

November 28, 1975

To the Steering Committee of the Leninist Trotskyist Faction

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed is a letter to the faction from the Political Bureau of the PST of Argentina, dated November 5, 1975. Some of you have already received a copy of this letter and its attachments.

Also enclosed is a reply to the PST Political Bureau from Joe Hansen.

As you can see, the accusation raised by the Argentine leadership is extremely grave. It calls into question whether the document published both internally and publicly accurately reflected the report, discussion, and unanimous vote for the general line of the draft document presented at the last faction steering committee meeting in August, 1975.

The coordinating committee of the LTF discussed the letter from the PST leadership at a meeting held November 22, and three motions were adopted.

1. The coordinating committee felt it had an immediate responsibility to express its opinion on this question. Had the majority of the coordinating committee agreed that the document published in the name of the LTF did not express the general line voted for by the steering committee, then members of the LTF on the United Secretariat would have been obligated to inform the United Secretariat immediately.

The coordinating committee adopted the following motion: The coordinating committee affirms that the general line of the document Key Issues in the Portuguese Revolution accurately expresses the general line approved by vote of the last steering committee meeting. The vote was 8 for (Alan, Ed, Gus, Jack, Joe, Benson, Mary-Alice, Melan); 1 against (Mario); 1 not voting (Eddy).

Comrade Eddy explained that since he was not present at the steering committee he was not in a position to judge whether it accurately reflected the general line adopted.

2. Comrades felt it was of extreme importance to rapidly resolve any ambiguity concerning the status of the resolution by polling the members of the steering committee who were present at the last meeting. (This would include comrades who were seated with voice and vote to replace members of the steering committee unable to attend.)

The motion adopted unanimously was the following: that we immediately poll the members of the steering committee present at the last faction meeting and ask them if they concur that the general line of the document Key Issues in the Portuguese Revolution is the general line approved at that meeting.

3. The coordinating committee also unanimously adopted a motion stating: Since the letter from the Political Bureau of the PST has already been sent by the PST to some members of the steering committee of the LTF, Joe Hansen's reply should be circulated to the same comrades who received the original.

For your convenience we have enclosed a copy of the motion on a separate sheet so that comrades can indicate their opinion and return the poll immediately.

As soon as the results are in we will inform the faction steering committee.

Meanwhile, the vote of the coordinating committee affirming that the resolution Key Issues in the Portuguese Revolution is that adopted by the last steering committee stands.

Comradely,

Mary-Alice Waters
for the coordinating committee

TRANSLATION

Buenos Aires
November 5, 1975

TO THE COMRADES OF THE LENINIST-TROTSKYIST
FACTION

Only last week we received a copy (sent from Mexico, because the copy that the Socialist Workers Party sent us did not arrive) of the document, The Key Issues in the Portuguese Revolution, with the final editing given to it by the comrades of the SWP leadership after the discussion and agreements reached last August.

What was voted on unanimously was the initial draft presented by the SWP (which we published in our Boletín de Discusión Interno no. 2 with the addition of the criticisms of that document, which should have been turned into the final document, to have been drafted by comrades Hansen, Moreno, and Roberto. Because comrade Hansen was ill, that drafting commission could not meet. For that reason, we submitted our additions in writing, fundamentally the introduction, which summarized the essence of our position. (We published the Introduction and the additions in the BDI no. 3, pp. 14-17.) According to comrade Mario, this Introduction was approved by comrade Gerry Foley speaking for comrade Hansen, as he indicated in his letter of September 4, 1975. Prior to that, during the August gathering, comrade Moreno had read a letter from him dated August 21, 1975, to comrades Joe Hansen, Barry Sheppard, and Jack Barnes. That letter was to have been read and published at the meeting we mentioned.

The comrades of the SWP leadership told comrade Moreno that it was technically impossible to have the letter published, because there was only one day to do so and the necessary apparatus was not available. Moreover, the comrades said that it wasn't necessary to publish the letter since there was complete agreement on it. It was agreed therefore that comrade Moreno would explain the position orally during the faction meeting. The SWP would propose to the faction meeting the drafting of a final document, on the basis of the letter and the oral presentation by Moreno, with a drafting commission composed of comrades Hansen and Moreno. Afterwards, comrade Hansen suggested, and comrade Moreno agreed, that it be proposed to the faction meeting that the drafting commission be broadened to incorporate comrade Roberto onto it.

We are studying this document carefully, because after a first reading it appears to us that it does not reflect the agreements we believed had been reached--synthesized in the letter by comrade Moreno we referred to, and especially in the introduction, in the modifications of the text that were accepted, and in the oral explanations of comrade Moreno. We continue to be firmly convinced of the correctness of our positions, expressed in those documents. Inde-

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pendent of formal questions of editing or terminology, we have the impression that in the final document, drafted by the comrades of the SWP leadership, the essence of our position--with which the comrades seemed to be in agreement--is not put forward: The central strategy in Portugal today is to see how we are going to push forward the development and centralization of the embryos of dual power that have arisen, and how we are going to help in the creation of such embryos of organs of dual power among sectors that do not yet have them.

You have the pertinent documentation to be able to study the document, since we sent you all the materials from the faction meeting, which we published in our BDI nos. 2 and 3. This week we will also send you BDI no. 4 with the Spanish translation of the SWP document, the statement approved by the faction on the general situation of the Fourth International, a statement of the International Majority Tendency on the same things, and the summary of the oral presentations at and before the August meeting.

To facilitate a quick study of the resolution and its supposedly unanimous character we attach three essential additions or observations, which were apparently accepted by the comrades of the SWP leadership or by comrade Hansen, but which--in our opinion--have not been incorporated in the final document.

We consider it of fundamental importance that you re-read the documents of the SWP comrades, the comments about them from other comrades, and all our amendments and additions, so that we can adopt a position that is reliably documented.

For our part, we have voted not to approve or reject the document The Key Issues, . . . until we carry out such a study and our National Committee decides, because if what we fear is the case--that the agreements were not respected--we would find ourselves facing a new situation.

Given the gravity of the situation, we ask that you approach a study of all of the existing documentation as we are doing.

With fraternal greetings,
THE POLITICAL BUREAU OF
THE PARTIDO SOCIALISTA DE
LOS TRABAJADORES

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1) Excerpt from Moreno's August 21, 1975, letter to Joe Hansen, accepted by comrades Hansen, Sheppard, and Barnes, which, as we have already made clear, was not published at the August meeting for technical reasons. (see full text in BDI no. 3, pp. 9-12.)

"We believe we are in agreement--although the draft

does not say it explicitly--that since the putsch of April 25 of last year what we are seeing in Portugal is a workers' revolution in progress. That is to say, the stage that began mainly since the last coup in March is nothing more and nothing but the socialist revolution. Portugal has entered a stage of a few months or years that has occurred only as an exception in some imperialist countries every twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years. It is an exceptional situation. It is of no interest whether we define it as revolutionary or prerevolutionary. The important thing to confirm is that the workers movement with its mobilizations, accompanied by the mass movement as a whole, has achieved a power of mobilization that has the bourgeoisie and its representative, the government of the MFA, in check. Concretely, it is an acute prerevolutionary or a directly revolutionary situation because the working class together with the broad masses have begun a process of general mobilization for different objectives and necessities. Therefore, what is involved is to do the same thing that you did in your national document, that is, to point out the broad strategic lines for the stage that has begun--the stage of the generalized mobilization of the Portuguese masses.

"From a reading of the draft one could get the false impression that the big strategic objective of the stage that has begun in Portugal is the defense of the present Constituent Assembly, that is, defense of the highest bourgeois-democratic institution. We don't have to discuss whether we should defend it or not, because we are in agreement that it is a principled question to defend it, to promote it against the attempts of the MFA to liquidate or limit it.

"We don't think that is what you believe, but if you do, it must be stated with absolute clarity--the essential goal that we propose to the masses for the present historic stage is the establishment of a free, sovereign Constituent Assembly. If this were to be the position, we would have a difference.

"We believe that the Constituent Assembly, like democratic rights, is one of the primary or principled political goals--the only one or almost the only one--that can mobilize the masses at the present moment. But strategically, for the whole stage that has begun, our main objective is to push the masses toward forming their organs of power against the MFA and the bourgeoisie. This means to propagandize under all circumstances the possible organs of workers' power. Said in another way, for us it is a Trotskyist principle that, when you have a situation of generalized mobilization of the masses of a country, that is, when you have a revolutionary or prerevolutionary situation, the essential axis of our strategy is to push the masses to develop their organs of workers power, so that they can take power and make the socialist revolution,

"We believe it appropriate to point out in one way or another the following points:

"1. That this long-term principled Trotskyist strategy is the one that is applicable today in Portugal which is passing through a prerevolutionary or revolutionary stage.

"2. That there is no possibility to develop this strategy without a tactic designed to mobilize the masses around all of their present needs and aspirations.

"3. That the correct tactic at the present moment fundamentally is to defend democratic rights, to defend the rights of the SP, to struggle to establish a sovereign and free Constituent Assembly, and to break the pact. Without these political struggles there is no possibility of carrying out the strategy.

"4. That these tactical necessities should not and cannot make us forget the strategic necessity of developing the organs of workers power.

"5. Such a strategy for this stage is always combined with our fundamental historical strategy of constructing mass Trotskyist parties. We did not put this in the first point as our main strategy precisely because it is not the specific strategy for this stage--the strategy of developing workers power. Rather it is the strategy permanently existing above the different stages. In this sense we can say that in relation to the historic task of building the party, the strategy for the stage of developing the organs of workers power is a historic tactic and as such is subordinate.

"These points are of fundamental importance although they may seem very general and although the disastrous policy of the majority is apparently hidden behind such strategic affirmations. We should make our agreement about these points explicit. If there are no differences on them, it is not redundant to single them out.

* * *

2) Draft Introduction officially accepted in the draft commission by comrade Gerry Foley speaking for comrade Joe Hansen (reproduced in BDI no. 3, pp. 14-15)

"What we are seeing in Portugal since April 25, 1974, judged by its dynamics and its perspectives, is nothing other than the first socialist revolution that has occurred in an imperialist country in the last 30 years.

"Like all revolutions of the workers, accompanied by the mass movement, it poses the urgent need for the masses to achieve forms of organization that express the revolutionary, massive character of its mobilizations and power. For the working class to be able to carry out the socialist revolution they must develop organs of power--be these soviets, factory or soldiers committees, revolutionary trade unions, workers militias, or whatever other form of revolutionary organization of the masses.

"The Portuguese revolution is no exception. Each stage in the mobilizations and victories of the workers and mass movement--first, against the fascist apparatus, later against Spínola's two coups--has advanced forms of workers and people's power, from the factory and vigilance committees to the assemblies and committees of soldiers and sailors. To encourage these or other forms that are expressions of the mass movement in struggle against the bourgeoisie and its government of the moment, as well as to centralize them so that when the moment arrives they can topple the MFA government and install their own power, is our main objective in the Portuguese revolution--an objective that we should have before us at every moment of our activity.

"Having said this, we should bring the application of this principled policy down to earth. It is not a question of debating our main objective of reaching out to build true soviets in Portugal. It is a question of knowing how, and with what policy we will attain the formation, development, and defense--if embryos already exist--of those forms of workers and people's power.

"And this need for a correct policy that would permit us to unify and drive the Portuguese masses forward--the only way to manage to express in organizational form the unity of the masses in struggle--takes on even more importance than ever. The Portuguese experience seems to confirm that of the Spanish revolution in the period before the war and the experiences that have occurred in the postwar period in the backward countries. The reformist parties, particularly the Stalinists, have learned from the Russian revolution, and they resist the creation of true soviet organizations, categorically opposing the development of the slightest attempt at autonomous workers' and people's power and organization.

"As a result of this, the Portuguese Trotskyists will not have the enormous historical advantage that the Russian Bolsheviks had, of finding, from the beginning of the February revolution, a powerful soviet organization institutionalized and generalized throughout the whole of Russia, one that was recognized by the reformist parties as the organization of the masses as a whole. Everything seems to indicate that it will fall upon the shoulders of the Trotskyist movement and its program to develop and establish true soviets. There does not seem to be any possibility that we will be accompanied in this task, even for a short while, by the reformist parties of the Portuguese revolution. This obliges us to pose more than ever this task as the most important and fundamental one of this stage. At the same time we should not search for shortcuts or fool ourselves thinking that other parties--much less the MFA, agent of all wings of the imperialist bourgeoisie--are capable of carrying out this colossal historic task. It is more and more apparent that the soviets will be the mass organization of Trotskyism for the seizure of power. To this colossal disadvantage we must add another just as great or even greater:

The Portuguese Trotskyists like all other Trotskyist organizations in the world, are not as closely linked to nor do they have the prestige in the workers movement that the Bolshevik party had. While this was a party with tradition, truly rooted in the mass movement, our parties are--with a few exceptions--propaganda parties, recently organized and with no roots in the workers movement.

"These two disadvantages of the Portuguese revolution when compared to the Russian revolution basically come down to one: the lack of a strong mass Trotskyist party. When we say this we take into account the relationship that ought to exist between the organs of workers power and the revolutionary party. Without organs of workers power the revolutionary party cannot seize power. Without the Trotskyist party to give them a revolutionary orientation, the soviets, or any other similar formation, cease being the organized expression of the masses in struggle, and instead are transformed into a tool of the reformist parties or of the bourgeois state, that is, precisely the opposite of what they should be.

"This is what is happening in Portugal today. The MFA or one of its wings, the reformist parties, and the ultralefts are playing around with the beginnings of workers power that exist, and not satisfied just doing this, are using soviet slogans or slogans of workers and people's power to cover up attempts to impose a bonapartist government and to crush all the democratic and working-class gains that have been achieved.

"The attempt to make the whole of Portuguese political life revolve around the false alternative 'for or against workers and people's power' has two clearly counterrevolutionary objectives, despite the good intentions of the useful idiots of the ultraleft. The first objective is to divide and deflect the mass movement from struggle around its present needs and tasks--confronting the MFA government as its main enemy, defending the democratic rights and working-class victories already gained, preventing the workers from working more than ever in the imperialist 'battle for production.' The second is to conceal the most pressing need of the vanguard and the Portuguese masses--the construction of a mass Trotskyist party. This attempt is counterposed to the objective needs of the masses and their greatest subjective lack, the building of the party.

"Without mobilizing the masses around a clear program that responds to their most urgent needs at the present moment, and without building a mass Trotskyist party, there is no possibility that the embryos of dual power, which have arisen and which will continue to arise with the progress of the struggles of the Portuguese masses, can be developed, centralized, and take power. For that reason, any attempt to conceal or minimize the importance of democratic tasks, or the importance of confronting the counterrevolutionary plans of the government--including its left wing--is to go

against the possible development of the organs of workers' power, which will only develop through the struggles of the Portuguese masses to defend and extend their gains, particularly their democratic gains."

* * *

3) A fundamental modification of the original draft officially accepted in the drafting commission by comrade Gerry Foley speaking for comrade Joe Hansen, which was not respected in the final draft of the document.

a) The original draft, at the end of the next to the last paragraph, third chapter, said:

"The future of the mass movement depends on the way the present democratic gains are defended by the mass organizations of the working class and peasantry, utilized in struggles to better their conditions of life, and emphasized in educating the masses and promoting their self-confidence, and in developing revolutionary cadres."

b) The amendment accepted by the drafting commission said:

"The future of the mass movement depends on the way the present democratic gains are defended by the mass organizations of the working class and peasantry, utilized in struggles to better their conditions of life, and emphasized in educating the masses and promoting their self-confidence [so that they can defend, centralize, and push forward the embryos of power that exist (committees that exist, the SWP suggested) and develop revolutionary cadres that will make possible the seizure of power by the above named organs], and in developing revolutionary cadres."

c) The final draft of the paragraph is as follows:

"The political process in Portugal has centered on issues that became explosive because of the concern of the masses over their democratic right to freely consider all alternative points of view and to assert their will as the majority of the populace.

"The fight to defend and extend democratic rights in the factory, in the barracks, in society as a whole, is indispensable in advancing toward the establishment of a workers and peasants government. This fight for a workers and peasants government constitutes the decisive axis of struggle in Portugal today."

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New York
November 25, 1975

Political Bureau
Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores

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Dear Comrades,

I did not receive a copy of your mimeographed circular letter "To the Members of the Leninist Trotskyist Faction" until a few days ago, although it was dated November 5, 1975. Also I wanted to consult with the Coordinating Committee of the LTF. Hence the delay in replying.

Inasmuch as you were not present at the meeting of the Steering Committee of the LTF that discussed the draft of "The Key Issues in the Portuguese Revolution," it is obvious that your judgment of that meeting is not based on your own personal experience but on the reports of the three members of the PST leadership who were able to attend. Even if their reports were unanimous in all details, it appears to me that before circulating your letter it would have been advisable to check with the other participants on what happened at that meeting.

If a misunderstanding was involved, it would have been much easier to rectify it if that procedure had been followed.

The main assertion of your letter is that an "agreement" was reached between Comrade Moreno and me on the general line of the resolution, and that after Comrade Moreno left I (or the "leadership of the SWP") broke this agreement.

However, you may not have given due weight to the following points:

1. For Comrade Moreno and me to make a secret agreement to vote for one line in a meeting and then replace it with a different line in an editing committee would be self-defeating. Leaving aside the violation this would represent of the most elementary principles of revolutionary Marxism, it is obvious that a general line can be put into practice only if it is thoroughly understood and agreed upon by all those for whom it constitutes a guide.

2. The same consideration would hold if the body as a whole had reached agreement on a general line and I individually had then sabotaged the decision, slipping a different general line into the edited resolution. All

the participants would have already begun to apply the line they agreed on; and they could not be switched by the publication of a fraudulent document.

3. It would have been the height of stupidity to think that upon publication of a false resolution such a swindle would not be seen immediately by those who were in attendance--about ninety comrades, if I remember correctly. The net result would have been to shatter the LTF instead of strengthening it, as was our purpose.

4. Aside from these three considerations, the trickery could be exposed by a very simple procedure: taking a poll of the participants at the meeting.

* * *

In support of your charge, you have circulated the original draft resolution, amendments proposed by Comrade Moreno, an introduction submitted by Comrade Moreno, and other materials, including a contribution by Comrade Peng Shu-tse and one by Comrade Chen Pi-lan.

But this material does not prove the existence of two opposing lines or an agreement between Comrade Moreno and me to get together in the editing committee and adopt a line contrary to the one voted for by the participants. The documents published by you prove only that in the preliminary process leading up to the meeting some tentative positions were voiced on points of varying importance. This was completely normal, particularly on the assumption that the differences were not at all of a basic character and were subject to modification in the light of the discussion at the meeting.

Most important of all, the entire oral debate at the meeting itself must be considered. What was said there was decisive. It was this discussion and the vote in the light of that discussion that determined the general line.

Finally, by challenging the import of the discussion and the meaning of the vote you place yourselves under obligation to prove that your differences are in reality so deep as to constitute an opposing general line. This can be done only by analyzing the political differences and showing their depth.

* * *

The procedure followed at the August meeting of the Steering Committee was the same as that followed at all normal conferences of the Trotskyist movement:

1. We sought the maximum preliminary consultation with all the participants. As always the objective was to reduce--or to clarify--differences in advance of the meeting so as to help avoid surprises and to permit everyone to think over any points in dispute and either begin changing or begin marshaling the best arguments for whatever position one held. In this preparatory process, the representatives of the PST, of course, played an important role.

2. In the meeting itself, it was expected that the participants--in accordance with the norms of Trotskyism--would present whatever special points of view they had, especially those indicated in preliminary discussions, and defend them to the best of their ability. Comrade Moreno played an active part in this, convincing the body of some of his points and apparently conceding on others. That the discussion was fruitful was shown by the vote, which was unanimous on the general line.

3. In the course of the discussion, the reporters indicated what points they found acceptable and what points they found unacceptable for inclusion in the resolution. Their views were, of course, subject to challenge and to a vote.

Some items, it was agreed by the participants, could best be developed in articles rather than in the resolution. On some debatable items, it was felt that the comrades were free, if they wished, to express their views in signed articles. (An example was the position of some comrades on the class nature of the MFA, which they held to be a petty-bourgeois institution. This did not involve the general line, since they agreed that the MFA government was bourgeois in character.) This procedure was completely in the tradition of the Trotskyist movement.

4. Three participants were nominated to the editing committee, Comrade Moreno, Comrade Roberto, and me. Comrade Roberto had to leave immediately because of unexpected developments in his country; Comrade Moreno left for similar reasons within a couple of days; and I had a bout with a virus infection. As a result the bulk of the editing work fell to other participants, although I was able to go over the final draft.

The editing committee did what most editing committees do. Suggestions that were repetitious were either not added or were amalgamated. Points that had not been adopted by the body as a whole were rejected. New points that had been agreed upon were inserted where they logically belonged.

This is what happened with the introduction proposed by Comrade Moreno. If I recall correctly, I proposed that

such points in his proposed introduction as were not already in the resolution should be placed where they belonged in the logical structure of the resolution. Those points in his proposed introduction that were already included in the resolution should either be dropped or amalgamated. Although Comrade Moreno argued for including the introduction as such, I was under the impression that he left the decision up to the editing committee. If this was a misunderstanding on my part, I certainly did not have any idea that the introduction represented a general line different from the one in the draft resolution.

In light of the above considerations, I would like to suggest that the Political Bureau of the PST reexamine this matter. A clarifying statement could be issued to dissipate the atmosphere of scandal. And if you are of the opinion that conflicting general lines are really involved, then your views on this ought to be stated clearly and frankly so as to make possible a discussion and differentiation on the political level.

With comradely greetings,
/s/
Joseph Hansen

POLL OF STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS
PRESENT AT THE LAST LTF MEETING

[] I concur that the general line of the document Key Issues in the Portuguese Revolution (published in Inter-continental Press, October 20, 1975) is the general line approved at the August meeting of the Leninist Trotskyist Faction steering committee.

[] I believe that the general line of the document Key Issues in the Portuguese Revolution is not the general line approved at the August meeting of the Leninist Trotskyist Faction steering committee.

Other comments:

PLEASE RETURN IMMEDIATELY

Name _____