

# Inter Press Service

Lisboa

20<sup>th</sup> October 1975

Dear Tony Cliff,

Thank you very much for your letter. Unfortunately I will not be able to answer - let alone solve - the questions you raised. I am not particularly gifted for theoretical reasoning and, as a PRP rank and file militant, my ability to influence policies would, in any case, be slow and limited. This position is partly the result of an option, since I arrived in Portugal with an experience that largely differs from that of most comrades here, and I have accepted to give a very specific political contribution to the situation, which implies my own adaptation to the environment rather than the reverse. Of course I defend my points of view, but within an accepted framework and aware of the nature of the role I can play.

I would guess that your position is still more difficult. It is particularly hard to change people's positions from outside, and anyway would require much more than you can do. Even if you could convince the leader you have been trying to influence, this wouldn't lead you very far. PRP policies are determined by a collective leadership, who, in their turn, also maintain a dialogue with the PRP membership and are restricted in their actions by collective decisions taken in the Congress. As you see, the task you set yourself is not an easy one, and its accomplishment would demand means that are far beyond those you have at your disposal - a text in a foreign language, a letter, or a debate conducted by intermediaries in necessarily short and hurried discussions.

I think, however, that the problem goes deeper than this. I have no doubt that your arguments would have a much greater impact if you could present them in a less general, abstract form. As it is, people tend inevitably to react as if they are being told something they have already heard, and taken their decisions as they did in spite of that, or dismiss them as not taking due account of the concrete situations, problems involved, means available, etc.

Perhaps a few examples will make my point clearer. You base a great deal of your argument on substitutionism on statements by Portuguese revolutionaries you have met. I don't know who they are, but even if they are PRP militants (and this would be very unfortunate), I can assure you that the things you say about the role of COPCON and SUV could not be farther away from PRP's thinking and public position. And to add, for instance, that COPCON is not homogeneous only repeats something we have been saying for ages. SUV is immensely

important, because it has, until now, made repression impossible and also for its positive role, but is no substitute for anything - and we all (almost all) know it.

From a different point of view, we (and this includes the PRP leadership) agree with many of the criticisms you (or other comrades that have been in Portugal) make on the way our organisation acts. In this respect our problem is not one of understanding what is at stake, but of knowing how to correct mistakes made by militants and to improve the way we react to or try to influence workers in the concrete circumstances in which we operate. In relation to the important problem of how to confront the PCP with proposals to the class which go beyond their reformist policies, you gave only concrete piece of advice to be found in which concrete circumstances and means available would have to be considered.

I suspect that there is a point of real disagreement between you and the PRP - the understanding of the party, its role and relationship with the class. But here again I believe that, more than a general disagreement, probably present too, the differences are mainly linked to the relation between the abstract concepts and the way they must operate under the concrete circumstances in which we live. At least I know that it would be at this level that the comrades would be more receptive to any arguments.

I am aware of the fact that I failed in my attempt to reply to your letter. I only hope to have been able to hint at some of the problems: a dialogue conducted through inadequate means and a possible lack of concrete references that would make your arguments more influential. I know that you cannot overcome these difficulties and that this needed a greater cooperation from this end - in your letter (a very correct one, no doubt) ; we should propose to the homeless the taking over of empty houses. In spite of its correctness, this wasn't of great help, simply because we have been doing it for many months... I wouldn't have any difficulty in mentioning many instances in which we have followed the line you propose, but the case you referred to makes my point sufficiently clear.

Your comments on FUR, SUV, the relation between insurrection and revolution, etc., tend to show that frequently your knowledge of our positions and activity is based on inaccurate reports or misinterpretations. I also feel (and still more than the rest this expresses a merely personal view) that, in spite of the remarkable effort it displays and highly successful attempt of interpreting and commenting on the situation, your *Crossroads* reflects the difficulty in grasping, without direct contact, the rhythm of events, the mood of the class and the uneven but steady growth of its organisations. Above all it seems to me that

your demands on the PRP sometimes ignore what the PRP is and the resources it has at its disposal (size, implantation cadres, money, etc.). I believe that, with an important exception, our aims are very similar; the problem is only how best to achieve them - this would require however, a very concrete and detailed discussion. Unfortunately, for the reasons I put forward, I am not in a position to solve the problem myself.

I also tried to suggest that not all of your criticisms in are, in my view, justified. I really think that some of them (and this applies more to conversations I had with IS comrades here than to your letter or work) result from incomplete knowledge of the situation and natural difficulty in understanding a process that is in many ways foreign to you. This, of course, does not mean that I think that everything goes well in this beautiful world. I have said that the comrades and I agree with many criticisms - we just do not know how to correct some of the shortcomings. And I also admit that there are certainly things that are basically wrong. I just do not see how I can help you in trying to correct them.

Finally, I apologise for my English. It forced me to put things rather crudely and in a confused and inadequate way. I hope you believe I did my best and tried to be as frank and helpful as I could.

Yours fraternally

Bruno da Ponte