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Intercontinental Press

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United Secretariat

Dear Comrades,

A protest was lodged at the February 15 meeting of the United Secretariat over the publication in Intercontinental Press of Comrade Tony Thomas's report to the National Committee of the Socialist Workers party on the situation in Angola. It was argued that the editor of Intercontinental Press had made a "grave error" in doing this since it initiated a public discussion on the interpretation of events in Angola without previous agreement.

It appears to me, after checking the facts, that the charge lacks substance. Without going back further, the question of policy in relation to Angola was referred to in the article "For a Correct Political Course in Portugal" (IP, No. 36, October 13, 1975, p. 1383), which Gerry Foley, George Novack, and I submitted in reply to the article "In Defense of the Portuguese Revolution" (IP, No. 31, September 8, 1975, p. 1167) written by Comrades Pierre Frank, Livio Maitan, and Ernest Mandel. The reference, of course, was made in conjunction with our position on the key issues of the Portuguese revolution and did not deal with the Angolan question per se. We merely pointed to the failure of the majority of the United Secretariat to initiate a campaign on the issue of immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Portuguese imperialist troops from Angola, analyzing this failure in conjunction with the policies they sponsored in Portugal.

Following this, the editor of Intercontinental Press received a communication from Comrade C. Gabriel, sent via the Bureau of the United Secretariat, asking that we publish an article he had written polemicizing with our reference to the failure of the majority to launch a campaign on withdrawal of Portuguese imperialist troops from Angola. Comrade Gabriel's article, which injected a number of issues involving the Angolan struggle in contradistinction to the subject matter of the Portuguese revolution, was published in the December 8, 1975, issue of Intercontinental Press under the title "On the Question of Angola."

The accompanying letter from the Bureau of the United Secretariat, dated October 26, 1975, and signed by Comrade Duret, was as follows:

"Enclosed please find an article on Angola which was received by the Political Bureau of the USec. The Bureau has decided to recommend to you that this article be published in Intercontinental Press under the suggested title 'On the Question of Angola.' A fraternal observer from the USA was present at the Bureau meeting at which this was decided.

"Please let us know in which issue the article will be appearing."

In addition to this, it should be noted that Comrades Pierre Frank, Livio Maitan, and Ernest Mandel publicly referred to the differences they have with us over the struggle in Angola in the final section (pp. 1839-40) of their article "Revolution and Counterrevolution in Portugal" which was published in the December 22, 1975, issue of Intercontinental Press (No. 46).

From the above, it is quite clear that the decision to publicly discuss the differences over Angola as a separate subject was taken by the Bureau of the United Secretariat and that this decision was not in contradiction to the position taken by Comrades Pierre Frank, Livio Maitan, and Ernest Mandel but in consonance with it. Evidently the members of the United Secretariat had forgotten these precedents when they took up the subject at the February 15 meeting.

In view of the above, it is obvious that the publication of Comrade Thomas's report did not represent a unilateral decision on my part to "initiate" a public discussion on the Angolan struggle. It came within the framework of the polemic already begun in the pages of Intercontinental Press. If blame is to be assigned for this, the first to be placed in the dock ought to be the members of the Bureau of the United Secretariat. As for myself, I think these comrades should be commended for starting a public discussion that can help to clarify the issues involved in the developing class struggle in Angola.

Comradely yours,

Joseph Hansen
Joseph Hansen
Editor