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Dear Steve,

Exactly what happened on 25 November is still shrouded in mystery. The clampdown on the press means that it is very difficult to piece together picture of how events developed. This is even harder for us in Britain, because of the distance and because of our dependence on reports from the bourgeois press.

However, a few important points are already clear:

1. The working class movement in Portugal has suffered a serious setback. From being virtually powerless a week ago, the bourgeoisie has now regained an almost complete monopoly of organised armed force. Reaction has gained a notable victory.

The revolutionary left has suffered its first major defeat since 25 April last year. It has to first understand how that defeat occurred and how to respond now. The great danger of such a defeat is that it will demoralise many militants who have been used to moving from strength to strength.

2. A defeat for the revolutionary movement is not the same as counter-revolution. The powerful army units where the revolutionaries had influence have been disbanded. The way is open for the creation of a true AMI; the bourgeoisie has secured its control over the press, the radio and TV. But the organisations of the workers - the workers' committees, the unions - remain intact.

3. The prime responsibility for the defeat lies with The reformist leaders of the Communist Party. In the days prior to 25 November, they played a major part in organising massive strikes and demonstrations of workers. On 25 November itself they seem to have been deeply involved in the agitation among the paratroops that led to the seizure of the air bases and the RTP building. This certainly created the feeling among whole layers of workers and rank and file soldiers that there was an inexorable movement towards decisive confrontation. The statement of the Lisbon area of the CP on the morning of the 25th must have seemed to many soldiers like a call to arms.

Yet the CP leadership was all along out to avoid the all-out confrontation that it was encouraging its followers to expect. The strikes and demonstrations were designed to mobilise the workers, to frighten the bourgeoisie - and then to send the workers home. The aim was to avoid any decisive confrontation with the state machine, while forcing the government and the military council of the revolution to accept more CP people into leading positions.

The moves of the CP on the 25 November fitted into this pattern. They encouraged the paratroops to move (their own statement later said that the 'left' - not the 'ultra-left' or the 'pseudo revolutionaries' had overestimated its strength), forced the revolutionary left to take sides with the movement and then, when they had exerted pressure on the bourgeoisie, abandoned the movement to the mercies of the right wing commanders. With calculated cynicism they refused to immobilise the working class to back up soldiers they themselves had encouraged to take action. The deaths of four soldiers, the imprisonment of many others, the repression directed against the revolutionary left and some of their own leading officers, did not matter to a party leadership providing it kept its links with the ruling group. A section at least of the ruling group (Arturas and Charais) now seem prepared to reward it for its treachery with a continuing, even enhanced, position in the government.

4. We wrote seven weeks ago that the right would do everything in its power to strangle the revolutionary left, to provoke it to engage in battle before they there existed either Soviets or a mass revolutionary party. The right will do everything in its power to dupe the proletarian vanguard (Portugal and .....?). On 25 November it succeeded in this, through the mediation of treachery by the reformist leadership of the Communist Party.

5. But the treachery of the CP leadership is not by itself a complete explanation of the defeat, for such treachery is only to be expected. What has to be explained is why the revolutionary left, including its sanest and most farsighted sections, were unable to see through that treachery and counteract its effects. As well as exposing, yet again, the treachery of the CP leadership, the 25 November also threw into full light weaknesses on the revolutionary left had been overlooked in the preceding period.

The most important of these weaknesses was that, when it came to the decisive test, the revolutionary left had proved itself to have a much weaker impact on

the decisive sections of the working class then the reformist party. And even within the left wing army units the reformers were able to create chaos and confusion.

In the weeks prior to 25th November, the revolutionary left managed on several occasions to mobilise thousands of soldiers for demonstrations. On a number of occasions this year it also mobilised, for demonstrations, tens of thousands of workers, despite the opposition of the CP and most of the unions. But the failure of the working class to respond en masse to the paratroops' call for support on 25 November shows that over the class as a whole, even in the Lisbon area, the paralysing grip of reformism is much stronger than the directing influence of revolutionaries

Even the best demonstrations organised by the reactionary left were demonstrations of a minority of the workers. But although a minority will demonstrate without majority support, they will not enter into insurrectionary or semi-insurrectionary activity on that basis. No worker will risk his livelihood, and even his life, on such an enterprise unless he feels that there is at least a fair chance of success and that requires at least the passive support of the majority. On 25 November the grip of the reformers permitted them to withdraw that support from the paratroops' revolt and to ensure the isolation of the revolutionary section of workers. The result was that even those soldiers who first moved - the paratroops - hesitated and finally surrendered without firing a single shot, once they saw that the class was not moving with them. It is this which explains why the soldiers' committees and SUV, which seemed so powerful (even to the ruling class!) on 24 November collapsed like a House of Cards on the 25th.

As we wrote in socialist worker six weeks ago, the great weakness of the revolutionary movement is the unevenness between the soldiers and the workers. The workers' movement lags far behind the soldiers' movement... "The unevenness cannot go on forever. If the workers do not rise to the level of the revolutionary soldiers, there is a great danger that the soldiers' level of consciousness and action will go down to the level of the workers... "If the workers do not catch up with the soldiers, the danger is that the soldiers' spirit will be dampened. The soldiers will be wary of marching forward on their own to seize state power.. In fact, armed forces substituting themselves for the proletariat will not even do for Lisbon in 1975 what the Blanquists did for Paris in 1839. Then a small minority of a few thousand could take power because the

rest of the population was unorganised. This cannot be repeated in Lisbon. The Communist Party is too well implanted to allow it.”

Shortly before 25th November some revolutionaries were saying that the ‘objective conditions’ for insurrection existed. Many of the conditions were certainly present: a deeply divided army, the splits within the ruling class, the expanding wave of struggle of workers, the beginnings of arming of the class. But one crucial thing was missing: a mass party of revolutionaries, with members in every workshop, fighting for its policies on the workers committees, counterposing its policies to those of the reformists in the unions, everywhere putting across to the broad mass of the workers direct, immediate and easily intelligible arguments to counter the treacherous twists and turns of the reformers. It was the absence of this party which permitted the reformers to play their treacherous and disastrous game on 25 November.

Of course, over the months, the revolutionary left had shown that it had a certain influence within the most advanced sections of workers. But the advanced sections cannot make a revolution by themselves. They depend upon at least passive support from much wider layers of the class. And here the reformist organisations were much more strongly placed than the revolutionaries.

This was shown in the building workers’ struggle. Revolutionaries could help ignite the struggle in ... but the general generalisation of it into a national struggle depended upon the reformist-controlled trade union structure. Even in Lisbon the reformists were able in the weeks just prior to 25th November - when the struggle against the 6th government was involving every even ever wider layers of workers to re-establish their hegemony in the movement, through the joint workers’ commissions of the Lisbon industrial belt.

It was the weakness of the revolutionary left within the working class that led to the PRP, MES and the other organisations of the left being led into a trap by the CP on 25 November.

6. The great danger now is that the resulting demoralisation will prevent the revolutionary left re-gathering its forces for the next stage of the struggle. For the defeat of 25 November is not the same as the complete victory of the bourgeoisie. A victory for reaction is not the same as a victory of counter-revolution. The former involves a defeat for the working class; the latter the

complete destruction of its organisations and its fighting spirit. Historically there have been many such defeats. They have usually set the revolutionary movement back a few months and then led to further massive battles. This was, for instance, the case with the July days in Russia in 1917, the defeat suffered by the German revolution in 1919 in Berlin and the defeat suffered by the Spanish revolution in 1934. In each case what has mattered has been the ability (or inability!) of the revolutionary left to adjust its tactics to the defeat, to know how to retreat so as to advance on a wider front at a later date. That is the key problem for the Portuguese revolutionary organisations, in particular the PRP, today.

7. We can already make outline predictions of some of the ways the class struggle will proceed in the coming weeks. The disarming of the left wing military units and the reorganisation of the press will doubtless have a demoralising effect on the workers' movement. But the workers' movement will not be destroyed. The government and the council of the revolution do not feel confident enough for that. Indeed, some of their members still look to a workers' movement that has had its wings clipped as a counter weight to the fascist forces to the right. Certainly, they hope to be able to control the workers' movement without incurring the immense costs of a Chile-type solution to the crisis. That is why ..... are so keen on the CP remaining in the government, even if Soares would like it otherwise. They feel that November 25th has taught the CP leaders a lesson, and that now they will do everything they can to hold back the workers' movement completely.

But the pressures of the international capitalist crisis will continue to be felt by Portuguese capitalism. No real relief can be expected until an upturn in the world economy. This will not come in less than 6 to 8 months and may be much more delayed. Furthermore, it will be short lived, giving rise to international inflationary pressures and another major crisis within two to three years.

For Portuguese capitalism the austerity programme based upon attacks on workers' living standards is a question of great urgency. The government will follow through its success of 25th November with price increases wage restraint, factory closures and redundancies. Inevitably there will be an economic fight back by the workers. The great economic struggles of recent weeks (the metal workers, the builders) involving whole layers of previously passive workers, will be followed by further struggles. Relating to these struggles will be the most important single thing of the revolutionary left to

build rebuild its forces. If, as seems likely, the CP has to pay a high price to remain in the government, the revolutionary left could find itself alone in supporting these workers' struggles. This could open the way for support within the industrial working class on a wider basis than ever before.

Economic struggles will not be the only struggles. There will be fight backs against repression, clashes of workers with detachments of GNR and PSP on the streets, possibly some soldier demonstrations against increased discipline. But it will be the economic struggle - which will always have a certain implicit, political content - which will open up to the revolutionary left the possibility of overcoming the weaknesses revealed on 25 November. That is why it is essential to understand the key role which the economic struggle plays in any revolution.

As the great Polish - German revolutionary Rosa Luxembourge wrote 70 years ago, "Every new rising and new victory of the political struggle simultaneously changes itself into a powerful impetus for the economic struggle by expanding the external possibilities of the latter. After each foaming wave of potential struggle a fructifying deposit remains behind from which a thousand stalks of economic struggle shoot forth...The ceaseless state of economic war of the workers with capital keeps the fighting energy alive at each political pause. It forms, so to speak, the ever fresh reservoir of strength of the proletarian class out of which the political struggle continued continually reviews its strength."  
(Mass strikes etc)

It was because she saw this dialectical interaction between political and economic struggle that Rosa stressed, after the first defeat experienced by the German revolution in December 1918, the need for the revolutionaries to regain the initiative over their opponents by relating to the economic struggle of millions of workers.

"Let us be clear it is the very essence of this revolution that strikes will become more and more extensive, that they must become the central focus...No one will dispute that we are alone on the side of the striking and fighting workers." In this way, she stressed, the hold of reformism over the mass of workers would be broken, and the base of the revolution extended.

No one in Portugal today can afford to ignore that lesson. After the political change of 25th April 1974, there followed a period of intense economic

struggle. Now we are faced with another period in which the class must recoup its forces in economic conflicts.

Of course the economic conflicts will run right up against the renovated forces of the bourgeois state and take on a political dimension. But the workers involved will usually start with economics before coming to politics.

After the set back of 25th November they will initially feel at a disadvantage in political questions. It is only when they are already in motion around basic questions of an economic character that they will begin to grasp their political power.

In the past phase of the conditional political crises, there emerged a tendency for revolutionaries to dismiss the economic struggle as 'outdated'. But even then what was out of date for advanced revolutionary workers was a new experience for whole layers of previously dormant building workers. For them economics, their living standards, were a matter of the greatest importance.

It is true that Portuguese capitalism can no longer afford reforms to the benefit of workers. It is also true that some of the most advanced workers are much more interested in politics than economics. But the vast mass of workers have not yet risen to this level of consciousness. It was their failure to strike or to take to the streets that ensured defeat on 25 November.

Instead of revolutionaries merely telling these workers that the economic struggle has been surpassed, it is necessary to fight alongside them for economic demands, to suggest appropriate forms of organisation for that struggle, to fight within the workers committees on the unions against the inevitable tendency of the reformist leaders to bow to the needs of Portuguese capitalism and renege even on the fight for reforms.

Revolutionaries must not merely sit on the sidelines and comment on the fight for wage improvements, saying that 'the real struggle' is elsewhere. They must lead that fight doing their utmost to propel it forward, uniting the strength of the workers around partial economic demands in order to raise the level of unity and combativity of the class, so that the political question of state power is posed to ever wider ranks of workers.

The organs of popular power by and large showed themselves to be inadequate on 25 November. This was because they were all too often remote from the day-to-day lives of the mass of workers from the daily struggle for better wages and conditions for better housing, against employment and rising prices. They let these struggles be carried on independently of the organs of popular power by workers' committees or unions, so that all too often the organs of popular power became mere talking shops remote from the daily lives of workers. Workers vaguely supported them but did not feel intimately, organically involved in their success or failure.

The resurrection of the organs of popular power depends on revolutionaries fighting to overcome these faults, by making them central to the partial economic demands which the class will have to fight under new and more difficult conditions.

In the period immediately ahead, groups of revolutionaries in the factories need to do more than pose abstractly the need for the class to arm itself. They have to make themselves into the directing force of the struggle against the government's austerity measures, as well as the fight back against repression. That means formulating the demands for the economic fight back, using regular factory bulletins and newspapers as a means of explaining to even the most backward workers the betrayals of the reformists on this front, as well as on the political front. Through such bulletins and papers, revolutionaries must express the workers' own anger in the workers own language, going through their experiences with them whilst also providing them with a political focus.

9. Revolutionaries must engage in such work with urgency, knowing that the political struggle is far from over, and demands that they learn to deploy far larger forces than they ever had in the past.

Despite its victory on 25 November, the bourgeois state power is still plagued by grave crises. The different factions within the bourgeoisie distrust one another almost as much as they fear the working class. Those directing the organs of the state still remain committed to the bourgeois programme of 25 April, restructuring of the economy with an enhanced state capitalist sector, reduction in the power of the monopolists and latifundists' acceptance of some of the features of bourgeois democracy. But in order to crush the left regimes they had to give increased powers to the ex-fascist and neo-fascist elements. These hate the present leaders of the MFA almost as much as they hate the left, and

will now try to move forward to regain everything they lost on 25th April, 28th September and 11th March. It is partly in order to resist the pressure that they, Antunes etc. look to a continuing alliance with the CP leaders.

The greater the success of the working class in the economic struggle, the greater will be the factional strife within the ruling class and the heads of the state apparatus. Revolutionaries can take advantage of these splits and diversions, providing they begin by rooting themselves deeply in the class, and explain honestly to their fellow workers what is happening. The greatest mistake for the revolutionary left will be to believe that manoeuvres with this or that element within the hierarchy of the state can be a substitute for building in the class; or just as bad, that armed actions by groups of individuals in isolation from the struggles of the class can repair the damage of 25 November.

10. A key part of building a mass base for the revolutionary left must be the maximum utilisation of opportunities for legal action. Because if repression, some leaders may have to remain underground. Because of the increased strength of the state, it will not be easy to talk about matters such as the need for armed struggle. Underground publications may be needed for this. But the character of the regime means that there will be numerous opportunities for legal propaganda - a regular legal paper, even if it has to use Aesopian language for some things, to keep changing its title and its publisher etc., open propaganda around workers' committees and union elections, open meetings (even if called by some front body). Because the Social Democrats and reformists will still revert to certain electoral forms of struggle between themselves, they will not be able to prevent revolutionaries using the means mentioned above.

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