

An Opportunist's Approach to the Question of “Marxism and the State”

Elif Çağlı

Markist
Tutum

en.marksist.com

Elif Çağlı

**An Opportunist's Approach to the Question
of "Marxism and the State"**

March 2010

http://en.marksist.net/elif_cagli/opportunists_approach_question_marxism_and_state.htm

An Opportunist's Approach to the Question of “Marxism and the State”

Opportunism is the term used in Marxist movement to characterize those who substitute principled revolutionary policy with a timeserving political line. In the workers' movement opportunism means sacrificing fundamental historical interests of the working masses for the sake of sectional self-interests and cheap political gain. The basic characteristic of opportunism is that it seeks to find within-the-system solutions when the decisive moment comes in the class struggle, not daring to take the revolutionary road which is perceived as hard. Opportunism is like an inclined plane where there is no stop once you place yourself in. Thus the projections of timeserving policy into Marxist movement produce an ever deepening opportunism and opportunist politicians turn more and more masters of a subtle and insidious opportunism.

However there is one unchanging truth about opportunism no matter it is the vulgar or subtle version on question. On both national and international level opportunism has always diverted the workers movement from revolutionary road and debilitated it. When you look into the various cases of opportunist tendencies within Marxist movement you cannot but see that a common feature of all opportunist tendencies is to turn a deaf ear to revolutionary criticism. Although the opportunists sometimes seem to accept general revolutionary principles when they are squeezed, in effect they keep following their well-trodden

opportunist way. Thus opportunism makes upsurges that are generally unavoidable. Giving concrete examples will surely make clear these features of opportunism that we state here very briefly. As a striking example we can take the upsurge of opportunism in the case of the IMT (International Marxist Tendency) lead by Alan Woods.

If we leave aside the earlier history, the IMT is known to be coming out of the Trotskyist circle Militant that came into prominence with their work during the miners' strike in Britain in the eighties. The Militant group was divided into two as a result of an inner split in the beginning of 90's. The part that which has been organized under the leadership of Ted Grant and Alan Woods is now known as the IMT on an international level. The year 2004 is obviously a serious turning point for the IMT when tendencies incompatible with revolutionary policy began to appear in a highlighted way. In that year the opportunism and reformism of Alan Woods especially exhibited on the approach to the events unfolding in Venezuela, to Chavez and Chavista regime became such manifest that it was impossible to hide it. With the passing away of Ted Grant, who was the historical founder of the Militant group, in 2006, Alan Woods placed himself comfortably in the chair of leadership of a political line which places friendship with Chavez on top and extends a hand of friendship towards bureaucratic regimes such as Cuba.

We need to state one thing right at this moment of beginning. Our approach to this question is not one of repeating certain tiring accusations that have been for years leveled against one another by Trotskyist groupings. Because as exemplified by Marksist Tutum, for a circle that stems from theoretical and practical lessons of past experiences both in the context of Stalinism and Trotskyism and that strives in a new historical period to build itself from the very start on the principles of revolutionary Marxism, such accusations are not of decisive importance. As we stated many times on various occasions, for us there is an essential political difference between Trotsky as a revolutionary and the Trotskyist movement that has taken shape after his death. This difference has a direct impact on the question of building the political organization on revolutionary proletarian grounds.

It is beyond question that Trotsky, albeit his erroneous approaches on certain issues, is one of those historical leaders who played an important revolutionary role both in the course of Russian revolution and on an international level. When it comes to the Trotskyist movement, however, things are a bit different and for us this needs to be appraised on the basis of a careful revolutionary examination. Because after Trotsky's death the Trotskyist movement moved away from

the Leninist-Bolshevik tradition he had upheld, was broken into pieces becoming mired in petty-bourgeois strives and in the final analysis failed in creating a tradition capable of representing revolutionary Marxism on an international level. Thus it cannot be imposed as if a revolutionary prerequisite for those political groups that aim to build themselves today on the basis of revolutionary Marxism to define themselves as Trotskyists or own and be part of the existing Trotskyist tradition as is.

Today this is an important factor to have a direct impact on the character and the way of the strivings to build a new international. Besides, contrary to the claims of Trotskyists, the collapse of the Stalinist regimes did not at all bring about the historical rise of Trotskyism. On the contrary it revealed the weaknesses of Trotskyists all along, which they seem to be unwilling to accept. And the fact that Trotskyist groups avoided facing their erroneous sides after the collapse of the Soviet Union is a big drawback from the standpoint of the international revolutionary struggle of the working class. The escape from imperative revolutionary duties on that point forms one of the main hindrances on new and healthy political syntheses on an international level today.

Thus attitudes of various Trotskyist groups in practice become completely disappointing for those groups that do not come out of Trotskyist movement but defend new syntheses on revolutionary Marxist fundamentals. As far as we can witness, the IMT leadership is a concrete example of this, proving that they are determined to anchor in opportunism especially since 2004 with their political attitudes in practice. What concerns us with the IMT is this opportunism which we never consented to, put under severe criticism since it first came into our view and eventually developed completely beyond our control. Beyond that, no matter it is the IMT or any other Trotskyist group, strives and accusations that have been going on for years among diverse groups in Trotskyist movement never concern us in terms of directly taking political sides.

There is something obvious. In the field of today's socialist politics the nature of the views and interpretations of various circles and organizations on a national and international level is revealed through putting into test whether or not Marxist principles on decisive subjects such as state and revolution are approached without distortion. And it is absolutely impossible to say that the IMT leadership and Alan Woods have passed this test. On the contrary, opportunism rises as the passion to offer support to and get appreciation from leaders such as Chavez rises and this course takes Alan Woods farther away from the fundamental axis of Marxism.

Opportunism on the question of state

In Marxist movement opportunist drifts always give themselves away most strikingly in the approach to the question of state. Alan Woods' piece titled "Marxism and the State" published (December 2008) in three parts in IDOM deserves to be examined in this respect. As clearly shown in this article, general principles of Marxism are seemingly affirmed but then these principles are hollowed out with various excuses, ifs and buts. We will try to exemplify this situation by some quotes from the Woods' article.

Let's first lay bare very briefly certain fundamental principles of Marxism. Marxism brought clarification to the question of state in an extensive and scientific way. State in the last analysis is formed of armed men and state apparatus is the means of the ruling class to suppress the other classes. Bourgeois domination can only be overthrown by the working class, because the working class is the only class capable of fulfilling this historical task due to its economic conditions of existence. As demonstrated by the history of class societies, force is the midwife of the old society pregnant with the new one. Giving the impression in his article that he moves from such general principles of Marxism, Woods says "We have never at any time denied that the working class, in moving to transform society will inevitably encounter the resistance of the possessing classes or that this resistance can under certain conditions result in civil war". Everything would be all right if this could be the end of the matter. But that is not the end of the matter, on the contrary "the issue" and the craft of opportunism starts right after this point.

In this crafty endeavor Woods again uses a general principle of Marxism as a shield. The reader's attention is first attracted to a point which there is no need to object: "The wage-earning class has grown not only in numbers, but also in terms of its potential for struggle. A properly organised general strike under modern conditions would bring the economy of a given country to a complete standstill, particularly in the more economically developed areas of the world. The decisive question is that of the leadership and of the degree of preparation of the working class, both organizationally and politically."

Well, what point Woods wants to arrive starting from this? That is the question! And Woods takes the reader to a journey away from Marxism by saying "What general conclusions can be drawn from what has been said above?" He puts forward two points that can hoodwink readers. Firstly he asserts that "the increased level of urbanisation and the ever-higher degree of technical sophistication of industry means that the working class will find itself in a generally more favora-

ble position at the outset of the revolution than was the case in the past.” And his second assertion: “the stronger the revolutionary party, the greater its success in rallying the working class to its programme and in winning the sympathy of the rank-and-file of the armed forces, then the more swiftly will it overcome the resistance of the ruling class and the less violence and loss of life will occur.” Thus Woods arrives at where he wants to take the reader to. What he intends to do by this journey is to instill the idea that today peaceful transition to socialism, in other words, for the revolution to proceed in a peaceful way, is more possible today than the past.

To this end Woods has devoted the article “Marxism and the State” largely to the subject of peaceful transformation of society. The idea that the political power can be conquered in a peaceful way (read parliamentary way!) in a number of capitalist countries Britain being the foremost (what coincidence?!) is being sought to inculcate insidiously. It is true that Marx made a mention of “peaceful transition” to socialism considering the distinctive conditions of Britain and North America in the pre-imperialist era. But Woods carries this issue to present world which has completely different conditions. And to be credible he needs to put forward some justifications that would appear valid under today’s conditions. For this reason he bases the construct of his article on the growing power of the working class and its organizations. For him, with the development of productive forces especially after 1945 the working class almost everywhere has developed enormously and the class balance has objectively turned in favor of the proletariat. While in Marx’s time the working class formed the majority of society only in Britain, today it has become the decisive force of society in all advanced capitalist countries. Also peasantry which forms the reserves of reaction has almost vanished.

Drawing a completely arbitrary and speculative conclusion from an objective truth, i.e. the growth of the working class, Woods contends that the possibility of a peaceful transition has increased. However this matter was addressed many years ago by Lenin and interpreted in a very different, scientific and revolutionary way in “State and Revolution”. For instance many years passed since Marx had stated in 1852 that bourgeois state apparatus had to be smashed and the proletariat grew very much in the mean time. And what revolutionary conclusion did Lenin draw from this fact? No wonder, Lenin emphasized that the progress of history propelled the proletarian revolution into gathering its forces to smash the state apparatus to a greater extent than 1952.

However, Woods wants us to believe that the changes that have taken place in

time prepared an objective basis enabling the power being conquered in a peaceful way (parliamentary transition!) in advanced capitalist countries. As if wishing to outpace Kautsky, the great opportunist of one time, Woods attempts to inculcate the delusion that today workers' revolution could move forward to socialism without any need to resort to revolutionary force. Thus revolution is reduced to setting up a "workers' government" in a parliamentary way, the most important revolutionary task of the working class (smashing the old state apparatus) is set aside. How can one but help remember Lenin with his warnings on this important matter?

Lenin remarked another important issue again in his "State and Revolution". Those socialists who replaced class struggle with class collaboration do not perceive and defend socialist transformation as overthrowing the exploitative class dominance. They conceive this transformation as a peaceful subordination of dominant minority to the majority conscious of their duties. But as Lenin remarked, the experience in the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century of "socialist" participation in the bourgeois governments in Britain, France, Italy and other countries always resulted in betrayal of the interests of the working classes. However, it appears that it is convenient for Woods to forget the lessons of such historical experiences and Lenin's warnings!

Lenin also points out to a task in "State and Revolution" to be accomplished for the working class to build its own revolutionary power, a historical task that had been laid bare by Marx and Engels. As he says it is completely impossible to replace the bourgeois state with the proletarian state without a revolution based on revolutionary force. As Marx states, based on his examination of the experience of civil war in France, all past revolutions have perfected and developed the state machine before the workers' revolutions, yet it has to be broken and smashed into pieces. And this is the historical lesson all varieties of opportunists past and present vow to forget or distort when they are unable to disregard it.

For Woods, the fact that the peasantry has withered in France and other countries is extremely important from the standpoint of diminishing the reserves of Bonapartist and fascist reaction. He prepares his defenses against possible justified criticisms though, by stating that this fact alone cannot bring about the reaction being ruled out. But on the other hand he is for a long time very keen on emphasizing in his various analyses that the road to fascism is closed in Europe. He says the entire situation is different to the period between the two world wars: "Then, the fascists had massive social reserves in the peasantry and the petit-bourgeoisie, including the students. Now all that has changed. The working class

is a thousand times stronger, the peasantry has all but disappeared, and large sections of the white-collar workers—teachers, civil servants, bank workers, etc.—have drawn much closer to the proletariat. Under these circumstances, the bourgeoisie will have to think twice before moving towards an open dictatorship. If the labor movement were armed with genuine socialist policies, such a move could end in the total overthrow of bourgeois rule.” It is obvious that in the world of opportunism objective truths and deliberate subjective interpretations are intermingled. While the impression is attempted to be given that realistic analyses are being made, the consciousness of the working class is blurred with the promise of an “easy revolution” to be realized almost spontaneously.

To cover up one's own inability with others' guilt

For Woods the reason for this “easy” or “peaceful” revolution not to become reality out of possibility is the attitude of those political tendencies completely weakening the workers movement. Thus he says: “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.” And elsewhere, “Without the aid of the reformists, Stalinists and the trade union leaders, it would not be possible to maintain the capitalist system for any length of time.” It is certainly a revolutionary task to expose the fact that reformists, Stalinists and the trade union bureaucrats did a lot of damage to the working class movement and raise the awareness of workers on these facts. That the capitalist system does not survive thanks only to bare force and armed men and that the bureaucrats, reformists who blur the consciousness of the working class provide the capitalist system a life space is obvious.

Now Woods covers his insidious opportunism characteristic of his political manner under such general truths. True, throughout whole its history the working class paid the price of the betrayals of the union bureaucrats and reformist leaders with in its lives and blood. However this fact cannot at all be an objective ground for the idea that peaceful transition is much more likely today. Such statements are but truisms. It is self-evident that union bureaucrats and so-called socialist leaders who lead the workers’ movement away from revolutionary road would play their historical roles to help capitalist order in its effort to crush the working class movement. Therefore to inculcate the daydream of a peaceful transition with a vision that these lackeys of the system might behave otherwise can

in no way be considered an innocent approach.

This attitude in fact is the manifestation of an ill approach inculcated for many years by Alan Woods and alike socialist leaders swimming in the same political waters. Main defect of this kind of politics is to systematically relegate those tasks that in fact can only be assumed by a revolutionary leadership to others. Time-serving politicians seek to escape from the burden of revolutionary tasks contenting themselves with accusing those people or groups, which is no big deal as their role to lead the working class to failures and losses is self-evident. They always put the blame on others when it comes to the fundamental revolutionary tasks of the day while at the same time boasting that they have built a glorious tradition and the international organization. This mindset is expressed in Woods' lines as follows: "As a matter of fact, the workers could have taken power in France, Italy, Spain, Britain and Germany, many times in the course of the last seven decades, if there had been a revolutionary party capable of performing this task. Many revolutionary opportunities have been lost through the betrayals of reformism and Stalinism. The working class may have to pay in blood for these crimes of the leadership."

Another problematic aspect of the view that peaceful transition is much more possible today than the past is the interpretation of the consequences of capitalist development in a mechanistic deterministic way. True, the working class itself and its potential for struggle have grown in time. But to confuse the reality and the potential means a political blindness in revolutionary struggle that would bring about disastrous consequences. Because the potential for struggle can only be realized through sound organization, correct leadership and revolutionary tactics. Yet the fundamental problem of today has already been the agonizing weakness on this issue that is yet to be overcome. Besides, the bourgeoisie has not been idle in the meantime reinforcing the apparatuses of coercion of the capitalist state amply. Also it developed many subtle methods and means on the ideological sphere to dull the consciousness of the working class and thus keep it away from struggle. Is it not obvious that decaying capitalism exposes the masses to a general mind-eclipse? Could it be denied that capitalist states have established an apparatus of coercion much more relentless in comparison to the past over the working class and other toilers?

Despite this reality, Woods does not hesitate to put forward his interpretation of Venezuelan example by saying "a revolutionary program would find support among the rank-and-file of the armed forces". This political line has created in Venezuela, where Chavez who has come out of the bourgeois army enjoys a con-

siderable support among low ranking officers, the dream that the revolution can move forward with Chavez and without breaking the old state machine apart. As exemplified in the approach of Woods and the IMT leadership to the revolutionary process in Venezuela, Marxist understanding of revolution which presupposes breaking apart of the state machine has been blurred and replaced with a completely opportunist and reformist approach, which finds expression in “purging the state from bad bureaucrats”. This case which shows clearly that the question of state is not approached in a Marxist way is a manifestation of IMT’s problematic understanding of the relation of state and socialism in general.

We emphasized it time and again: its not just Stalinists that have a bad record in blurring Marxist understanding of the state (for instance confusing statism with socialism), but Trotskyists’ approach to the question is also ill. It should not be forgotten that socialism which is the first phase of classless society means a stateless social order. The conceptions of “socialism” invented by coupling a bureaucratic planning with a strong state, going outside Marxism, eventually lead to defense of national developmentalist statist bureaucratic Stalinist-like regimes. Is it not, thus, significant enough that Woods who claims the legacy of Trotsky who criticized the Stalinist bureaucratic regime on right grounds defends the bureaucratic regime in Cuba today?

As it is beyond the limits of one article, we will content ourselves at this moment with simply reminding the readers that on various occasions we raised our criticisms on such opportunist leanings of the IMT. Apart from our criticisms and differences on other matters, we expressed our criticisms clearly on the positions of the IMT leadership on the question of Venezuela since 2003, i.e. from the very beginning. Necessary early warnings were made on issues such as exaggeration of the political role of Chavez and the tendency to dissolve proletarian revolutionary elements in Bolivarian movement.

But despite these criticisms the IMT leadership kept proceeding in its own way. Taking refuge behind the pretext that masses support Chavez in Venezuela, Alan Woods has built a political line promoting Chavez more and more and praising him as “the person who makes history”. But there was a serious revolutionary situation in Venezuela and Chavez was a hindrance in front of the working masses waging a revolutionary struggle for the conquest of political power. Despite this fact the IMT leadership started the “Hands off Venezuela” campaign which has been almost completely tuned to the propaganda of president Chavez. Though it was as yet “a revolutionary situation” taking place in Venezuela, in Alan Woods’ articles it was presented as an accomplished “revolution”. For Woods Chavez was

a “person who makes history” and what was taking place in Venezuela was the “Venezuelan Revolution”.

This political line that was unacceptable and alien to us, is both the pretext and the clear manifestation of opportunism and reformism escaping from burning realities of the day. The only force that could bring a revolutionary transformation to society in Venezuela and other Latin American countries today is the organized movement of the working class. If under today’s concrete conditions in Venezuela (or other Latin American countries where similar revolutionary situations take place) the working class is far from this leadership position and supports Chavez, then a revolutionary organization can only be advanced by exposing his limits and not praising him! It is clear that as long as Chavez is seen as El Libertador by the masses, he will continue to be a factor hindering the progress of the revolutionary process.

The revolutionary situations in Latin America are undoubtedly important, but such political attitudes must be developed that would serve to utilize these processes with the purpose of establishing the revolutionary working class power. Moreover Latin America is not in another planet, but part of the capitalist world jungle where we live. This period wherein American imperialism created a blood bath in the Middle East is a period of deep system crisis and a new imperialist war of carving up on a world scale. In such a period where the world is drawn into bloody wars of division, communists cannot be in a state of ease as if there are sweet winds of reform blowing around the world. However, as proven once again by the IMT leadership under Woods, the political disposition of opportunists and reformists is different. As in other periods of the history of working class struggles, they will not stop distorting realities and living truths of Marxism in their own interests!

Distortion of Marxism

The opportunists who claim to stand on the ground of Marxism appear to let certain fundamental principles of revolutionary struggle come in from the front door of their politics in order to bring credibility to their claim. But the fact of the matter is that they push them out from the back door in a quite crafty way. Alan Woods, too, in his article titled “Marxism and the State”, imposes his dream of “peaceful transition” in the totality of the article, while at the same time pretending to welcome the tough nature of the class struggle, for instance the perspective of a civil war. Here is what Woods says: “as against the bourgeois and the re-

formists who always try to frighten the workers with the spectre of violence and civil war, and the sects who lose no opportunity to advertise their enthusiasm for ‘bloody revolution,’ thereby rendering a great service to the bourgeois and the reformists, we insist that we stand for a peaceful transformation of society, and place all the blame for any violence on the shoulders of the ruling class and the reformist leaders.”

Asserting various similar justifications in his article, Woods tries, in fact, to inculcate the idea that most of the workers are deeply afraid of the perspective of violence and blood. Thus he overlooks the fact that throughout whole history the oppressed rebelled fearlessly when they come to the point of no return and pursues a policy completely on his own intellectual light-mindedness and fears. His intention in promoting so much the pretext that the masses are timid on the question of revolutionary uprising is to lay the ground for presenting genuine Marxists as “ultraleft” elements, who, in the cause of the emancipation of the working class and the poor, face up to every hardship and dare revolutionary force.

Indeed, on almost every important political question Woods first creates a target to attack, which he persistently keeps naming “ultralefts”, in order to be able to hit from the right in his own fashion. But questions such as what political circles are meant by this naming and who says what in reality are left in ambiguity. Thus all circles that look “ultra-left” in the eyes of a politician like Woods, communists, for sure, in the first place, who have no other “sin” than defending revolutionary Marxism, would be placed under the attack of opportunism. This is the insidious method of attack of opportunism. Thus Woods has put all left circles into the same sack who criticized the reformist approach of the IMT leadership towards revolutionary developments in Latin America and developed explanations and interpretations which present revolutionary Marxist attitudes that defend the requirements of a genuine proletarian revolution today as “ultra-left”.

In order not to leave space for any misunderstandings, we need to emphasize here the fact that, without doubt, Marxism is a worldview that defends not death, but life, emancipation and freedom of humankind, and that involves a far superior affection for humankind than bourgeois humanism. So the internationalist communists would never defend uncalled-for violence, bloodshed etc. One should not be misled by bourgeois slanders. Marxism is not a worldview which worships violence. Not resorting to violence unless ruling classes resort to violence is a basic position of Marxism.

However, as Marxist worldview is not an airy utopia but grounds itself in the world of realities of capitalism in every respect, internationalist communists would in no way fool the working class by dreams of “peaceful transition” in the face of the forces of reckless oppression of capitalist states! Engels’ criticism of Herr Dühring who was longing in a petty-bourgeois manner for an easy overthrow of capitalist order of exploitation without any need to resort to revolutionary violence must not be forgotten. Thus in his “Anti-Dühring” Engels states that revolutionary role of force in history cannot be ignored. Likewise Lenin, following the revolutionary road opened by Marx and Engels, remarks the necessity of winning the working masses to the idea of a revolution based on revolutionary force in order to build a world without exploitation. On such issues Lenin for instance reminds Marx’s harsh criticisms of petty-bourgeois socialists such as Proudhon who thinks class struggle would be resolved peacefully through free credits given to workers via a “People’s Bank”.

So Marxist leaders are not content with educating only the cadres on the question of the necessity of revolutionary force in order a workers’ revolution to be successful, but they also clearly mention the duty of raising the consciousness of the working masses on the same question. And, in the face of clear expressions of revolutionary Marxist leaders on revolutionary force, Woods would try to engineer a way out saying that such things are only told for the purpose of educating cadres. But when it comes to the revolutionary education of cadres he again would turn to his own fictions of peaceful transition under other pretexts. Besides, contrary to what Alan Woods seeks to present, the circumstances about which the founders of revolutionary Marxism suggested a peaceful development of revolution is a very exceptional case and it is associated with the pre-imperialist era. If we are to remind this subject in a bit more detailed way, Marx mentioned a prospect of peaceful transition for Britain (and to a certain extent America) of his times because of the special conditions of these two countries.

As Lenin would remark in his “Infantile Disorder” too, there were objective reasons that led Marx to consider the prospect of a peaceful transition in the special case of Britain which was “model of a purely capitalist country”. At that time Britain was an interesting country that involved peculiar historical conditions. Instead of holding a big army, Britain , as an “island power”, could maintain its supremacy over Europe through its naval force and “divide and rule” policy. Therefore militarism and bureaucracy in Britain were weaker in comparison to continental Europe. Besides, due to its traditional political freedom it had a working class with a higher level of culture and greater weight in population,

moreover well-organized in trade-unions in comparison to continental Europe. It is due to this specific situation that the proletarian revolution in Britain could fulfill the task of destroying the capitalist state machinery perhaps without any need to resort to revolutionary force.

Of course all these considerations of Marx and Engels about the prospect of a peaceful transition in Britain reflect the objective situation in the past and are conditional. As the objective conditions changed with the years passed such considerations lost their relevance. Thus, with time, in all capitalist countries the capitalist state machine and state bureaucracy were entrenched in many respects, and in parallel with the rise of militarism in imperialist era the military caste gained strength. This was valid for Britain too. And Lenin stated in his "State and Revolution" that conditions changed in the imperialist era and that there was now not much difference between Britain and America and the countries in continental Europe in terms of militarism and bureaucracy. Therefore, as in other countries, the fundamental condition of proletarian revolution in these two countries, now became the breaking apart of capitalist state machine through revolutionary force when necessary and creating the dictatorship of the proletariat.

But what Woods and alike do is as usual. First, certain general truths of Marxism are told. But immediately afterwards, the opportunist path is taken with the statement that Marxism cannot be reduced to reiterating such general truths. One of the striking examples of this method of Woods is the confusion created by stating two things together, namely the revolutionary tasks related to breaking apart of the old state machine and the dream of "peaceful transition" which is an invention of Woods-like socialists. Here is what Woods says: "Marx explained that the working class cannot simply base itself on the existing state power, but must overthrow and destroy it. That is ABC for a Marxist." Correct and good so far; but the rest is not so good. As in many of his writings, by saying "but after the ABC, there are other letters in the alphabet," Woods sets out to perform the opportunist's art. In the end, one of Engels' explanations in "Principles of Communism" is presented to the reader along with comments that would supposedly justify the opportunist politics of Woods.

Engels, in this work, which is written in question-and-answer style, asked the question "Will it be possible to bring about the abolition of private property by peaceful means?" and gave the following answer: "It is to be desired that this could happen, and the Communists certainly would be the last to resist it. The Communists know only too well that conspiracies are not only futile but even harmful. They know only too well that revolutions are not made deliberately and

arbitrarily, but are everywhere and at all times the essential outcome of circumstances quite independent of the will and the leadership of particular parties and entire classes.” Seeking to present Engels’ lines as basis for his fiction of “peaceful transition,” Woods takes refuge behind a justified warning about the danger of a premature and unprepared uprising of the working class. While the reader is sought to be fooled by such tricks, the task of revolutionary uprising is craftily removed from sight!

The message that Engels intends to transmit to the reader on the whole in the “Principles of Communism” is turned into a mainstay for an opportunist’s dreams of peaceful transition as a result of Woods’ trickery. Thus Woods says: “From the very outset, the founders of scientific socialism were very careful in how they approached the question of violence, realising not only the danger of the proletariat being drawn into premature uprisings and adventures, but that a clumsy presentation of this question would be a propaganda gift to the enemies of Communism.” But those who wish to learn revolutionary Marxism properly should not focus on Woods’ self-style interpretation of “Principles of Communism” but on what Engels says in the continuing lines. “But” says Engels, “they likewise perceive that the development of the proletariat is in nearly every civilised country forcibly suppressed, and that thereby the opponents of the Communists are tending in every way to promote revolution. Should the oppressed proletariat in the end be goaded into a revolution, we Communists will then defend the cause of the proletarians by deed as well as we do now by word.”

That opportunists crop or distort Marxism’s ideas in their own intentions cannot change the political realities that are known for long. The attention of Marx and Engels is evident on the issue of educating the proletarian vanguard in a revolutionary way against escapist, cynical and pacifist trends. In criticizing the “opponents of authority” who chatter on authority in a fashion that amounts to losing touch from life and who turn this light-minded petty-bourgeois attitude into a political modus operandi, Engels says the following: “Have these gentlemen ever seen a revolution? A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon—authoritarian means, if such there be at all; and if the victorious party does not want to have fought in vain, it must maintain this rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionaries. Would the Paris Commune have lasted a single day if it had not made use of this authority of the armed people against the bourgeois? Should we not, on the contrary, reproach it for not having used it freely enough?”

This is the language a revolutionary Marxist speaks in explaining historical-social-political realities. The opportunist intellectual who reaches out into the workers' movement, on the other hand, would ascribe the fear by which he is possessed in the face of iron laws of revolution onto the masses in an attempt to conceal it, while not giving up posing himself as revolutionary. Such a socialist would ignore the fact that the capitalist order already means tyranny, tears and suffering for poor working masses in almost every aspect of life and instead of a genuine revolutionary politics he would suggest "peaceful dreams" to them characteristic of his world of intelligentsia. He would escape from educating workers on the basis of hard but necessary aspects of revolutionary struggle and instead attempt to feed them with reformist-opportunist baby food as if they are tender babies.

In an article which deals with "Marxism and the State" a genuine Marxist would express in a most unequivocal manner the idea that the most fundamental and indispensable task of the workers' revolution is to break apart the capitalist state machinery and therefore that the organized proletariat must be imbued with the idea of the necessity of revolutionary force. From the standpoint of the working masses capitalist state machinery, especially in today's world, has turned into a much more unbearable machinery of coercion and oppression than the past. Therefore, it is self-evident that the proletarian revolution that would throw such a machine into the junk of history would be faced with a ruthless violence of the ruling class and thus would have to exert revolutionary force in order to counter this violence. While this is the reality, Woods keeps turning the attention of the reader to the subject of "peaceful transition". Now again it is time to come to the same subject and of course the venue is Britain !

First Woods makes his prelude: "Under certain conditions, Marx and Engels did not rule out the possibility of a peaceful transfer of power to the proletariat, although, at the time, they believed that the only country where conditions existed for this perspective was Britain ." And afterwards, he quotes Engels from his Preface to Capital written in 1886. There Engels says the following about Marx's theory: "Surely, at such a moment, the voice ought to be heard of a man whose whole theory is the result of a lifelong study of the economic history and condition of England, and whom that study led to the conclusion that, at least in Europe, England is the only country where the inevitable social revolution might be effected entirely by peaceful and legal means."

Thus Woods, mobilizing whole his intellectual energy, tries to prove that Marx and Engels have attached what a great importance (!) to the prospect of a peace-

ful transition especially in Britain . He also creates his own Lenin and look how he presents him, who emphasized time and again that the idea of peaceful transition in imperialist era is nothing more than a dream, in a completely different way: “Lenin was capable of asserting in 1920 that in Britain, because of the enormous power of the proletariat and its organisations, 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.” In this way Woods in fact have quickly abused Lenin by making him instrumental in his own dreams of “a peaceful and tranquil life”, claiming that he has taken the example of his dialectical approach. Lenin the revolutionary is reduced to the level of a supporter of Woods who defends transformation through parliament!

Denying Lenin in the guise of defending him

Let's remember the fact of the matter. Not only in his “Renegade Kautsky” but also other writings in 1920's Lenin clearly criticized the Kautskyite policy of “peaceful transformation” which ignores the necessity of revolutionary force through frivolous excuses. In defining the concept of dictatorship, Kautsky tries with all his might to conceal from the reader the essential feature of the concept, i.e. revolutionary force. Lenin points out that at this moment the fundamental problem that needs to be discussed is the antagonism between a peaceful revolution and a revolution based on coercive force and he makes his position clear: “So, to talk about ‘violence’ in general, without examining the conditions which distinguish reactionary from revolutionary violence, means being a philistine who renounces revolution, or else it means simply deceiving oneself and others by sophistry.” What Lenin says is perfectly clear, but remembering these revolutionary truths would surely not suit to those like Woods.

Alan Woods is busy distorting Lenin's views and Marxist analysis of the process of Russian revolution with a view to polishing his own opportunist policy. He likens the revolutionary process that has come to a halt as a result of Chavez's sitting to the chair of power with revolutionary posture to the process of Russian revolution from February to October 1917. Woods' intention with this baseless and improper analogy is to create the delusion that Venezuelan revolution is still advancing and will be successful if the bad bureaucrats are purged from the state. To lay the basis for this delusion he begins the subject matter by saying “October Revolution in Russia is a peaceful event contrary to what many think.” That he presents the process of Russian revolution as if totally a “peaceful event” is a mockery because this process began with the February 1917 revolution that

overthrew the Tsarist regime and broke apart the existing state machinery and as such involved the possibility of a peaceful transfer of power to the soviets.

In the course of the Russian revolution a provisional bourgeois government was set up as a result of the February revolution. But the bourgeoisie has not acquired the political power and set up its own bureaucratic state machinery yet. Besides, there were workers', peasants' and soldiers' soviets which rested on tremendous power of the masses and bore a genuine potential for acquiring the power. There was a revolution with all its fervent and ups and downs, and in the run up to the October 1917 the possibility arises that the soviets could conquer the power in a peaceful way. But because Bolshevik deputies could not achieve majority in the soviets yet, this possibility could not be turned into reality. That is, there was a situation of dual power (a dual powerlessness in other words) in Russia at that time.

Those leaders of the revolution like Lenin and Trotsky embodied the goal of mobilizing the working masses for the transfer of power to the soviets by the slogan "all power to the soviets". Eventually the possibility of transferring the power to the soviets could not be realized and in September when the conditions turned ripe Lenin announced in a most clear way that it was time for the revolutionary uprising. The tactics of the Bolshevik Party that would lead to organizing the uprising are worked into the working masses organized in the soviets. In the end, the October uprising was brought to success without much blood because the old state apparatus had already been broken apart, the bourgeoisie did not gain enough power to acquire the state power and the revolutionary policy of the Bolsheviks rose to the majority in the soviets.

This is the reality of October Revolution out of which Woods tries to make a prop for his reformist dreams by calling it a "peaceful event". It is a completely ill-intentioned trickery to equate the question of peaceful acquiring of power by the soviets under the aforementioned conditions in Russia with the process experienced today in Venezuela and thus invalidate the task of breaking apart the existing state machinery in Venezuela under the pretext of "possibility of peaceful revolution"!

But Alan Woods speaks like he is trying to fool children he gathered around rather than a political leader educating revolutionary cadres. And in order to justify himself he attempts to make baseless comparisons based on tricks of his own invention. Thus he would say, "The assertion that a mass movement of sufficient strength can, under certain conditions, bring about the transfer of power without civil war is not an invention of the IMT" and go on to abuse some of the

answers Trotsky has given to Dewey Commission. But the context is completely different! Trotsky has erroneous analyses on the class nature of the Soviet Union which had already stopped being a workers' state under the rule of the sovereign bureaucracy. For this reason, he finds it sufficient to carry out a mere political revolution for transfer of all economic and political power back to the working class, and on this basis, says in an answer to a question of the Dewey Commission that the Soviet bureaucracy could be overthrown without resort to violence. Is it not sufficiently clear that Alan Woods exploits Trotsky's words in an attempt to mislead those who turned their ears to him?

If one needs more evidence about the unavoidable upsurge of opportunism in the example of Woods one can also look to his fiddling with the question of "Lenin and revolutionary defeatism" to his own ends. He firstly makes some references to Lenin's statements on the situation in 1914. As he says the divide in the Second International created completely different conditions. In light of the lessons of the unprecedented betrayal of the Social Democracy, the question of re-educating and reshaping the small and isolated forces of Marxism became urgent. And to cope with this colossal task and educate revolutionary cadres on the international arena Lenin places a heavy emphasis on the fundamental principles of revolutionary internationalism.

Under conditions of ongoing imperialist war it is necessary to educate cadres on the basis of the tactics of "revolutionary defeatism" in order to create a new international organization of the revolutionary proletariat. Through the agency of opportunists and social-chauvinists all kinds of patriotism was being turned into nationalism poisoning the working class. Instead of building the fraternity between the workers of different countries in a common struggle, they led the workers to cut one another's throat in the interests of "their own" bourgeois. For this reason the call by Karl Liebknecht in Germany amidst the flames of imperialist war, that is "the main enemy is at home, turn your weapon to your own bourgeois", is extremely important and correct, aimed at awakening the working masses.

Lenin paid a great attention to this revolutionary attitude and tried to make it prevalent on the international arena of struggle. His tactic of "revolutionary defeatism" in the context of warring imperialist countries calls on the masses to "turn the imperialist war into a civil war" and "demand the defeat of one's own bourgeoisie" in order to build a revolutionary workers' power. And today the revolutionary proletariat still should learn to use these revolutionary tactics in countries that wage imperialist wars and revolutionary political leaders undoubt-

edly should educate such cadres that have assimilated these revolutionary tactics on a national and international level.

But it is not the need to emphasize these revolutionary duties what motivates Woods when he makes a mention of this issue in his article “Marxism and the State”; his intention is completely different. Reminding Lenin’s attitudes along with some key events around 1914, Woods, after a lot of talk, ends up with discrediting Lenin’s revolutionary attitudes. He would say “it is arguable that, on occasion, he exaggerated,” thus spitting out what he has in his mouth. Woods relates Lenin’s defense of the policy of “revolutionary defeatism” to that “Lenin bent it too far in the other direction, in order to straighten the stick.” He makes his “warning” that unless we understand not only what Lenin wrote but also for what he wrote we would be confused and thus presents the tactic of “revolutionary defeatism” against imperialist war as going too far to the opposite extreme in trying to straighten the stick. This is the way Woods educates “cadres” in the spirit of “Marxism”!

If Woods were to achieve his goal the cadres and peripheral elements of his international organization would develop such an understanding (!) of Lenin that now revolutionary tactics would appear to them as ultra-left. And they would be comfortable with defending a shabby reformism in the name of revolution as Woods teaches. The story would surely not end here and on the one hand Woods would keep climbing to the climax in the steps of opportunist leadership by making strides in his friendship with president Chavez, on the other hand, his disciples would find no problem at all in all this pro-Chavez flag waving. And quite naturally they would accuse those revolutionaries who criticize this approach of Woods towards Venezuela with “ultra-leftism”.

Possessed with the joy he gets from friendship with statesmen such as Chavez Woods let his pen which gained mastery in opportunism go to write the following kind of stuff: “Ultra-left and sectarian groups always repeat Lenin’s words without understanding a single line. ... 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 characterise 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.”

He claims that Lenin put forward his position of “revolutionary defeatism” not

as part of necessary tactics of revolutionary struggle but only as a correction of some erroneous approaches of cadres in an exaggerated manner. Woods has two aims in doing this. First, to justify Trotsky's position who for a certain period of time collaborated with the opportunist "center" of the Second International and discredit Lenin's criticism of his position. Second, to convince the reader that the tactic of "revolutionary defeatism" was but an exaggeration and that Lenin abandoned it after March 1917. "When Lenin returned to Russia after March 1917, he fundamentally modified his position" says Woods. And he goes on, "Lenin's position after March 1917 bore little resemblance to the slogans he had advanced earlier." And then comes to the point. We learn that, "as a matter of fact, the slogans of 'revolutionary defeatism' played no role in preparing the masses for the October revolution!"

Here again, Woods, by a crafty twist of hand, distorts the question and takes up his position by taking refuge behind the principle that revolutionary tactics need to be patiently explained to the masses in a proper language to draw them into struggle. And he discards the duty of educating revolutionary cadres so that they learn the prospect of civil war, role of revolutionary force and art of uprising and the duty of formulating revolutionary tactics accordingly in the most consummate way. This attitude is like throwing out the baby with the bath water which Woods likes and repeats all the time. That is, we have a perfect case of "giving the advice to others without keeping himself"!

Of course it is completely wrong to convey revolutionary tactics and slogans to the masses in an impatient, timeless and careless way that amounts to revolutionary phraseology and sectarianism. Mass work is a political art that requires patience and care. In the founding period of Comintern Lenin put a lot of effort to prevent the young Communist Parties from falling into the trap of sectarianism. It is also important that the Communist International under the leadership of Lenin brought forward the tactics of united front, working in trade-unions and other mass organizations, joining the bourgeois parliaments in order to win the masses. Again Woods appears on the one hand to accept these Marxist approaches, but on the other hand he keeps delicately doing his own way. Taking refuge behind undeniable generalities such as "winning the masses" he sets out to "insidiously" deny the revolutionary legacy embodied in the slogans and positions defended by Lenin in relation to the education of revolutionary cadres and producing revolutionary tactics.

Woods' "insidiousness" here is to bring forward the tactic of winning the masses by depriving of its revolutionary essence and oppose it opportunistically to other

revolutionary tactics. For this reason, Lenin is presented as a political leader who all the time makes a one-sided stress on “to the masses”. The tactic of “revolutionary offensive” brought forward by Lenin and defended by him when the conditions are ripe is presented as if almost completely “ultra-left”. Independent of its content, Woods attaches such a “magic” power to “winning the masses” that the tail-ending reformist policy pursued in countries such as Venezuela where revolutionary situations erupt is served as something justified! Yet, to underline, the goal of “winning the masses” means nothing unless its content is properly defined. One must not forget that reformist and opportunist tendencies, too, seek to win over the masses to their aims. In short, what matters as for the mass work, is to what ideas and what kind of struggle against capitalism you are winning over the masses.

In sum, these are the realities that lay behind the accusations of “sectarianism” and “ultra-leftism” Woods leveled against those who criticize IMT leadership’s opportunist and reformist approach from a revolutionary perspective. As a last word we would like to stress that as the opportunism of IMT leadership keeps its unavoidable upsurge in the leadership of Alan Woods it is those young cadres who are being ruined, who believe in this international organization deeming it revolutionary. As we stated in the beginning, opportunism is an unstoppable drift and day after day IMT keeps desperately drowning into that ominous marsh of opportunism and reformism.