

Socialist Worker

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Dear Bruno,

We both know that the Portuguese revolution will have a decisive influence internationally, for better or worse. But the more I follow PRP policies the more worried I become. Again and again I get the feeling that they are simply muddling through. In a revolutionary situation the worst thing that can happen to a revolutionary party is lack of clarity. This muddling through is not accidental. It is the result of a basic conception of the relation between insurrection and revolution; between the party and the class. Again and again when meeting Portuguese revolutionaries one finds that they speak about insurrection as possible independently from the mass action of the class. The result is the worst kind of substitutionism. Five or six weeks ago I met a Portuguese revolutionary who talked about the possibility of COPCON taking power. He thought that this would be the realisation of the proletarian revolution. It wasn't clear to him that COPCON is neither homogenous, which a revolutionary party must be, or broad, as a Soviet must be. A fortnight ago some Portuguese revolutionaries saw SUV taking COPCON's place in realising the proletarian revolution and the insurrection.

In fact, armed force substituting for the class could not even repeat, what Blanqui did in 1839. Then a small minority of a few thousand could take power in Paris because the rest of the population was unorganised. It is true that Blanqui held power for a short time only, but at least he achieved temporary power. This cannot be repeated in Portugal. The Communist Party is far too well implanted in the class to allow such a thing.

Then again, in Bavaria in 1919 it was the social democrats who declared soviet power. After a few days they dropped it and the weak CP had no alternative but to take the reins of power. There is no way for a revolutionary party to march forward without coming into headlong collision with the CP from the beginning.

It is not even on now to repeat the post-September 1974 spontaneous economic mass strikes to which the CP acted as strike breakers and thereby lost

some of its influence. The situation in Portugal is far too serious, the revolutionary crisis is far too deep for workers on the whole to launch many industrial strikes.

It is not possible to repeat the post 11 March expansion of the factory occupations without replacing state power. The workers again feel that the issues are far too great to act in a fragmented way.

The main danger is that workers will be passive not because they are apathetic but because the issues are too great to be solved without a mass revolutionary party in the lead.

For the soldiers the question of unevenness in consciousness in the individual units is much less serious than it is for the workers. Any revolutionary soldier knows that his head is on the chopping block if the soldiers don't win. Workers haven't exposed their hand as much as that. Not every worker is listed, so as to speak. The unevenness between the soldiers and the workers cannot go on for ever. And if the advanced workers cannot mobilise masses of workers we will find that even the advanced workers will fall into passivity. Repeating demonstrations is not an answer, on the contrary it is a recipe for decline.

The PRP must confront the CP directly. What is necessary now is not just to compete with the CP in terms of militancy, but to pose a series of demands that fit the situation but go beyond capitalism. For example, hundreds of thousands of workers live in terrible conditions so organise the occupation of the houses of the rich and let the families from the shanty towns settle in the empty flats.

Daily the party must raise slogans for action which will confront and counterpose the CP's hold in the factories. This is why a daily paper is not a luxury. In such a situation a revolutionary party cannot exist without a daily paper. It is not a question of lack of financial or technical resources. If the paper is radically different from any other paper it will sell.

The idea of turning the FUR into a membership organisation is yet another form of substitutionism. It is a substitute for a party on the one hand and a soviet on the other. It will be neither a small sharp axe, nor a big, heavy, if blunt axe. You can cut a tree with both of these, but to cut a tree with a small blunt axe is not on. Such an organisation would inevitably decline in size, and would decline very quickly.

One final point. Insurrection is an art. But an art must be subordinated to the political situation. A successful proletarian insurrection can take place only

when the working class is united and at a high level of militancy, and while the capitalist class is vacillating and breaking up. These were the conditions of October 1917. Without mass preparation and the right conditions the insurrection merely becomes a conspiracy.

One of the sad things about the situation in Portugal is that questions of strategy and tactics are never discussed openly in the press. This is exactly the opposite of what happened in the Bolshevik party in 1917. The Bolshevik Party changed tactics again and again but every time it was explained to the workers why the changes took place. There is nothing more dangerous in a revolutionary situation than relying on tricks. It does not deceive the enemy and it confuses the workers. Of course there are technical matters that are never discussed openly and the workers understand this, but the broad political issues must be clarified to the masses. Otherwise Marx's saying that the emancipation of the working class is the action of the working class is not true.

I am extremely worried about the situation because I believe that over the coming few months the capitalist class will find it impossible to impose its discipline because of its lack of reliable and active support in big sections of the army and proletariat. The revolutionary left will find it impossible to solve the crisis because however much the CP has lost its ability to mobilise it is still strong enough to prevent workers from moving. History cannot be made behind the CP's back. The CP's influence must be broken. Otherwise, even the most advanced sections of the class may in time fall into apathy and despair through lack of activity. Under such conditions it is extremely dangerous for a revolutionary party to speak only to the vanguard. It must speak through the vanguard to the class as a whole. In a revolutionary situation workers will not tolerate a difference between words and deeds for any length of time. Any revolutionary knows that to translate words into deeds he must be able to mobilise the majority of his mates in the factory.

I am sure you are very busy, Bruno, and you may find my outpourings off tangent, but I would be fantastically grateful if you could drop me a line. To say that Portugal should not be another Chile, is not the same as to make sure that Portugal is not another Chile and I don't think that you, the Portuguese workers, have more than a few months to make the decision.

Yours fraternally,

Tony Cliff