, IMT etc. – supported this strike. The SPEW/CWI even proudly boasted that one of its members was a leader of this chauvinist strike!

Hence, we consider the Grantite policy, as applied by the CWI, ISA and IMT, as a betrayal of the principles of Marxism and the revolutionary struggle. Or to quote Trotsky who polemicised against a group which advocated a similar policy of hostile opposition to liberation struggles led by non-revolutionary forces: *"The Eiffelites counterpose the policy of "class struggle" to this "nationalist and social patriotic" policy. Lenin fought this abstract and sterile opposition all his life. To him, the interests of the world proletariat dictated the duty of aiding oppressed peoples in their national and patriotic struggle against imperialism. Those who have not yet understood that, almost a quarter of a century after the World War and twenty years after the October revolution, must be pitilessly rejected as the worst enemies on the inside by the revolutionary vanguard. This is exactly the case with Eiffel and his kind!"* ⁶²



Publications of the RCIT

The Origins of the Jews

By Yossi Schwartz, July 2015

Chapter I: What are the origins of the Jews?

Chapter II: The Rise of Anti-Semitism

Chapter III: Anti-Semitism and Zionism

Chapter IV: The Russian Revolution:

Bolshevism, the Bund, and Stalinism

PART II. THE CLASS BASIS AND THE THEORETICAL TRADITION OF GRANTITE REVISIONISM

It is impossible to understand the methodological failures of Grantism without recognising its historical class basis and the theoretical traditions in which it has been shaped. Since its foundation in 1964, this current has always been based – resp. has its mother section in Britain, the oldest capitalist and imperialist power. The leading cadres of the ISA, which emerged only in 2019 after the split with Taaffe, are trained for decades in the same tradition. Furthermore, the strongest section of the ISA is based in the U.S. – the biggest imperialist power since three quarter of a century and characterised by the same Anglo-Saxon intellectual world.

4. Strategic orientation to the labour bureaucracy, Sanders, Chavez, etc.

Naturally, we don't talk about any geographical factors but about the specific politically and ideologically environment in which Grantism has operated over many decades. Since its foundation in Britain, Militant was deeply entrenched within the reformist Labour Party (at its high point in the mid-1980s, it boasted to have three parliamentary deputies and many representatives within the party bureaucracy).⁶³

After a series of expulsions by the Labour leadership in the 1980s, the majority around Peter Taaffe felt the necessity to make a turn and to leave the party. In contrast, the minority around Ted Grant and Alan Woods, which became the IMT, split in 1991/92 and stayed within the Labour Party. But even after the split, Taaffe's CWI continued to remain entrenched within the labour bureaucracy via its positions in the trade unions. Over many years it was well-placed within the highest ranks of the trade union bureaucracy. In a book on the history of the CWI, Peter Taaffe boasted in 2004: *"The CWI now has an important influence in several unions in Britain and in Ireland. Eighteen CWI members sit on the national executives of British-based unions. Janice Godridge, the President of the PCS, a public employees' union, is a CWI member, as is Chris Baugh, the Assistant General Secretary of PCS, the main civil servants' union. The President of the main public sector union in Northern Ireland, NIPSA, is Carmel Gates, a CWI member, and other Socialist Party members sit on NIPSA leadership body. For a period, the Socialist Party in Ireland also held the position of President of the CPSU (civil servants union) in Southern Ireland."*⁶⁴ Even the General Secretary of the prison officers' union (the *Prison Officers' Association*), Brian Caton, was a member of the CWI in England!⁶⁵

With the decline and splits of the CWI in the last years, they also lost a number of trade union bureaucrats. However, this does not alter the fact that since its inception, the CWI always had a *strategic orientation* to the labour bureaucracy and its direct social base – the labour aristocracy, i.e. the upper, privileged strata of the working class. These sectors – *"real agents of the bourgeoisie in the working-class movement, the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class,"* as Lenin once said, are closely connected with the imperialist state and the monopolies.⁶⁶ Hence, they are a

privileged stratum, with a thoroughly conservative mentality, an ideology of loyalty to the state and its tradition (remember that the British trade union leaders cancelled their planned strikes for higher wages when the Queen died a few months ago!) – in other words, this is an enemy of the working class!

Leon Trotsky once noted about the labour bureaucracy in general and the British in particular: *"The question of the source of this bureaucratic danger is no less important. (...) In the capitalist states, the most monstrous forms of bureaucratism are to be observed precisely in the trade unions. It is enough to look at America, England and Germany. Amsterdam is the most powerful international organisation of the trade union bureaucracy. It is thanks to it that the whole structure of capitalism now stands upright above all in Europe and especially in England. If there were not a bureaucracy of the trade unions, then the police, the army, the courts, the lords, the monarchy would appear before the proletarian masses as nothing but pitiful and ridiculous playthings. The bureaucracy of the trade unions is the backbone of British imperialism. It is by means of this bureaucracy that the bourgeoisie exists, not only in the metropolis, but in India, in Egypt, and in the other colonies. One would have to be completely blind to say to the English workers: "Be on guard against the conquest of power and always remember that your trade unions are the antidote to the dangers of the state." The Marxist will say to the English workers: "The trade union bureaucracy is the chief Instrument, for your oppression by the bourgeois state. Power must be wrested from the hands of the bourgeoisie, and for that its principal agent, the trade union bureaucracy, must be overthrown." Parenthetically, it is especially for this reason that the bloc of Stalin with the strikebreakers was so criminal.*

*From the example of England, one sees very clearly how absurd it is to counterpose, as if it were a question of two different principles, the trade union organisation and the state organisation. In England, more than anywhere else, the state rests upon the back of the working class which constitutes the overwhelming majority of the population of the country. The mechanism is such that the bureaucracy is based directly on the workers, and the state indirectly, through the intermediary of the trade union bureaucracy. Up to now, we have not mentioned the Labour Party, which in England, the classic country of trade unions, is only a political transposition of the same trade union bureaucracy. The same leaders guide the trade unions, betray the general strike, lead the electoral campaign and later on sit in the ministries. The Labour Party and the trade unions – these are not two principles, they are only a technical division of labour. Together they are the fundamental support of the domination of the English bourgeoisie. The latter cannot be overthrown without overthrowing the Labourite bureaucracy. And that cannot be attained by counterposing the trade union as such to the state as such, but only by the active opposition of the Communist Party to the Labourite bureaucracy in all fields of social life: in the trade unions, in strikes, in the electoral campaign, in parliament, and in power."*⁶⁷

These words were written nearly a century ago. How much more true is this statement today, when the Labour

Party has been in government for many years since 1945 and the trade union bureaucracy is much closer linked with the capitalist monopolies!

Is it surprising that the Grantites never call for the defeat of British imperialism and the military victory of its opponents like Argentina in 1982, like the Afghan and the Iraqi resistance, like the Irish Republicans, etc.?! Any serious position of anti-British defeatism, of intransigent anti-imperialism would have provoked an outcry among the milieu of the labour bureaucracy and the privileged layers of the working class and would have resulted in their hostility against the Grantites.

By this we don't want to suggest that the Grantite cadres make a conscious decision of playing down this or that anti-imperialist position. It is evident from the statements quoted above that the Grantites, over the decades of their entrenchment, have fully internalised the social-imperialist prejudices of the reformist bureaucracy.

Only a sharp and conscious policy of intransigent struggle against the bureaucracy, based on a program for the revolutionary overthrow of the ruling class and the support for oppressed people fighting against British imperialism would have allowed the cadres of the CWI/IMT/ISA to withstand the pressure of conservative reformism. However, Grantism throughout its whole existence of nearly six decades has always been miles away from such a Bolshevik approach!

While the Grantites historically have had their main base in the labour bureaucracy, it is important to recognise that such opportunist strategy can also be directed to different petty-bourgeois layers. In Pakistan, where the IMT had its largest section until most of their members left them in two major splits, the Grantites worked within the bourgeois *Pakistan People's Party*, led by the Bhutto clan since its inception in 1967, one of the country's most powerful landowner families. As a result of their loyal service in the PPP, the IMT section even had a member of parliament for some time (who then deserted them for a career inside the PPP). The IMT had a similar opportunist approach to bourgeois-populist parties in Latin America with Alan Woods – the IMT's long-time leader – praising “my friend” Hugo Chavez and his capitalist regime who ruled Venezuela from 1999 until his death in 2013 to the skies.

In the U.S., *Socialist Alternative* – the former section of the CWI and now the leading force within the ISA – applies the same method of reformist opportunism to the “progressive” wing within the Democratic Party. Both in 2016 as well as in 2020, it supported Bernie Sanders' bid for the Democratic nomination and the presidency. The Democratic Party, as it is well known, is one of the two main parties of the U.S. monopoly bourgeoisie and has shared the Presidency – alternating with its traditional rival, the Republican Party – since more than 150 years.

Sanders has been an elected representative in the U.S. Congress since 1991 (first in the House of Representatives and, since 2007, in the Senate). He is a major figure of the progressive liberal camp in the Democratic Party and is an important supporter of the Biden Administration and its imperialist policy.⁶⁸

All this did not stop *Socialist Alternative* and its public figurehead, Seattle City Councilor Kshama Sawant, from lending support for such a bourgeois politician like Sanders. Obviously, they hoped to gain a foot in the liberal, so-

cial democratic milieu as their joining of the DSA – the “left-wing” of the Democratic Party – shows.

Imagine the outrage of “Bernie” – as the SA affectionally call the bourgeois Senator – and the DSA leaders if the Grantites would have publicly called for the military victory of the Iraqi or the Afghan resistance against the American occupation or of the Palestinian resistance against the Zionist state! Any consistent anti-imperialism would have immediately destroyed the yearslong efforts of the Grantites to build links with the “progressive” wing in the Democratic Party.

Irrespective of different features, all these different forces – the labour bureaucracy, the Pakistani PPP, Chavez Bolivarians, or Sanders/DSA – have in common that these are (petty-)bourgeois forces with privileged strata of the working class or the middle class as their core basis. Such forces do not only defend capitalism ideologically but are also closely linked with the bourgeois state machinery of imperialist powers like the U.S. or Britain resp. of capitalist states in other countries. In contrast to authentic Marxists, the Grantites never orientated primarily to the lower strata of the working class, the non-aristocratic masses of the proletariat and the oppressed.

5. The Grantites' utopia: reforming the capitalist state and the peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism

With such a *strategic orientation* to the labour bureaucracy and other left-bourgeois forces over many decades, it is hardly surprising that the Grantites replaced key elements of the Marxist program with revisionist positions. We did already show above what were the consequences of such opportunist adaption in the field of imperialism theory and the national liberation struggle. But such revisionism has been not limited to these issues. As these topics go beyond the focus of this pamphlet, we will not discuss these in similar detail and refer readers to our relevant literature.

A most fundamental revision of Marxism has been the Grantites' thesis that the capitalist state could be reformed and that a peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism would be possible. This has been their strategy from early on and has remained a pillar of their program since then. Such said Peter Taaffe in an interview in response to the question if there will be a revolution to overthrow capitalism:

“Well yes, a change in society, established through winning a majority in elections, backed up by a mass movement to prevent the capitalists from overthrowing a socialist government and fighting, not to take over every small shop, every betting shop or every street corner shop -- in any case, they are disappearing because of the rise of the supermarkets -- and so on, or every small factory, but to nationalise a handful of monopolies, transnationals now, that control 80 to 85% of the economy.”⁶⁹

Another central CWI leader, Lynn Walsh, repeated this idea in a pamphlet (republished also on the ISA's American website): *“Our programme presented the case for ‘the socialist transformation of society’ - a popularised form of ‘socialist revolution’. We use this formulation to avoid the crude association between ‘revolution’ and ‘violence’ always falsely made by apologists of capitalism. A successful socialist transformation can be carried through only on the basis of the support of the overwhelming majority of the working class, with the support of other layers, through the most radical forms of*

democracy. On that basis, provided a socialist government takes decisive measures on the basis of mobilising the working class, it would be possible to carry through a peaceful change of society. Any threat of violence would come, not from a popular socialist government, but from forces seeking to restore their monopoly of wealth, power and privilege by mobilising a reaction against the democratic majority.”⁷⁰

Alan Woods and the IMT repeat the same nonsense: “A peaceful transformation of society would be entirely possible if the trade union and reformist leaders were prepared to use the colossal power in their hands to change society. If the workers leaders did not do this, then there could be rivers of blood, and this would entirely be the responsibility of the reformist leaders. (...) it would be entirely possible to carry through the socialist transformation peacefully, and even through parliament, provided the trade unions and Labour Party were led by Marxists.”⁷¹

It is evident that the Grantites don’t understand the nature of the bourgeois state with its huge machinery – built top down without any democratic control from below – which serves *and can only serve* the capitalist class. The bourgeois state – with all its departments from police and army, prison system, parliament, justice, etc. – exists and can only exist to implement the class interests of the bourgeoisie and enforce them against the resistance of the working class and oppressed. The CWI/ISA/IMT don’t understand that such machinery is incompatible with serving the working class on its road to socialism.

Likewise, they ignore the historical experience that the ruling class will not give up its power voluntarily or peacefully. This is why Lenin and Trotsky insisted that the bourgeois state *cannot* be reformed but must be smashed by a violent revolution: „*The proletarian revolution is impossible without the forcible destruction of the bourgeois state machine and the substitution for it of a new one which, in the words of Engels, is “no longer a state in the proper sense of the word. But Kautsky finds it necessary to befog and belie all this -- his renegade position demands it.”*”⁷²

Therefore, Lenin and the Bolsheviks resolutely refuted the reformist idea that the transformation to socialism could proceed peacefully. They insisted that this is only possible via a revolution, an armed insurrection: „*Of course, if it were a case of capitalist society in peacetime, peacefully developing into socialism, there would be no more urgent task before us than that of increasing output. But the little word “if” makes all the difference. If only socialism had come into being peacefully, in the way the capitalist gentlemen did not want to see it born. But there was a slight hitch. Even if there had been no war, the capitalist gentlemen would have done all in their power to prevent such a peaceful evolution. Great revolutions, even when they commence peacefully, as was the case with the great French Revolution, end in furious wars which are instigated by the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie. Nor can it be otherwise, if we look at it from the point of view of the class struggle and not from the point of view of philistine phrase-mongering about liberty, equality, labour democracy and the will of the majority, of all the dullwitted, philistine phrase-mongering to which the Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries and all these “democrats” treat us. There can be no peaceful evolution towards socialism.*”⁷³

These statements of the Marxist classics have been confirmed by more than a century of historical experience of the international class struggle. The Bolsheviks had to wage an armed insurrection and three years of civil war in

order to defeat the bourgeoisie and their imperialist backers. Where a revolutionary party was lacking, the working class suffered defeat and the ruling class, if necessary, did not hesitate to use violence to keep power. As we did already explain in an essay published in 1989, the Grantite peaceful road to socialism is a petty-bourgeois, pacifist utopia.⁷⁴ Such a theory bears the mark of the conservative, pro-capitalist milieu of the labour bureaucracy, Sanderistas, and Chavistas!

6. Are the police “workers in uniform”?

Related to the Grantites’ reformist conception of the state is their idea that the police would be not an instrument of the class enemy but are rather “*workers in uniform*”. Hence, in accordance with their revisionist state theory, the Grantites call for “*democratic control*” of the police instead of advocating the formation of self-defence units of the workers and oppressed (which can be transformed into armed workers and popular militias in revolutionary situations). Likewise, they advocate that police trade unions should be part of the general trade union federation. It is not difficult to see that such a position fits conveniently to having the General Secretary of a prison officers trade union in their ranks!

The position of the Grantites is clearly wrong, contradicts the classic Marxist position, and is entirely inconsistent with the experience of the labour movement over more than 150 years. The *central* role of the police is to control and oppress the working class – like low-level managers in a business. Neither low-level management nor the police create or distribute, directly or indirectly, value in any form. Nor do they provide any social necessary labour. They are paid parasites and thugs of capitalism. They are part of the middle layers and not of the working class. It doesn’t matter if the origins of an individual policeman or policewoman are in the working class. Not the past but the present and the foreseeable future are what is decisive for the class character of a professional group.⁷⁵

This is why Trotsky thought any idea of police being “workers in uniform” is ridiculous: „*The fact that the police was originally recruited in large numbers from among Social Democratic workers is absolutely meaningless. Consciousness is determined by environment even in this instance. The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state, is a bourgeois cop, not a worker. Of late years these policemen have had to do much more fighting with revolutionary workers than with Nazi students. Such training does not fail to leave its effects. And above all: every policeman knows that though governments may change, the police remain.*”⁷⁶

(Dis-)armed with such a reformist approach, it is not surprising that the Grantites failed to side with the black and poor working-class youths spontaneously taking the streets in August 2011 after the police killed Mark Duggan, a black father of four children. For three days, tens of thousands of youths clashed with the police and burned down various kinds of property, first and foremost banks and gambling dens. More than 3,000 people were arrested.

The RCIT stood in unconditional solidarity with the black and poor working-class youths. Sure, one could not support each and every action, as it is often the case in spontaneous popular uprisings. But for us, it was clear that socialists had to join the camp of the youth against the camp

of the capitalist state apparatus. (The Austrian section of the RCIT even sent a small delegation to Tottenham at that time.) In contrast, the CWI and the IMT didn't show any solidarity with the uprising but rather condemned the riot.⁷⁷

7. Woods against Lenin's concept of revolutionary defeatism

Another example of Grantite revisionism is their refusal of the Bolsheviks' concept of revolutionary defeatism. Looking for justification for their failure to ever call for the defeat of British imperialism, the CWI/ISA/IMT characterise Lenin's crucial strategy in the struggle against the imperialist war an "exaggeration". As we have discussed this issue in detail in other works, we limit ourselves to a brief elaboration.

In his above-mentioned pamphlet on the state, Alan Woods writes about Lenin's concept of revolutionary defeatism: "*Lenin in this period (1914, Ed.) laid heavy emphasis on the basic principles of revolutionary internationalism, above all the impossibility of returning to the old International, and implacable opposition to all forms of patriotism (revolutionary defeatism). In order to combat the doubts and vacillations of the Bolshevik leaders, Lenin gave the sharpest possible expression to these ideas, such as "turn the imperialist war into civil war," and "the defeat of one's own bourgeoisie is the lesser evil." It is arguable that, on occasion, he exaggerated. (...) In order to combat chauvinism, and stress the impossibility of any reconciliation with the Social Democracy, and particularly its left wing (Kautsky and the 'centre'), Lenin used some formulations which were undoubtedly exaggerated. Such exaggerations, for example, led him to characterize Trotsky's position as "centrism" which was entirely incorrect. Endless confusions have arisen from the one sided interpretation of Lenin's position of this period.*"⁷⁸

Woods claims that Lenin "exaggerated" the defeatist program against the imperialist war. He also claims that he later withdrew it de facto. As a matter of fact, the Bolsheviks, the Comintern and later the Fourth International confirmed all the essential ideas and slogans which Lenin raised in 1914. Trotsky himself stressed the crucial importance of the principles of revolutionary defeatism in the *Transitional Program* of the Fourth International: "*The fundamental content of the politics of the international proletariat will consequently be a struggle against imperialism and its war. In this struggle the basic principle is: "the chief enemy is in your own country" or "the defeat of your own (imperialist) government is the lesser evil."* (...) *It will be the duty of the international proletariat to aid the oppressed countries in their war against oppressors. The same duty applies in regard to aiding the USSR, or whatever other workers' government might arise before the war or during the war. The defeat of every imperialist government in the struggle with the workers' state or with a colonial country is the lesser evil.*"⁷⁹

And in his *War and the Fourth International*, Trotsky stated: "*The transformation of imperialist war into civil war is that general strategic task to which the whole work of a proletarian party during war should be subordinated.*"⁸⁰

Rudolf Klement, another leader of the Fourth International who was killed by the Stalinists in 1938, repeated the validity of the Leninist program of revolutionary defeatism: "*The methods of revolutionary defeatism remain unaltered: revolutionary propaganda, irreconcilable opposition to the regime,*

the class struggle from its purely economic up to its highest political form (the armed uprising), fraternisation of the troops, transformation of the war into the civil war."⁸¹

As we did show elsewhere in detail, contrary to the Grantites claim, neither Lenin nor Trotsky ever changed or repudiated the concept of revolutionary defeatism. The CWI/IMT/ISA feels only obligated to invent this myth in order to justify its own revisionist deviations!⁸²

8. The Marxist theory of antagonistic contradictions and the inevitability of their violent explosion (and their gradualist distortion by Grantism)

We have now presented a number of revisionist distortions which have been characteristic of the Grantite tradition from its inception. What do all these revisions of the Marxist theory – from the failure in the analysis as well as the struggle against imperialism and national oppression, from the analysis of the capitalist state to the strategy of socialist revolution, etc. – what do they all have in common?

Basically, the Grantites ignore one of the most fundamental pillars of Marxism – the theory of the irreconcilability on class antagonism. It is such an approach which lead Marxists to recognise:

- * that the capitalist state can not be reformed but must be smashed;
- * that capitalism can not be abolished peacefully or via parliamentary vote but via a violent and well organised revolution of the working class and the oppressed;
- * that the police are not "workers in uniform" but part of the class enemy's state machinery;
- * that imperialism is a scientific concept which recognises the division of the world where a handful of Great Powers exploits and oppresses the majority of the world population living in (semi-colonial) countries;
- * that Marxists designate the class character of a given state not by this or that foreign policy but by its objective political, economic and military position within the global order;
- * that Marxists, all other conditions equal, support a (semi-colonial) countries resp. nationally oppressed people against the imperialist aggressor;
- * that Marxists support such legitimate struggles even if these are led by (petty-)bourgeois forces – without lending political support to them.

Marxists recognise the irreconcilability of class antagonism; hence, we understand that these contradictions inevitable result in all kinds of explosions (wars, uprisings, revolutionary insurrection, counterrevolutionary strikes, social catastrophes). Such events are not "exceptions" to "the ordinary run of things" in capitalism – but are rather its essence. Hence, the political superstructure – from the state to military interventions abroad – are necessary instruments to keep together a class society divided by unconcealable contradictions (at least temporarily).

As Engels once noted: "*The state is, therefore, by no means a power forced on society from without; just as little is it "the reality of the ethical idea", "the image and reality of reason", as Hegel maintains. Rather, it is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has*

become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, classes with conflicting economic interests, might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have a power seemingly standing above society that would alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of "order"; and this power, arisen out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the state."⁸³

This is why Marxists recognise that the capitalist state machinery must be smashed, that the imperialist state must be militarily weakened and if possible defeated, that one can not stand aside in a conflict between oppressed and oppressor, etc.

During World War I, the Bolsheviks wrote in their central organ: "*Nicht Friedensidee, sondern Bürgerkriegsidee*"—not the idea of peace, but the idea of civil war—this is what we are tempted to shout at these great utopians who promise such a meager utopia. Not the idea of peace, but the idea of civil war, citizen Adler (and citizen Woods, MP)! This will be the central point of our program. The problem is not that we failed to sufficiently preach the idea of peace before the war; it is that we did not preach the idea of class struggle, of civil war, enough or seriously enough. Because in wartime, the recognition of class struggle without a recognition of civil war is empty verbiage; it is hypocrisy; it is deceiving the workers."⁸⁴

In contrast, the Grantites, constantly blunt the class contradictions, try to pacify the means of class struggle, refuse to support the armed forms of struggle against the capitalist state and the imperialist oppressor. They adhere to the reformist conception of gradual reform via parliament, via peaceful means of class struggle, without arms, without war and without revolutionary explosions.

In essence, all branches of Grantism are strongly influenced by the conception of *gradualism*, i.e. the pauper's broth of eclecticism from which the social democratic Fabian Society in Britain lives on since its foundation. It is therefore appropriate to characterise Grantism at its core as a *post-1945 version of Kautskyianism*, as Lenin called the revisionist teachings of the Second International's leading theoretician Karl Kautsky.

"On the other hand, the "Kautskyite" distortion of Marxism is far more subtle. "Theoretically", it is not denied that the state is an organ of class rule, or that class antagonisms are irreconcilable. But what is overlooked or glossed over is this: if the state is the product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms, if it is a power standing above society and "alienating itself more and more from it", it is clear that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution, but also without the destruction of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class and which is the embodiment of this "alienation". As we shall see later, Marx very explicitly drew this theoretically self-evident conclusion on the strength of a concrete historical analysis of the tasks of the revolution. And—as we shall show in detail further on—it is this conclusion which Kautsky has "forgotten" and distorted."⁸⁵

Similar to Kautsky do Grant, Taaffe and Woods blunt the irreconcilably class contradictions. They do not deny these as such. But their whole program, which denies the necessity to violently destroy the machinery of the capitalist class enemy and of the imperialist beast, shows that they fantasise about the possibility of solving the class contradictions without explosions, of solving these gradually.

9. Excuse: Comparing imperialist economism in the past and present (Bukharin/Pjatakov/Radek versus Grant/Woods/Taaffe)

In itself, the pillars of the Grantite arguments against supporting national liberation struggles are not new. At the beginning of the imperialist epoch, Lenin and the Bolsheviks conducted sharp debates about this issue. Rosa Luxemburg and the Polish Social Democrats had already opposed paragraph 9 in the 1903 program of the Russian Marxists in which they advocated the right of national self-determination. During World War I, several theoreticians like Karl Radek, Nikolai Bukharin and Georgy Pyatakov argued that Marxists should drop their support for this slogan.

Very similar to the Grantites, they argued that the slogan for national self-determination would be "utopian" and could create "illusion in capitalism". Such wrote Radek and his comrades: "*The tactical consequences of using the formula of the right of self-determination. This slogan, like all utopian slogans, can only spread false conceptions of the nature of both capitalist and socialist society, and mislead the proletariat struggling against national oppression. This slogan arouses false hopes that capitalism can accommodate the national interests of weak people.*"⁸⁶

Some Bolshevik theoreticians shared this argument and published a set of theses with a similar approach. "*The slogan "self-determination of nations" is first of all Utopian, as it cannot be realized within the limits of capitalism. It is also harmful, as it is a slogan that sows illusions. In this respect it does not distinguish itself at all from the slogans of arbitration courts, disarmament, and so on which presuppose the possibility of so-called peaceful capitalism.*"⁸⁷

Following from this, they opposed support for national liberation struggles which were not connected to the struggle against capitalism. Such struggles, they argued, could only divide and weaken the working class. "*It is therefore impossible to struggle against the enslavement of nations other than through a struggle against imperialism. Ergo a struggle against imperialism; ergo a struggle against finance capital; ergo a struggle against capitalism in general. To turn aside from this path in any way and advance "partial" tasks of the "liberation of nations" within the limits of capitalist society diverts proletarian forces from the true solution of the problem and unites them with the forces of the bourgeoisie of the corresponding national groups.*"⁸⁸

Lenin sharply denounced such views and characterised such as a new version of "economism", i.e. a position which denigrates the political and democratic struggle. Hence, he called this current "*imperialist economism*". About the first version of this trend—in the late 19th and early 20th century—he wrote: "*Economism was a bourgeois, opportunist trend, which strove to subordinate the workers to the liberals.*"⁸⁹

Consequently, Lenin was also sharp in his polemic against the imperialist economists. He accused them: "*And that the negation of freedom of secession now is theoretically false from beginning to end and in practice amounts to servility to the chauvinists of the oppressing nations—this we know, see and feel daily.*"⁹⁰

He went on explaining: "*Having failed to understand that, Kievsky (i.e. Pyatakov, MP) bypasses the central question, that belongs to his special subject, namely, how will we Social-*

Democrats abolish national oppression? He shunts the question aside with phrases (...) This leaves only one single argument: the socialist revolution will solve everything. Or, the argument sometimes advanced by people who share his views: self-determination is impossible under capitalism and superfluous under socialism. From the theoretical standpoint that view is nonsensical; from the practical political standpoint it is chauvinistic. It fails to appreciate the significance of democracy. For socialism is impossible without democracy because: (1) the proletariat cannot perform the socialist revolution unless it prepares for it by the struggle for democracy; (2) victorious socialism cannot consolidate its victory and bring humanity to the withering away of the state without implementing full democracy. To claim that self-determination is superfluous under socialism is therefore just as nonsensical and just as hopelessly confusing as to claim that democracy is superfluous under socialism. Self-determination is no more impossible under capitalism, and just as superfluous under socialism, as democracy generally. The economic revolution will create the necessary prerequisites for eliminating all types of political oppression. Precisely for that reason it is illogical and incorrect to reduce everything to the economic revolution, for the question is: how to eliminate national oppression? It cannot be eliminated without an economic revolution. That is incontestable. But to limit ourselves to this is to lapse into absurd and wretched imperialist Economism.”⁹¹

With their thoroughly negative and ignorant approach to the national question, the Grantites apply the same

method of imperialist economism to the current period. However, one has to be fair. Rosa Luxemburg, Bukharin and Pjatakov elaborated their mistaken views at the *beginning* of the imperialist epoch. At that time, dealing with the national question under such new historic conditions was indeed a challenge to the Marxist theory. It did need a genius like Lenin to present such a clear and serious solution! (Remember, even Trotsky was confused on this issue before 1917!)

But today? Which excuse do the Grantites have for their pathetic approach to the national question?! We are living in the *final* period of imperialism with more a century of political experience behind us! Is this not enough time for accumulating sufficient experience in order to understand the superiority of the Bolsheviks' approach to the national question? How many more years do the Grantites need to learn and to understand?!

Trotsky, who was able to overcome his political weaknesses on the basis of his experience in the Russian Revolution 1917, later noted that it is a typical approach of sectarians to refuse support for the class struggle as it takes place by referring to the socialist revolution at a later time. „The sectarian simply ignores the fact that the national struggle, one of the most labyrinthine and complex but at the same time extremely important forms of the class struggle, cannot be suspended by bare references to the future world revolution.“⁹²

Books of the RCIT

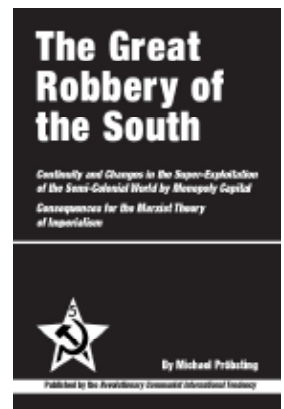
Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism

The RCIT is proud to announce the publication of a book called *THE GREAT ROBBERY OF THE SOUTH*. The book's subtitle is: *Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital*. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism. The book is in English-language. It has 15 chapters, 448 pages and includes 139 Tables and Figures. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who is the International Secretary of the RCIT.

In *The Great Robbery of the South* Michael Pröbsting analyses the super-exploitation and oppression of the semi-colonial world (often referred to as the "Third World") by the imperialist powers and monopolies. He shows that the relationship between the small minority of rich capitalist countries and the huge majority of mankind living in the semi-colonial world forms one of the most important elements of the imperialist world system we are living in. The Great Robbery of the South shows that the past decades have been a complete confirmation of the validity of Lenin's theory of imperialism and its programmatic conclusions. *The Great Robbery of the South* demonstrates the important changes in the relationship between the imperialist and the semi-colonial countries. Using comprehensive material (including 139 Tables and Figures), Michael Pröbsting elaborates that never before

has such a big share of the world capitalist value been produced in the South. Never before have the imperialist monopolies been so dependent on the super-exploitation of the semi-colonial world. Never before has migrant labor from the semi-colonial world played such a significant role for the capitalist value production in the imperialist countries. Never before has the huge majority of the world working class lived in the South – outside of the old imperialist metropolises.

In *The Great Robbery of the South* Michael Pröbsting argues that a correct understanding of the nature of imperialism as well as of the program of permanent revolution which includes the tactics of consistent anti-imperialism is essential for anyone who wants to change the world and bring about a socialist future. Order your copy NOW! \$20 / £13 / €15 plus p+p (21\$ for US and international, £9 for UK, €10 for Europe)



PART III. SOME OBJECTIONS AND MARXIST ANSWERS

In this part, we want to deal with some of the main arguments with which the Grantites justify their revisionist positions, and which can also be found in quotes which we reproduced in previous sections of this pamphlet.

10. Undermining the unity of the working class?

A key argument of the CWI/ISA/IMT against lending support to national liberation wars or movements is that this would divide the working class across national, racial, or religious lines. In fact, this is an old argument which reformists repeatedly deployed against radical advocates of the struggle for the rights of oppressed nations. It is both theoretically wrong and practically weakening the working-class struggle.

The theoretical fundament of this argument is the revisionist idea that core interests of workers are their economic demands (higher wages, social security, etc.). Other interests – political demands, national or democratic rights, social issues – all that would be of secondary importance. Essentially, this is the vulgarised consequence of the vulgar idea that the (economic) antagonism between workers and capitalists are the main contradiction while other contradictions (the oppression of women, national groups, LGBT+, etc) would be only side contradictions.

All these are distortions of the Marxist conception of capitalism and the class struggle. Surely, the creation of surplus value is the heart of the capitalist economy. But such surplus value could not be realised without circulation, without distribution and consumption as Marx insisted in his famous preface of the *Grundrisse*. „*The conclusion we reach is not that production, distribution, exchange and consumption are identical, but that they all form the members of a totality, distinctions within a unity. Production predominates not only over itself, in the antithetical definition of production, but over the other moments as well.*“⁹³

Since, furthermore, “*pure economics is a fiction*” as Trotsky pointed out,⁹⁴ the bourgeois society needs a political instrument – the state resp. the whole superstructure – in order to manage the class contradictions: „*Society thus far, based upon class antagonisms, had need of the state, that is, of an organisation of the particular class which was pro tempore the exploiting class, for the maintenance of its external conditions of production and, therefore, especially, for the purpose of forcibly keeping the exploited classes in the condition of oppression corresponding with the given mode of production (slavery, serfdom, wage labour).*“⁹⁵

Add to this the social forms of oppression – the specific form of reproduction based on women’s oppression, the forms of oppression of national minorities (at home and/or abroad) which allows the capitalist class to squeeze out super-profits, etc.

In summary, economic, political and social issues, base and superstructure, all these are inextricably linked with each other. It is a comprehensive fabric with the economic exploitation as its core and numerous political and so-

cial forms of oppression as integral components. Hence, the class struggle has to be understood in its totality and must not be separated in primary and secondary issues. Likewise, one can not say that the cockpit of an airplane is more important than the wings. Try to make a flight without wings!

From this follows that Marxists do not view the struggle against national or social oppression as a “deflection” from the “real”, i.e. economic, class struggle. In reality, the struggle against national and social oppression is an integral part of the comprehensive struggle for the liberation of the working class and the oppressed, i.e. of the class struggle. Remember that Trotsky characterizes, in the above-mentioned quote, “*the national struggle*” as an “*extremely important form of the class struggle.*”

The Grantites might object: “*But do issues which deal with contradictions existing between workers not divide the proletariat and, hence, weaken the class struggle?*” Superficially, this seems plausible but in essence it is wrong. Divisions within the working class *objectively* exist – privileges for men in relation to women,⁹⁶ for members of the dominant nation in relation to members of oppressed nations, for domestic workers in relation to migrants,⁹⁷ for workers living in imperialist states in relation to workers in (semi-)colonies, etc. These divisions are not a product of bourgeois ideology but rather the result of the specific and complex physiognomy of the totality of the class society.

Furthermore, such objectively existing divisions weaken the working class as they often discourage the discriminated sectors of the proletariat to participate in the class struggle. As a result – and we see this often in the social composition of reformist trade unions, parties, etc. – it is rather the more aristocratic, better paid, male, white etc. sectors of the class which dominate the labour organisations.

Hence, if revolutionaries address these issues and support the rights of the oppressed, if they combat the reactionary prejudices of backward sectors of the class, they do not weaken but rather strengthen the class struggle.

Furthermore, the oppressed do not wait until the consciousness of the whole working class has fully developed. They fight against their oppression anyways. It is such struggles which often helps the more privileged sectors of the working class to better understand the issues of the oppressed and to raise their consciousness. Hence, it is not true that democratic, social and political struggles would deflect from the economic – the supposedly most important forms of – class struggle. The opposite is the case: democratic struggles enrich and might even spark economic struggles.

It is only in such a way that the nationally and socially oppressed sectors of the working class and the popular masses can be fully integrated and play a key role in the class struggle. Contrary to the Grantites’ believe, support of liberation struggles strengthens the working class and creates the basis for a stronger unity on a higher plane!

In his excellent book about the history of the Russian Rev-

olution, Trotsky noted that the Bolshevik's intransigent support of the right of national self-determination was crucial in order to gain the trust of the oppressed nations and by this to lay the foundations of the multinational unity of the working class.

*"Lenin early learned the inevitability of this development of centrifugal national movements in Russia, and for many years stubbornly fought — most particularly against Rosa Luxemburg — for that famous paragraph nine of the old party program which formulated the right of nations to self-determination — that is, to complete separation as states. In this the Bolshevik Party did not by any means undertake an evangel of separation. It merely assumed an obligation to struggle implacably against every form of national oppression, including the forcible retention of this or that nationality within the boundaries of the general state. Only in this way could the Russian proletariat gradually win the confidence of the oppressed nationalities."*⁹⁸

These lessons have not lost any relevance for the class struggle today!

11. "The workers would not understand this"

Another favourite argument of Grantism against revolutionary positions is that *"the workers would not understand this"*. Such arguments are the stuff opportunism is made of! Marxists never elaborated their program on the basis of what the mass of the working class in this or that country, in this or that moment, thinks or says. This is why Lenin insisted on the vanguard character of a revolutionary organisation. As a matter of fact, the proletariat is not a homogenous class — neither socially nor ideologically. There are more privileged and less privileged, politically more progressive and less progressive sectors.

Marxists elaborate their program on the basis of a scientific analysis of the objective conditions of the class struggle, irrespective of the temporary mood of the mass of workers in this or that situation. They address their program to the vanguard of the proletariat in order to help them winning the mass of the class for the struggle. This is, as we elaborated in our book on the revolutionary party, why the Marxist organisation is — outside of a revolutionary situation — a *vanguard* organisation and not a *mass* party.⁹⁹

For the same reason, revolutionaries are often obliged to swim against the stream and to argue against the dominating prejudices of the majority of the working class. This might be not always a comfortable road for revolutionaries but, hey, if you look for a comfortable live you should not join a Marxist combat party!

If socialists are not able to swim, if necessary, against the stream they will inevitably go with the flow. Hence, they would have (as the large majority of reformist parties did) supported "their imperialist fatherland" in World War I and II; they would have (as the social democrats and Stalinists did) failed to support the colonial people fighting against French and English occupiers, etc. And it is for exactly the same reason why the Grantites failed to side with the resistance of Argentina, of the Afghan and Iraqi people, of the Ukraine etc. in the wars of the last decades!

Imagine Lenin in 1914 or Trotsky in 1939 elaborating their position on the imperialist world war from the starting point if "the workers would understand this or not"!? They would hardly have arrived at the conclusion of advocating a program of revolutionary defeatism! And

imagine revolutionaries in Russia today basing their position on the Ukraine War from the starting point if "the workers would understand this or not"!? They would have arrived at similar conclusions like the Stalinist KPRF and their friends in Alan Woods IMT!¹⁰⁰ Fortunately, authentic Marxists in Russia — like our comrades in "Socialist Tendency" or the comrades in "Socialist Alternative" — have followed the method of Lenin and not that of Grant, Taaffe and Woods!¹⁰¹

The Grantites are not unaware of this contradiction in their argument. Unfortunately, the conclusion which they draw from this is not to correct their opportunist method but ... to claim that Lenin would have renounced the program of revolutionary defeatism himself! In short, the Grantites' version of "Leninism" is one emptied of the spirit of Bolshevism!

The Grantite argument repeats the old position of the Economists who adapted their policy to the non-socialist consciousness of the mass of the proletariat. Lenin polemicalised many times against such "*chvostism*" (tailism). He explained that socialist consciousness does not — and can not — arise spontaneously in the struggle but that it is the task of Marxists to aid the class in developing such. "*Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships of all classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of the interrelations between all classes.*"¹⁰²

Hence, the relevance of supporting national and democratic demands is closely related to the issue of bringing socialist consciousness into the proletariat. Such demands are crucial issues in the total fabric of the bourgeois class society and, hence, they aid the workers to better understand and to better fight the class enemy. "*Social-Democracy is not confined to simple service to the working-class movement: it represents "the combination of socialism and the working-class movement" (to use Karl Kautsky's definition which repeats the basic ideas of the Communist Manifesto); the task of Social-Democracy is to bring definite socialist ideals to the spontaneous working-class movement, to connect this movement with socialist convictions that should attain the level of contemporary science, to connect it with the regular political struggle for democracy as a means of achieving socialism — in a word, to fuse this spontaneous movement into one indestructible whole with the activity of the revolutionary party.*"¹⁰³

Here too, the Grantites are not unaware of their contradiction to the Bolsheviks' approach. And, again, they conclude from this not to correct their opportunist method but ... to claim that Lenin would have renounced such an approach himself!¹⁰⁴ (How unfortunate Lenin was that he did not have the wise advice of Grant, Taaffe and Woods at his time!) However, as we demonstrated in our works, Lenin never renounced his understanding of the relationship of socialist and spontaneous consciousness or of the relationship between the vanguard and the mass of the proletariat.¹⁰⁵

A hypocritical Grantite hack might object against us: "*You are sectarians, you want to present the whole program in a workers meeting. No one will support you!*" Again, this is utter nonsense. Of course, Marxists are obliged in a mass meeting to focus their agitation to one or two of the most burn-

ing issues instead of “explaining the whole program”. But our critique of the Grantites is not that they don’t raise all the necessary demands in an agitational speech. Our critique is rather that they are silent about – or even explicitly oppose – the correct tactics and slogans always and everywhere (in their program, in their papers and websites, etc.)! Our critique is that they opportunistically adapt their theory and their program to the practical needs to find a place within the labour bureaucracy, within the Sanders campaign, among their Bolivarian friends, etc.! Our critique is, finally, that they put the interests of the more privileged sectors of the working class above the interests of the mass of the proletariat, including the nationally oppressed workers.

12. “But the national question can not be solved under capitalism!”

Another key argument of the Grantites in defence of their economist opposition against the Marxist program of national liberation is that “*the national question can not be solved under capitalism*”. As we did show above, this argument has been put forward already 100 years ago by various theoreticians of imperialist economism.

Basically, this statement is a semi-truth which is, in essence, an opportunist nonsense disguised in ultra-left phrases. Of course, the national question as a whole can not be solved as long as the conditions of class exploitation continue to enslave the people. Likewise, not a single case of national oppression can be completely solved under capitalism. But what are the conclusion of such truism?

Does this mean that no improvements, no changes in the relation of forces between oppressed and oppressor nations are possible as long as capitalism exists? Obviously, such a claim would be ultra-left idiocy! It is a step forward if an oppressed nation expels a colonial power – even if it remains dependent on the imperialist world system. It is a step forward if a national minority achieves the right to use their native language in public administration, schools, universities, etc. – even if they are forced to continue living under capitalism. It is a step forward if women get the right to vote or abortion rights – even if the general conditions of capitalism and women’s oppression don’t wither away. It is a step forward if all forms of discrimination of LGBT+ people – or even only this or that reactionary law – are abolished. We could go on with many more examples.

In addition, one could say just as well the following: “wage labour can not be abolished under capitalism”. But only the stupid caricature of an ultra-leftist would conclude from this that it is useless to fight against wage cuts, for higher social benefits, against unemployment, etc.

For the Grantites, this is something completely different. Of course, they support each and every struggle for this or that small reform. And they are right to do so. But why is it legitimate for socialist to fight for little economic demands but not for little national (or social) demands?!

Well, the reason is that the Grantites are die-hard economists who privilege the economic struggle to the political struggle and who do so in order to better nest in the reformist and left-bourgeois milieu!

13. Are national liberation wars doomed to become “proxy wars” in the age of inter-imperialist Cold War?

Finally, we want to deal with a new argument which has been suggested by the ISA. As we mentioned above, the ISA distinguishes itself positively from their ex-comrades in the CWI and IMT by unambiguously recognizing the existence of Russian and Chinese imperialism. Not only this, but they also understand that the rivalry between the Great Powers is a key axis of the world situation. Obviously, this was a progressive and very welcomed development!

However, one must not forget that this was rather an empiricist step forced by the overwhelming evidence of world political developments. But it has not been combined with an honest reappraisal of their method of analysis of imperialism. In fact, we are not aware of any substantial document of the ISA in which the comrades elaborate their analysis of Russian and Chinese imperialism. As a result, the ISA made a step forward in recognizing the emergence of new Great Powers and the relevance of their rivalry for the world situation. But they did not discuss or even overcome the methodological basis of imperialist economism. They only adapted the same, decades old method of Grantism to the world political conditions of the 21st century.

Hence, such recognition does not lead these comrades to understand the legitimate character of wars of oppressed peoples resp. of semi-colonial countries against this or that imperialist power. The current Ukraine War, in which the ISA refuses to support Kyiv and even calls for an end of military aid, is a prime example for this.

In short, why they accept, in theory, that important changes have taken place in the configuration of world capitalism, they keep their old method of imperialist economism. How does the ISA justify this? Basically, they denounce the Ukraine War of being, first and foremost, a “proxy war” between the Western powers and Russia.¹⁰⁶ Not only this, but they also suggest that such kind of proxy wars would become a widespread phenomenon in the coming period of Cold War.

“This war has dramatically speeded up the processes previously analysed by ISA, a key point of which was the development of the new cold war, mainly between US and Chinese imperialism. We did not, at this stage, expect the ‘cold’ war to turn ‘hot’ directly between the two powers, but we expected an increase in ‘proxy’ wars. Now Ukraine is being sacrificed in this conflict between imperialist forces.”¹⁰⁷

Of course, the acceleration of rivalry between the Great Powers will increase their appetite to utilise this or that regional conflict. But the argument of the ISA comrades leaves out a much more fundamental development. The rising tensions of inter-imperialist rivalry are rooted in the deepening of the capitalist crisis. Such decay of capitalism accelerates all kind of social antagonisms amongst which the national question is an important component.

As a result, there is not only increasing appetite of Great Powers to utilise regional conflicts but there is also another, much more powerful, tendency – the acceleration of contradictions between Great Powers and semi-colonial countries, between oppressed and oppressor nations. In a historic period of decline, where the cake gets smaller,

all exploiters will inevitably increase the pressure on the workers and on the oppressed peoples in the Global South.

As a consequence, while there will certainly be one or the other proxy war in the future (Taiwan?),¹⁰⁸ we expect an increasing number of national liberation wars against Great Powers as a much more relevant phenomenon.

Our prognosis is based on historical experience. Just think about the inter-war period 1919-39. What was the dominant feature at that time – legitimate wars of national defence or proxy wars between two pro-imperialist camps? Clearly, it was the former. The struggle of the Rif-Kabyls under Abd-el-Krim in 1921-26, of the Syrian people in 1925-27, of Ethiopia against Italy in 1935-36, of China against Japan from 1931-45, etc – all these where national liberation struggles which communists in the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky unconditionally supported.

This did not mean that Great Powers did not interfere in such struggles in any way. They certainly did. As we pointed out in other works, the League of Nations even put economic sanctions on Italy in 1935 and the U.S. supported China against Japan since the latter was their main Pacific rival. But such tactical support did not alter the total character of these just national wars.¹⁰⁹

The ISA's new theory about proxy wars as the "new normal" is not an unexpected development for Marxists. The RCIT published a pamphlet in 2014 in which we dealt with the consequences of the emergence of Russia and China as new imperialist powers. Dealing with the differences within the workers movement concerning the approach towards the Great Powers, we stated: "*The severe intensification of rivalry between the imperialist powers has provoked the sharpened expression of existing and emerging positions inside*

the workers' movement. Among these positions we can differentiate between four basic ones, while granting that, naturally, there are various shades and combination of them." We then listed four different currents: a) the "*pro-Western social-imperialists and social-pacifists*", b) the "*pro-Eastern social-imperialists and social-pacifists*", c) the "*Proletarian Internationalists*" who take a revolutionary defeatist position against all imperialist powers, and a fourth tendency which we characterised as follows.

*"Another, albeit much smaller, current includes those which we characterize as Imperialist Economists. These are groups which recognize that there are imperialist powers in the West and the East, but which derive from this correct insight the dangerous conclusion that all national and local wars can be reduced to proxy conflicts between these imperialist rivals. From this, they conclude that socialists should not support any side in local conflicts like in Syria, the Ukraine, or Thailand. Lenin rightly denounced such currents as 'imperialist economists.'"*¹¹⁰

And, in the same pamphlet, we also noted: "*The Imperialist Economists recognize the imperialist nature of both the Great Powers in the West as well in the East, but fail to understand the nature of the increasing number of just national and democratic movements and uprisings.*"

Such forces, which applied the policy of imperialist economism to the new conditions of rivalry between Western and Eastern Great Power in the 21st century, were relatively small in the last decade. However, they have become much stronger since the beginning of the Ukraine War. This is why authentic Marxists must pay increasing attention to this current and fight against their harmful position of reactionary abstentionism in struggles between oppressed people and imperialist oppressors!

Books of the RCIT

Michael Pröbsting: Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry

The Factors behind the Accelerating Rivalry between the U.S., China, Russia, EU and Japan.
A Critique of the Left's Analysis and an Outline of the Marxist Perspective

In *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry* Michael Pröbsting analyses the accelerating rivalry between the imperialist Great Powers – the U.S., China, EU, Russia, and Japan. He shows that the diplomatic rows, sanctions, trade wars, and military tensions between these Great Powers are not accidental or caused by a mad man in the White House. They are rather rooted in the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system. This rivalry is a key feature of the current historic period and could, ultimately, result in major wars between these Great Powers.

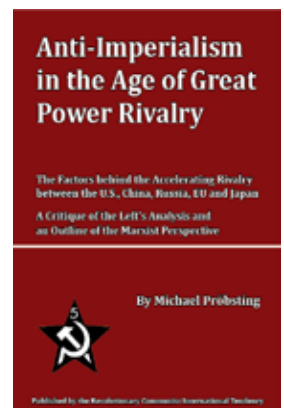
Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry demonstrates the validity of the Marxist analysis of modern imperialism. Using comprehensive material (including 61 Tables and Figures), Michael Pröbsting elaborates that a correct understanding of the rise of China and Russia as new Great Powers is crucial for assessing the character of the current inter-imperialist rivalry.

In *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry* Michael Pröbsting critically discusses the analysis of modern imperialism by a number of left-wing parties (left social democrats, Stalinists, Trotskyists and others). He demon-

strates that most of these organizations fail to understand the nature of the Great Power rivalry and, consequently, are not able to take an internationalist and revolutionary stance.

The author elaborates the approach of leading Marxist figures like Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg to the problems of Great Power rivalry and imperialist aggression against oppressed peoples. He outlines a Marxist program for the current period which is essential for anyone who wants to change the world and bring about a socialist future.

The book contains an introduction and 29 chapters plus an appendix (412 pages) and includes 61 figures and tables. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who serves as the International Secretary of the RCIT.



CONCLUSIONS

We have demonstrated in this pamphlet that the currents standing in the tradition of Ted Grant share a number of fundamental revisions of the Marxist theory. These are particularly relevant for their understanding of imperialism and the role of the national liberation struggles. Their theoretical revisionism has profound consequences for their approach to the class struggle. In a number of important national wars and rebellions, the Grantites failed to support these or even denounced them as reactionary – during the Malvinas War between Argentina and Britain in 1982, during the period of armed resistance in Northern Ireland, during the two Iraq Wars in 1991 and 2003 (plus the resistance against the following occupation), during the Afghanistan War in 2001 (plus the resistance against the following occupation), during the Palestinian resistance against the Zionist state, during the Ukraine War.

Hence, we have shown that we do not talk about a mistaken assessment in this or that war, a wrong tactical conclusion in an individual case but rather a *systematic method* of failure to support national liberation struggles as they take place. It is a method which Marxists are calling *imperialist economism*.

It is therefore no accident that all three Grantite tendencies – the CWI, the ISA and the IMT – are currently failing to defend the Ukraine against the invasion of Russian imperialism. It demonstrates the consequences of such a method under the conditions of Great Power rivalry in the 21st century. It shows the poverty of *neo-imperialist economism*.

Such distortion of the Marxist teachings on the national question are closely related to similar revisions of the Grantites on other crucial issues – like the character of the capitalist state, the role of the repression apparatus, the thesis of the peaceful and parliamentary road to socialism, etc.

In the end, such a series of revisions has its common basis in the Grantites' refutation of the Marxist theory of antagonistic contradictions and the inevitability of their violent explosion. They claim that the working class can march forward in their struggle for liberation without supporting armed struggles against the imperialist powers, without smashing the capitalist state, without a violent revolution. Such, the Grantites constantly blunt the class contradic-

tions, try to pacify the means of class struggle, refuse to support the armed forms of struggle against the capitalist state and the imperialist oppressor. They adhere to the reformist conception of gradual reform via parliament, via peaceful means of class struggle, without arms, without war and without revolutionary explosions. For most cases of national liberation struggle, they expect from the oppressed to be submissive, to patiently wait for a socialist kingdom to come.

Hence, Grantism is a method based on Gradualism, it is a remake of Kautskyianism under the conditions of imperialism in its later stage. Throughout its whole existence, Grantism refused to make use of the rich arsenal of Marxism but relied on the modest breadcrumbs of Anglo-Saxon eclecticism.

Such theory and policy are the result of the strategic orientation of the Grantite organisations towards the labour bureaucracy or similar left-bourgeois forces (like Bernie Sanders in the U.S., Chavez and the Bolivarians, etc.)

The RCIT and all authentic Marxists defend the orthodox teachings of Lenin's theory of imperialism and the consequences which he drew for the revolutionary program. We have always defended semi-colonial countries and oppressed nations in their struggles against imperialist powers. Consequently, we did not make acceptance of the socialist program a condition for our support of such struggles but sided with those – usually (petty-)bourgeois nationalist or Islamist – forces who were actually leading such struggles. Naturally, such an application of the united front tactic necessarily includes sharp criticism for the wrong policy and methods of struggle of these forces.

Furthermore, we oppose any strategic orientation to the bureaucratic and aristocratic layers. Socialists must seek to build the revolutionary party among the workers and oppressed in the semi-colonial world as well as among the non-aristocratic layers of the proletariat in the imperialist countries.

The key task today is the building of such a vanguard party – nationally and internationally – which is free of all forms of revisionism. Hence the construction of such a party necessarily includes the ideological struggle against the opportunist methods of Grantism, and in particular its neo-imperialist economism.

The Rise of Russia as an Imperialist Great Power

Three Pamphlets by Michael Pröbsting (International Secretary of the RCIT)

Order the pamphlet via our contact address: rcit@thecommunists.net

FOOTNOTES

1 For a compilation of reports from the RCIT's solidarity work with the Ukrainian people see <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/international-workers-aid/>.

2 We refer readers to a special page on our website where more than 150 RCIT documents on the Ukraine War and the current NATO-Russia conflict are compiled: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/compilation-of-documents-on-nato-russia-conflict/>. In particular we refer to the RCIT Manifesto: Ukraine War: A Turning Point of World Historic Significance. Socialists must combine the revolutionary defense of the Ukraine against Putin's invasion with the internationalist struggle against Russian as well as NATO and EU imperialism, 1 March 2022, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/manifesto-ukraine-war-a-turning-point-of-world-historic-significance/>.

3 Our most detailed works on the Marxist theory of imperialism are two books by Michael Pröbsting: *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry*. The Factors behind the Accelerating Rivalry between the U.S., China, Russia, EU and Japan. A Critique of the Left's Analysis and an Outline of the Marxist Perspective, RCIT Books, Vienna 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/anti-imperialism-in-the-age-of-great-power-rivalry/>; *The Great Robbery of the South*. Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism, RCIT Books, 2013, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-of-the-south/>

4 V. I. Lenin: The revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (1915); in: LCW 21, p. 409

5 V. I. Lenin: The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (1916); in: LCW 22, p. 147

6 For an extensive discussion of the Marxist conception of semi-colonies see chapter 1 in the above-mentioned book *The Great Robbery of the South*.

7 V. I. Lenin: The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (1916); in: LCW Vol. 22, p. 151

8 V. I. Lenin: Imperialism. The Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916); in: LCW Vol. 22, pp. 259-260 and p. 263

9 *The Great Robbery of the South*, pp. 388-389. The quote from Trotsky can be found at Leon Trotsky: Latin American Problems: A Transcript (1938), in Writings of Leon Trotsky Supplement (1934-40), p. 784

10 Fourth International: Imperialist War and the Proletarian World Revolution; Manifesto adopted by the Emergency Conference of the Fourth International in May 1940; in: Documents of the Fourth International. The Formative Years (1933-40), New York 1973, p. 327; <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1938-1949/emergconf/fi-emerg02.htm>

11 V.I.Lenin: Plan of Hegel's Dialectics (Logic) (1914); in: Collected Works Vol. 38, p. 316

12 Leon Trotsky: War and the Fourth International (1934), in: Trotsky Writings 1933-34, p. 328

13 For a discussion of the CWI's analysis of Argentina with a number of quotes see the above-mentioned book *The Great Robbery of the South*, pp. 211-215.

14 Peter Taaffe: Afghanistan, Islam and the Revolutionary Left (2002), CWI, <http://www.socialistworld.net/pubs/afghanistan/afghanchp1.html>

15 Roger Shives: Falklands/Malvinas 1982 - Thatcher's War Of Saving Face, in: The Socialist (CWI), 3 May 2002, http://www.socialist-party.org.uk/html_article/2002-252-index/article4

16 Wolfram Klein: Hintergründe der kolonialen Revolution (1991); in: Die koloniale Revolution, Herausgegeben von Stuttgarter VORAN-Unterstützern (1991), p. 6

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