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Death of Ted Grant, Founder and leader of 'Militant'

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Ted Grant, who died recently, was a major leader in the British and international Marxist, Trotskyist movement of the last 60 years. He co-founded and led Militant in Britain in 1964, which grew to become the most effective and largest Trotskyite Marxist movement in Britain and most of Europe, the largest Marxist organisation in Britain in fifty years.

Ted Grant was a major theoretician - in particular his analysis of the 'proletarian bonapartism', and the development of deformed workers' states in Eastern Europe (differing from the SWP's Tony Cliffe's analysis of them being 'state capitalist').

Militant was not just theory, it was strikes, picket lines, mobilizations- and 'resolutionitis'- a focus on passing resolutions through/ by local and national Labour Party organizations and seeking to take organizational control. Militant did this more effectively than any entrising group in the history of the Labour Party. Party meetings lasted hours and hours!

At its height, Militant had eight thousand members, three MPs (and others voting with them), more full-time workers than the Labour Party, controlled Liverpool City Council (1983-1987) and included many Labour Councillors. Militant dominated the Labour Parties in various cities through the seventies and eighties, with Militant candidates fighting as Labour Parliamentary candidates with the belief and the slogan, 'A Workers' MP on a Workers' Wage'.

It was the largest Marxist organisation in Britain for a generation, a major part of the Left which nearly, oh so nearly, took control of the Labour Party at the Wembley conference of 1981 where Tony Benn, came within 1% of the vote to become Labour Party deputy leader. This period, following the crisis of capital accumulation (the international commodity/ oil rise prices of the early 1970s) saw an intensification of class conflict, with the Conservatives under Thatcher turning hard right, and Labour, influenced by Militant, almost turning predominantly socialist.

Although through the seventies and very early eighties I was in opposition to them, he (Ted Grant) and Militant, then the largest/ most organised Trotskyite Marxist group in Britain, had a major effect on me, personally and ideologically. This was to last over forty years. And he/ Militant had major political impact in Britain.

I was aware of Militant from its very beginning, in a pub in Brighton, in the Ditchling Road, near Fiveways (Peter Taffe's obituary disputes this, and Alan Wood's account). I attended one of their very first Marxist Discussion/ Reading Groups with Terry Adams, now trade union official (PCS national secretary). He was also a boy from the back streets of Brighton, from teenage years) and already Marxist/ Trotskyite. But in those days (sixties/ seventies, till around 1982), I was a social democrat, a revisionist socialist, a working class Labour boy suspicious of Marxist intellectuals and their critiques of Labour.

Labour (the Clement Atlee Labour nationalising government of 1945-51) had helped my class and my family in very real material senses- free medical prescriptions and health care, free doctors, more power and rights for trade unions to protect workers, secondary schools for all till the age of 16 (unlike for my mum and dad, leaving school at 14), grants for working class kids like me to stay on at school after the leaving age of 15 (both brothers left at 15), grants for kids like me, staying on at school, to buy vests / undervests, pants/ undershorts, living grants to attend university with no university fees.

All of these were unheard of in the 1930s, unavailable, dreamed of only by socialists within the Labour Party and by the then strong Communist Party. There were hardly any Trotskyites about till the excesses of Stalinism were exposed/ became painfully obvious, with Hungary 1956, Krushchev's Speech at the 20th Congress of the CPSU criticising Stalin and exposing the horrors of 'The Stalinist Terror', Orwells' writings suddenly became more relevant and understandable, *Animal Farm*, and his writings about the Spanish Civil War (*Homage to Catalonia*), Czechoslovakia 1968 and the crushing of the Czech velvet revolution, with its lost possibilities of an evolution into a more democratic communism.

I was one of the generation of post-war (WW2) working class kids, some thousands of us, who made it to university (although I was suspected, and, I suspect, derided, because of my accent and habitus and cultural capital (see my *Brief Autobiography of a Bolshie Dismissed* , where I tried to represent some of my family and work experiences, at <http://www.pipeline.com/~rougeforum/Newspaper/Summer2004/BriefAutobiography.htm>). This was true occasionally also in my second job at Bognor College of Education, in leafy West Sussex (' Oh God, can you imagine Dave Hill supervising teachers at Lancing College'). It wasn't so *apparent* when I worked in inner-city areas, Stockwell Manor Comprehensive School, Tower Hamlets College in London, truly multicultural, and *apparently* more accepting of multi/class/ 'race' cultures/ subcultures, class cultures and 'race' / ethnic cultures, unlike 'Middle England'.

Militant dominated my party, Brighton Labour Party through the nineteen seventies and eighties, a major part of my life. (I was Parliamentary candidate in 1979 and 1987 for Labour, Labour Councillor most of the period between 1975 till 1989, Labour Group Leader of a group (East Sussex County Council) which encompassed right-wingers through to two Militant comrades such as Ted Watson. They always were the best with a class analysis).

We were the last of the Labour Groups together with Liverpool City Council (controlled by Militant, see *Liverpool - A City that Dared to Fight* by Peter Taaffe and Tony Mulhearn, reviewed at <http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/books/thatbookframe.htm?bkno=4&order=61&cat=0&nextten=1&findword=0&sortby=>) and Lambeth Council (led by Ted Knight) to support the 'Deficit Budget' Policy against Thatcher's rate-capping policies. Of course for the Lambeth and Liverpool councillors this threatened them, and indeed, imposed disqualifications and personal surcharges and liabilities. For us in East Sussex, in opposition, it had no such threat, it was more of a gesture (though we weren't totally sure of that, we did have Labour Group meetings over personal surcharges).

But what if all the Labour Councils of the mid-1980s had challenged the Thatcher government! (Of course, most of today's supine new Labour councils wouldn't dream of criticising the current government, let alone challenging it- but in the seventies and eighties, there were many tens of thousands of socialists in the Labour Party- and some thousands of members of `Militant' in the Party.

So Militant dominated Brighton Labour Party through the seventies and eighties, with people like Ray Apps and Rod Fitch (who, together with other Militant candidates fighting as Labour Parliamentary candidates had the belief and the slogan, `A Workers' MP on a Workers' Wage'. Notable, in particular, were Geoff Jones and Ann Jones, and some older comrades from the Spanish Civil War era, like Dudley Edwards. My then wife, Marylyn Hill, a North London council estate comrade, was very close to, though not a member of Militant, for many years Brighton Labour Party secretary, a party then of 2,000 people. What is it now in the Blairite era? 400? A husk emptied of ideology, principles and members.

The Party then, in the seventies and eighties? So different from the arrogant money grubbing pro-privatising extravagances and class betrayal of the Blair Babes, Blair's (male and female) conservative or revisionist socialist, in other words, *anti-socialist* MPs),

Militant dominated Brighton Labour Party, my Party, in particular the Kemp Town constituency half, for twenty years until their expulsions (and the expulsions of other non-Militant Left comrades like Andy Winter, and members of Briefing) from the Labour Party by Kinnock (see <http://www.marxist.net/openturn/main/script.htm?3-2-2.htm>), expulsions I then opposed (and still do).

Labour's swing to the right started with Kinnock's expulsions of Ted Grant and the Militant Editorial Board, in 1983. Other non-Militant Left members were expelled, too. The strongholds of Militant within the Labour Party were either purged or closed down by the right wing running Labour. The Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS). Whole parties, such as the Liverpool and the Brighton Labour Parties were suspended and closed down. It was a witchhunt. With local witchhunters.

Militant split in 1991. Grant and Alan Woods, were overwhelmingly defeated at a Militant conference. They formed Socialist Appeal, focused its efforts on the Labour Party, rather than building a socialist alternative to Labour. The majority of Militant formed Militant Labour, then renamed the Socialist Party, outside the Labour Party, contesting elections. It wins (and retains) an as yet, small) number of Council seats.

Labour Party conferences then, in the seventies and eighties, were real fora of socialist expression, and meaningful, there was then (unlike now) a degree of intra-party/ internal democracy, power to select Parliamentary candidates. My then wife Marylyn, was delegate to the 1981 Labour Party national conference where she and 49% of the delegates narrowly failed to elect Tony Benn as Party Deputy Leader (see his website at <http://www.bennites.com/>). Conference then, (I attended through much of the seventies and eighties- without making much of an impression, I might add), had power to determine Party policy. There actually was a point to being a Party activist. But no more, buddy! I left last October after 44 years, having proudly joined on my sixteenth birthday) (see <http://www.respectcoalition.org/index.php?ite=882>).

I have read *Militant* (now *The Socialist*, see its website, <http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/TheSocialistContents.htm>) and its international review (formerly *Militant International Review*, now *Socialism Today*, <http://www.socialismtoday.org/>) for thirty years. Many years' of them are filling my loft space.

So, it has had a major impact on me, I learned a lot of my Marxism from it. I do realise that the Socialist Appeal group, which Ted Grant led after the split in *Militant* (with the majority of *Militant* joining *Militant Labour*, then renamed the Socialist Party) focused its efforts on the Labour Party, rather than building a socialist alternative to Labour.

Until the last year or so (perhaps I have been sooo naive) I had hoped that Labour could be reclaimed, reclaimed for class action by/ with/ on behalf of the working class, for socialism as well as for the reforms that meant, materially, so much to communities like mine. And I had always believed, along with Ted Grant and other entrists (though I did not start off as an entrist) that the place to be, the site of struggle in terms of party organisation, should be the mass party of the working class. For most of the twentieth century was the Labour Party- in particular with its long-term umbilical links with the trade union movement).

Indeed, there are, today, movements to 'Reclaim the Labour Party' such as the Labour Representation Committee (<http://www.l-r-c.org.uk/>) (For a variety of perspectives, see http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/article.php?article_id=5147 and <http://www.socialistunitynetwork.co.uk/voices/labour.htm> and <http://www.comunist-party.org.uk/articles/2004/January/21-01-04.shtml>, <http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/2005/402/index.html?id=nlrc.htm>). And there are currently Trade Union inspired conferences to reclaim Labour.

But the moment has gone. Labour is no longer a 'capitalist workers party', it is now a 'capitalist party'. I joined Respect, the RESPECT coalition, (<http://www.respectcoalition.org/>) in September 2005 simply because it is the largest political party (actually it is a movement rather than a Party), simply because it is the largest socialist grouping to the Left of Labour. (I know that is contested by the Socialist Party and others, the International Socialist Group, the Alliance for Workers Liberty, and other groups tiny in size).

Ironically enough, considering my own opposition- in Labour Party meetings in the (Brighton) *Evening Argus*, and on local television in the late 1970s/ early 1980s, parading myself / being paraded as a 'Labour Moderate' ideologically, in fact, I actually have more affinity, with the Socialist Party and with its Campaign for a New Workers' Party (CNWP), a new party combining existing groups and groupuscules to challenge and replace Labour from the Left (see <http://www.cnwp.org.uk/> and <http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/pamphlets/cnwp/index.html>).

But, in fact, I have joined RESPECT, although The Socialist Party (one of the two organisations that had their original roots and theoretical basis in Ted Grant's 'Militant') has more of a class analysis. And RESPECT seems to me to be more like a too broad Popular Front than the United Front I that could be more strategically viable and necessary in challenging New Labour from a socialist perspective.

The model of Party organisation I prefer is like the Scottish Socialist Party with its democratic 'platforms' (tendencies (although it is currently in some disarray with the Tommy Sheridan high court case)).

So in England my hope, together with that of the ISG, International Socialist Group (<http://www.isg-fi.org.uk/index.htm>) which I have just joined (it is also part of the RESPECT coalition) is that there should be a New Workers' Party. But it should comprise the Socialist Party (and its smaller allies, such as the Alliance for Workers Liberty (see <http://www.isg-fi.org.uk/index.htm>), the Alliance for Green Socialism, The Socialist Unity Network) *together* with RESPECT. It's doubtful if the Socialist Workers Party, currently the most active and numerous Marxist Party in England and Wales, will give up their dominance of RESPECT. But, such a Party could be a force, a uniting of England and Wales' socialist and Marxist groups and parties.

There are already encouraging signs in Europe, in Portugal with *O Bloco Esquerda*, in Germany with the *LinksPartei*, in France, with improving relationships between *Lutte Ouvriere* and the *Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire*, in Australia with the *Socialist Alliance*, with linkages and electoral agreements and mergers between socialist and Marxist organisations from different traditions. And the millions on the streets across Western Europe, against privatisations, casualisation, attacks on pension and workers' rights, together with the massive popularity of socialists and Left populists such as Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales in Latin America, show class consciousness by workers and the need for socialist organisation.

So, I am moved by Ted Grant's death. He, and his political ideas, and the movements and parties he led, have influenced me for forty years. But after 40 years as a Labour representative, activist and member (and a trade union representative activist and member, regional NATFHE chair for a short time, Branch Chair or Secretary for 15 years), it is now too late to reclaim the Labour Party, or to work as a Marxist within the Labour Party. Enough of New Labour. Enough of a party out-Torying the Conservatives, scarcely disguised by the handful of social democratic redistributionist policies.

It is time to form a New Workers' Party combining, on a platform or faction basis, all of the socialist and Marxist groupings and parties. Some, the most sectarian, such as, in England, the Socialist Labour Party may well stay out. But, along with Alan Thornett and the ISG in Britain (the International Socialist Group) (see http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/article.php3?id_article=951) I support the party form of political organization rather than the current loose organisational / movementist form of RESPECT. The future of socialism, if there is one (and Rosa Luxemburg's prediction that the future is Barbarism or Socialism looks increasingly apt), Marxists and Socialists and Trade Unions should eschew sectarianism and bring together Marxist and socialist organisations in a New Workers' Party that democratically embraces organisations as diverse as the Socialist Party, the Socialist Workers' Party, the International Socialist Group, and RESPECT.

So, time for socialists, and trade unions, and Tony Benn and the Campaign Group of Labour MPs, to leave New Labour- and work to bring together Marxist and socialist organisations in a New Workers' Party that embraces organisations as diverse as the Socialist Party, the International Socialist group, the Socialist Workers' Party and RESPECT- and the might, muscle and money of trade unions.

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