

Revolution & Counter-Revolution in Portugal

Workers Councils or the Reorganization of Capital?

anon.

1975

Trying to make sense of the situation in Portugal with facts gleaned from reading the daily newspapers and watching the nightly news has become an increasingly impossible task.

Both sources of bourgeois mystification report diligently on which general enjoys the support of what faction of the Armed Forces Movement (MFA) today and which political party has trumpeted what particular demand.

What seems to be glaringly absent, however, is any news as to whether there is actually a revolution afoot which alters the day-to-day existence of the working class and the rest of the population as subjects of Capital.

The major activity which has dominated political events in Portugal since the April 25, 1974 military coup against a half-century of fascism, has been a struggle to determine which form the rule of Capital shall take in reorganizing itself.

This ever-sharpening conflict has taken on the dramatic proportions of mass demonstrations, street fighting and intense political maneuvering, but the questions posed still have nothing to do with communist revolution or the abolition of capitalism.

Instead, the options thus far proposed for the Portuguese working class include: the continuation of the rule of private ownership of the means of production with government nationalization of the least profitable industries under the stewardship of the Socialist Party (using the model of England or Israel); a consolidation of private and nationalized industry under the firm hand of an MFA "left-wing" military dictatorship similar to that which the workers of Peru and Libya suffer under; or an Eastern European-type police state that administers state capitalism under the dictatorship of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP).

Also, as vague contenders for political power and the right to maintain capitalist relations in Portugal are several small Maoist and Trotskyist groups which are agitating for the self-contradictory absurdity of a "government based on workers' councils."

Media Watches Frantic Activity

While all of this frantic activity must look terribly exciting to reporters from NBC and *Time* magazine, one element which is steadfastly ignored in all accounts of the "revolution" is to what extent workers are attempting to end the domination of Capital in their lives. That is what communist revolution is about; not which faction of capital masquerading as the "representative" of the working class will seize the power of the state for its own benefit.

Most of us have read reports that workers in many sections of the economy have established workers councils, those autonomous organs of the working class which have sprung up during every revolutionary upsurge in the 20th century. These reports have been at best sketchy and it is evident that factions of the military and many of the marxist politicians see their formation as yet another way to elevate their political sect to power.

Authentic workers councils are antithetical to government and state power in all of its forms. Councils and factory committees, along with community and rural assemblies have formed the backbone of communist democracy which obliterates the need for the state, the police and army, political parties, bosses or external authority

of any variety. Decentralized and autonomous, councils historically have functioned as both the fighting arm of revolutionary workers and as the 'decision-making body through which daily life is coordinated.

Their spontaneous appearance in Russia in 1917–1921 Spain in 1936–1939 and Hungary in 1956 was perhaps the most dramatic example of the self-activity of the working class and in each case the councils were ruthlessly suppressed by Communist parties who correctly saw them as a threat to their tyrannical administration of state capitalism.

The opportunistic call of the Portuguese Maoist and Trotskyist sects for a "government based on workers councils" is easily exposed for the sham it is—when one gives even a quick examination to the history of their political mentor, V.I. Lenin, at the time of the Russian revolution.

While Lenin, as the head politician of the minuscule Bolshevik Party, cynically raised the workers' cry of "All Power to the Soviets (councils)," it was only a matter of time before he and his party had seized complete control of the state machinery, eradicated the councils, factory committees, and peasant communes and, under an ever growing police apparatus, began the operation of state capitalism with a vengeance.

In Portugal, for workers to group around one faction of Capital in opposition to another is suicidal. The historical project of communism has been to end the rule of Capital and to eliminate the working class as a class within Capital. The left-wing politicians of Portugal have no plans other than to continue the development of Capital at the expense of the working class.

This is probably best seen in the political machinations of the PCP which survived decades of underground life under fascism and surfaced with a full-blown drive for state power. Financed directly from Moscow (just like in the movies), the PCP was the only West European Communist party to support the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, and makes no secret of its admiration for the totalitarianism of Russia and the Eastern bloc countries. It seems unimaginable that a worker in Portugal wouldn't realize full well the consequences of a PCP assumption of power.

The reactionary mobs of Northern Portugal comprised of fanatical Catholics and financially-ruined peasants, who have sacked over 50 headquarters of the PCP and allied groups have produced cries of horror from the official leftist political sects. However, the destruction of the property of political parties should be of no concern to the workers' movement either in Portugal or anywhere else. Political parties are part of the overall institution of domination of the working class by Capital, and any harm that befalls them concerns only those whose goal is political power.

In fact, in this case, the action of the reactionaries may have been decisive in halting the drive of the stalinists for power.

It is a toss-up as to whether more workers have perished under stalinism or fascism and 'posing the phony choice to the working class of fascism or the state capitalism of the PCP is like asking a prisoner if he prefers execution by hanging or shooting. The PCP's rousing call for an anti-fascist movement is a cynical maneuver to mobilize workers around their grab for political power.

To the argument that the fascists begin with the CP and then attack the "unorganized" sections of the working class, the only answer can be that the authentic workers' movement must devise its own independent arms of defense as it has always been defeated when it has had to rely on political parties for its protection.

As of this writing the Portuguese generals and politicians are still jockeying for power with the threat of civil war and/or a U.S./NATO intervention hovering in the wings. At the same time the position of the Portuguese proletariat is a precarious one with all illuminated roads leading to its continued enslavement in a reorganized Portuguese capitalism.

The revolutionary direction is one that implies a whole new dimension of human relationships which would end the eons-old system of the domination of one group by another, and the establishment of a human community based on humanistic communism.

Our knowledge of the self-activities of our brothers and sisters in Portugal is hidden by media reporting which views politics as important and the social revolution as only secondary. The need for information is critical.

Additional reading

The Anarchist Collectives: Workers' Self-Management in the Spanish Revolution, edited by Sam Dolgoff, Free Life Editions

The Unknown Revolution by Voline, Black & Red

Strike! by Jeremy Brecher, Straight Arrow;

The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control by Maurice Brinton, Black & Red;

Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement by Jean Barrot & Francois Martin, Black & Red.

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