

August 15, 1975

TO THE LENINIST TROTSKYIST FACTION STEERING COMMITTEE

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed are two letters from Chen Pi-lan and Peng Shu-tse expressing their opinions on the events in Portugal and the draft resolution. They requested that these comments be circulated to the steering committee prior to its deliberations on the draft resolution.

Comradely,

Mary-Alice Waters

A Statement on Portugal

By Chen Pi-lan

It is my opinion that the leadership of the Fourth International must take the initiative in establishing an orientation toward the creation of soviets in Portugal. This is our duty and our task. To call for soviets is not the same thing as to create them. That will be a development that can only happen over time. We must raise the idea, the slogan. We can of course call them councils instead of soviets to help win the unconvinced, to whom "soviets" sounds too revolutionary or too ambitious at an early stage. But under whatever name, the demand must be raised. This is especially necessary to neutralize and win the soldiers to the side of workers and peasants.

This should have been done last year after the coup d'état, at the beginning of the revolution. Although it is late, at least we should not continue to wait. The Fourth International is too small in Portugal to provide direct organizational leadership in the formation of soviets on a national scale. But that cannot be an objection to raising the demand in a propogandistic way. The Fourth International, as a world organization, should give the Portuguese masses a correct orientation. Instead, we try to orient the Portuguese masses on many smaller and less important questions, which blows them out of proportion to their real importance. The Constituent Assembly is not our goal and cannot serve our purpose. The call for a consituent assembly is a good demand under a full-scale military dictatorship. It cannot substitute for soviets in a revolutionary situation.

Comments on the LTF Draft Resolution

"The Key Issues in the Portuguese Revolution"

By Peng Shu-tse

The overthrow of the Caetano dictatorship took place in April 1974. It is good that the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction has drafted a resolution on the revolutionary situation in Portugal, but coming only in July 1975 it is very late to take a position. Moreover, the position presented in the LTF document is worse than that of the International Majority Tendency. The IMT, in the declaration adopted by a majority of the United Secretariat on June 1, 1975 [published in Inprecor of June 19 and in Intercontinental Press of August 4, 1975], proposes the establishment of councils of workers, peasants, and soldiers. The Liga Comunista Internacionalista (LCI), the Portuguese group that supports the IMT, also raises this demand in its statement "For the Generalization of Workers Councils," published in Inprecor, No. 30, July 3, 1975.

It is true that the IMT never clearly explains the functions of soviets and confuses them with factory committees. But the LTF does not even propose soviets. Instead it calls for strengthening the Constituent Assembly. This is very dangerous for a Marxist party.

What is the situation in Portugal today and how should we orient toward it? First we should define the positions of the principal political groups. Let us begin with the Armed Forces Movement (MFA).

An important shift has taken place in the MFA. On July 30 General Carvalho, a member of the troika that controls the MFA, returned from a visit to Cuba. He told reporters that "We are going to see now what we can use here of what we learned in Cuba," and said, "I have just come back from a socialist country and I can tell you it is worth the sacrifice." He said that it is "becoming impossible to carry out a socialist revolution by completely peaceful means." According to one press report he stated that Portugal would have to follow the path of Eastern Europe.

Carvalho is the real strongman in Portugal today. He is commander of the Continental Operations Command (COPCON), the army security force. His position was not clear before he went to Cuba. Now there is no doubt that he supports the Moscow line.

Prime Minister Gonçalves is definitely a supporter of the CP. The third member of the ruling troika, President da Costa Gomes, is more moderate. But with this last exception, the leading military group orients generally toward the East. We should not forget, however, that differences exist inside the MFA. But its principal leaders are now pro-Stalinist.

The CP, led by Cunhal, is closely tied to the MFA. Neither it nor Moscow favor socialist revolution in Portugal. It does seek to gain organizational dominance over the workers' movement.

The Socialist Party is the real mass workers' party in Portugal. It was by far the largest in the last elections. They never publish their political program. They say only that they are for "socialism with freedom." They give no content to the word socialism except to say that it will be free. The SP does not call for land reform. The peasants want to confiscate and redistribute the land. Why doesn't the SP propose land reform if it is allegedly for socialism? This is, after all, a bourgeois democratic demand.

On capitalist property the SP hides its program. In reality it is procapitalist. It is a reformist party like the British Labour Party. Reformism in a revolutionary situation is always reactionary. We have only to recall the example of the conduct of the Social Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks after the February revolution in Russia. The SP joins hands with the Popular Democratic Party in supporting Western "socialism" of the type sponsored by the West European Social Democrats, who give their backing to the Portuguese SP. The West European Social Democrats in turn are supported by the West European imperialists.

What position should Trotskyists take in such a situation? Can we support either the SP or the CP? No. We should clearly say that the SP is a Menshevik party; the CP is a Stalinist party. Both are a brake on the revolution.

The most important question is, how can we mobilize the workers, peasants, and soldiers? What organizational form should this mobilization take? All the experience of history shows that only soviets can accomplish this. There is no other form.

The International as a whole has not propagandized for soviets. It was only last month that the IMT raised this slogan. Even though they were late, it was correct for them to do so, no matter what other mistakes they have made. The LCI statement published by Inprecor in July, although it is somewhat confused, is good in that it proposes land reform, nationalization of capitalist property, and the formation of councils.

Unfortunately the LTF has no such program. We mention land reform, but we do not call for the nationalization of capitalist property in industry. This is not some abstract demand that the workers will not see the need of. There are today 300,000 unemployed in a country of less than 10 million. That is very serious. There are reports of widespread sabotage of production by the capitalists: refusal to reinvest, the flight of capital abroad. Generally, production continues to decline and necessary

material goods are decreasing rapidly. On the other hand, prices are rising steadily. The situation for the common people is very hard and will grow progressively worse. They will see the necessity of measures to deal with this.

We should propose the immediate nationalization of all factories that have been closed by their owners. These factories should be operated under workers' management; that is, management by soviets, not by the MFA. Of course, this cannot be realized at once, but it should be raised now in a propagandistic way. This is the duty of the revolutionary party.

The draft resolution proposes a struggle for the meeting of the Constituent Assembly. The Constituent Assembly is a bourgeois institution by its very nature. The suffrage was not limited to workers as in workers' councils, and not only workers or peasants were elected to it. It is true that the revolutionary Marxist movement has often raised the demand for the convocation of a constituent assembly, but not under any and all circumstances. It was part of the program of the Bolsheviks under the tsar and Trotsky raised it after the defeat of the Chinese revolution of 1926-27. In reactionary times, under a dictatorship, it has a role to play. But not in a revolutionary situation. In Russia after February the demand rapidly became subordinate to the call for all power to the soviets. It goes without saying that we would oppose any effort by the MFA to dissolve the Constituent Assembly but we should raise no illusions in this body.

Portugal is in a revolutionary situation today. Our transitional program proposed the slogan of a workers' and farmers' government. That should be our slogan in Portugal. And the transitional program also proposed the instrument for the creation of such a government: soviets. Only soviets can decide the revolutionary question favorably for the proletariat. That is not dogmatism but the voice of experience. That is what we learned positively from the Russian Revolution and negatively from the Second Chinese Revolution and the Spanish revolution of the 1930s. Soviets are required. I leave aside the special circumstances in which Stalinist or petty-bourgeois parties created deformed workers' states despite the absence of soviets. We do not and cannot base our strategy on such purely exceptional circumstances.

The leaders of our movement always supported the most important point in the transitional program in real revolutionary situations: the need to form soviets. But there has been a dangerous departure from the transitional program in the years since World War II. We saw this in four revolutionary situations: Cuba, Algeria, Chile, and now Portugal.

In each of these countries the Trotskyists had sections, but they were small and either inexperienced or politically disoriented. In Cuba as you know the section of the Fourth Interna-

tional was led by the Posadistas. The International, then still divided, recognized the overturn of capitalist property relations when it occurred and supported it, which was correct. But it did not, during the revolutionary process, call for the formation of soviets.

In Algeria, millions were mobilized under the FLN. The Trotskyists adopted no program. The Fourth International as a whole did not, as Trotsky had done in the 1920s, offer a guiding political line for the development of the mass mobilization into socialist channels. Although I proposed a program for the Algerian revolution which included nationalization of capitalist property and creation of workers' and peasants' and soldiers' councils ("Where is Healy taking the Socialist Labor League?" SWP International Information Bulletin, May 1963), no one paid any attention to this proposal. The leadership of the FI proposed land reform, but not the nationalization of capitalist property or the creation of soviets. Why? The Trotskyist movement did not adhere to the transitional program in Algeria.

Why did it prove so easy for Boumedienne to overthrow Ben Bella and stabilize a capitalist regime in Algeria? He controlled the soldiers. There were no soldiers' soviets, linked to workers' and peasants' soviets, that could have wrested control of the army away from Boumedienne. As a result the revolution stopped with the Boumedienne coup.

What lessons should the Fourth International draw from this experience? The Fourth International did not propose a revolutionary program to the Algerian masses. It should have proposed not only land reform but the nationalization of capitalist property and the formation of soviets.

The turning point that made the October Revolution possible was Lenin's April theses. Weren't these directed precisely against those half-revolutionary Bolsheviks who proposed only mass mobilizations in defense of democratic rights and offered more or less revolutionary advice to the Provisional Government, but left out the lynch-pin that could give meaning to these otherwise correct demands: the need to form a government based on the soviets?

The Second Chinese Revolution provided a negative example of the failure to build soviets, a course that Trotsky had strenuously but unsuccessfully urged on the Chinese Communist Party, though we did not know it at the time.

In Algeria the Trotskyists did not even call for soviets.

Chile proved to be another important failure for the Fourth International. At least I have never seen an official document of the Fourth International calling for soviets and for agrarian revolution.

In November 1971, I proposed formally in a letter to the International Executive Committee that we must draw the lessons in Chile and call openly for the creation of workers', peasants', and soldiers' soviets or there would be a defeat like the one in Bolivia in August of that year. In December 1971, one year and ten months before the overthrow of Allende, the IEC met but never even discussed my proposal. If in Chile the soldiers had been organized into soviets with workers the situation would have been different. The officers who supported Pinochet would have lost their base.

Now we have Portugal. The position of the LTF is like that of the FI in Algeria and Chile. The policy seems to be to wait and see what will happen, to tail-end the events. It has no program beyond secondary and conjunctural events. It raises no slogan for the creation of workers', peasants', and soldiers' soviets. It places its hopes on the Constituent Assembly and leaves it to this body to establish a workers' and farmers' government. This is a serious mistake.

If we take an incorrect position on Portugal we will lose everything. It is of course good to have a correct position in peaceful times. It is a hundred times more important to have a correct position in the midst of a revolution. A real revolution is the most important test of any revolutionary party.

I consider the adoption of a correct position on Portugal to be a profoundly serious matter for the FI and the LTF. I am afraid of where we are going if we try to evade the central strategic question for the Portuguese revolution as we have done so far.

The leadership of the LTF should reconsider the situation in Portugal. In doing so the following considerations must be kept in mind:

To criticize the Stalinists we must have a full program of our own on Portugal, clearly stated, or our criticism will not be taken seriously by anyone.

To criticize the Socialist Party's call for "socialism with freedom" we must state our own position on the content of socialism and the instrument for its achievement, soviets. Otherwise our criticism becomes abstract and meaningless.

To criticize the MFA we must be able to reply to its demagogic call for a socialist road and for "soviets." This means of course demanding the nationalization of capitalist property, which both Moscow and the MFA at this time oppose. But even that demand is not sufficient. It is not excluded that under the pressure of the economic strangulation being applied to Portugal by Western Europe and the United States the MFA will do as it says and adopt an East Europe solution, that it will

nationalize capitalist property. We must continue to defend the independent mobilization of the workers through their own organizations. We would then denounce this government as a handful of bureaucrats without control by the workers. (We would defend the nationalizations against attempts at restoration as well.)

Without a full program of our own we must inevitably appear only as supporters of the SP against the CP. That will be the result of a policy limited to conjunctural maneuver and based only on democratic demands and mass mobilization in the abstract. The SP uses the question of democracy for its own ends. To distinguish ourselves from its procapitalist reformism, our defense of its democratic rights against the MFA as in the Republica case should be combined with a basic perspective for the Portuguese revolution. The democratic questions alone can lead to much confusion in a revolutionary situation. Today we defend the SP press against the CP, but should we not also defend the CP against the attacks on its headquarters by the SP? Something more basic is required.

The slogan of soviets in Portugal is absent from the LTF draft resolution, but this is in part not merely an omission but a step backwards from positions taken earlier by supporters of the LTF. The slogan was raised, for example, though not as centrally as it should have been, in an editorial in the June 14, 1974, Militant. I have the impression from the draft resolution itself that one consideration that has provoked this attitude is a fear that our call for soviets would be identified with the wholly artificial "soviets" set up by some Maoist groups in Portugal and that to raise the slogan would deter Portuguese revolutionists from finding ways to influence the ranks of the CP, SP, and the members of Intersindical, the trade union federation. These fears are groundless. In explaining in a propagandistic way the function of real soviets we will undercut and expose all fraudulent substitutes that masquerade as soviets, including the organizations being set up by the MFA. In no other way can we reach the workers influenced by the reformist and Stalinist parties than through providing a program for the victory of the workers' revolution in Portugal.

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