

The strongest challenge to capitalism anywhere in Europe is being mounted by the working class in Portugal now. Throughout the country, hundreds of factories, offices, schools, farms and houses have been occupied and their owners chased away. And right-wing, army officers, until months ago active in breaking strikes and occupations are being increasingly isolated as the armed forces shifts to the left.

The last week of July saw the third failed military coup since the fall of fascism. The coup failed when rank and file paratroopers, air force mechanics and commandos refused to take part. Senior commando officers had to abandon their plans for the take-over finally when they were arrested by their own men. A few days later, the whole of the commando unit at Amadora, a few miles outside Lisbon, met to elect a new commanding officer.

WORKERS DEMOCRACY

The Portuguese working class is fighting for a society without classes, unemployment and poverty - for socialism. It is fighting for control over every level of society - the economy, the schools, the mass media, the armed forces, the government. The means of control are the dozens of committees now springing up in factories, villages, barracks and among squatters.

Overleaf we describe the activities of two of these committees: in Pontinha, where the whole town is now run by democratically elected representatives who can be removed at any time by the people who elected them, and at Tomar, where the peasants have taken over the administration of justice.

This workers democracy has nothing to do with the democracy that Mario Soares Socialist Party (PSP) wants. It's a democracy that spells the end of the control of profit and bosses over how we live. Not surprisingly, everything is being done to cover up what is really happening in Portugal. All the social democratic leaders of Europe have pledged their full support to Soares. The world's press pours out an unceasing stream of lies.

What is happening in Portugal threatens the future of capitalism all over the world - the collapse of the US-backed regimes in South East Asia shows how infectious socialism can be, and countries like Spain and Italy would almost certainly be affected by what happens in Portugal. This has a strong bearing on the actions of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) which wants to halt the move to a workers state. The PCP is under intense pressure from other communist parties to prevent a final confrontation with capitalism. All over Europe, communist leaders are trying to establish themselves as being more democratic than the traditional parties and worthy of participation in the government. Their plans are threatened by the events in Portugal.

THE ROLE OF THE ARMED FORCES

Strengthened by the international support, from the communist parties and the social democrats, the supporters of capitalism Portugal - referred to in the press always as 'moderates' even if they have a history of devoted service to the old fascist regime - are trying to turn the clock back. But they face an increasingly strong and determined working class now linked firmly to rank and file soldiers and sailors and some revolutionary officers. Inside the armed forces, it is the left which today holds the initiative at every level.

As we said some months ago in the BIG FLAME pamphlet, *Portugal - A Blaze of Freedom*,

Today the role of the Armed Forces Movement (MFA) is crucial to the revolutionary process in Portugal. By this we mean two things. First, that without the support of the MFA that process might well come to an end: for the time being, the MFA is the guarantor of the Revolution. Second, that the process itself is inside the MFA.

We also pointed out, and we hold to it still, that the key to understanding the MFA is to look at the relationship between the vanguard sections of the working class and the left of the MFA. So, we say that the

people who talk about a military dictatorship in Portugal are talking nonsense, even now that GOVERNMENTAL power is in the hands of three generals. (Carvalho, for the revolutionary left, Costa Gomes, for the 'moderates' and the PSP, and Vasco Goncalves, the prime minister, for the PCP.)

The reality today is that power is shared between dozens of factory commissions, popular assemblies, neighbourhood committees, revolutionary committees of workers, soldiers and sailors, by the units which make up the MFA's security force, COPCON, commanded by Otelo de Carvalho. Governmental power means little unless it acts in accordance with the wishes of all of these forces. That's the meaning of workers power in Portugal.

WHAT NEXT?

But this situation can't go on for ever. Capitalism still exercises its influence in Portugal even if the bosses are fleeing. With thousands unemployed, the economy is threatening to grind to a halt. The first problem then is to complete the workers take over of the economy and to begin to plan it so that it serves the needs of the working class.

But that's easier said than done. What is crystal clear, though, is that several key problems demand urgent attention -

How to win over to the revolution the poor peasants of the North, the small businessmen and the professional middle classes.

How to complete the transformation of the armed forces into a force at the service of the working class.

How to solve the colonial problem in Angola and Cabinda.

At root, all these problems boil down to the same dilemma. What structures should be set up to link the vanguards of the working class, inside and outside the armed forces, and how can they produce together a programme of action capable of uniting all the anti-capitalist sections of the population to carry through the socialist revolution?

The MFA is committed, in time, to helping to create revolutionary committees as the link between barracks, factory and community. Some revolutionary officers, who see themselves as the counterparts of the African liberation movements, don't grasp that these committees can't be willed into existence. They have to be built from the bottom upwards - as they were in Russia in 1905 and 1917, and in Chile in 1970-73 - and this means that the working class has to see the need to set them up.

What is increasingly clear is that the importance of the revolutionary organisations - MES, LUAR, PRP and UDP - in setting up and guiding the revolutionary committees and popular assemblies will have to be acknowledged in any new provisional government. Carvalho has already made it clear that there is no room for a new government dominated by the PCP, which has played such an obstructive and self-seeking role in relation to growth of working class power.

The signs are that the next government will have to take account of the revolutionary groups, of COPCON: the question then will be, how long before the government is made irrelevant by the development of the organs of popular power.

Note: There are now three networks of popular power in Portugal -

† the CDR's, Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, which are only for members of the PCP. In the few factories where they exist the CDR's are armed units of the PCP.

† the CRT's Committees of Revolutionary workers, soldiers and sailors, which are supported by the PRP and the UDP. Again the CRT's tend to be limited to the groups and their sympathisers who are pushing for them.

† the fastest growing network of organs of popular power are the Popular Assemblies supported by the MES, LCI, LUAR, FSP and the left of the Armed Forces Movement. The Popular Assemblies are a coming together of delegates from the workers commissions in factories, the squatters and tenants commissions in the communities and the soldiers and sailors assemblies.

These assemblies are called for in the MFA's recently published guide lines for direct democracy. As popular power grows in Portugal it is likely that the Popular Assemblies and the CRT's will fuse.



Reactionaries Behind Socialist Party

The growth in the number of CIA agents in Portugal is a reminder that the 'dirty tricks' and military tactics used against Allende's government in Chile are in reserve if they are required. For the time being, the strength of the revolutionary movement compels the international employer class to use other, more subtle means to halt the advance of workers power.

SOARES TO THE RESCUE

Chief among these is the Socialist Party led by Mario Soares, who has a fine line in left rhetoric but has roughly the same political position as Harold Wilson.

When he took his party out of the provisional government in mid-July, he sparked a serious political crisis. Soares' withdrawal was in protest against the increasing irrelevance of the PSP at a time when the country is edging closer to workers power. A workers state does not mean the end of democracy, but it does mean the end of Mario Soares and his capitalist backers.

Soares has gambled on stopping the move to the left in Portugal by withdrawing from the Government and mobilising his followers on the street - at the same time appealing for support from the European social democrat leaders. How successful has he been?

Certainly, he has brought about a crisis in the government but he's been forced into a strategy that is likely to backfire on him. The anti-government PSP rallies have been big but they have shown only too clearly how dependent Soares now is on the support of the middle-classes and small business-men. The working-class less and less believes in Soares' talk of 'freedom' and the 'fight against Communist dictatorship'. This for two reasons -

1. The 'República' Battle
The PSP represented the República battle to the world as a struggle against the Communist party take-over of the newspaper. In fact, the fight was part of a general fight by the working-class for control over production and distribution - for a kind of democracy which would mean the end of capitalism. What began the struggle at 'República' was the attempt of the pro-PSP editorial board and journalists to take over the paper. The República print-workers noted that the PSP take over of the paper was not only stifling an independent source of political information, but in the process the paper's circulation was falling very fast. Not many wanted to read the PSP's line in 'República' when they could already read it in the two other PSP 'party' newspapers. One of the strange facts of the situation never revealed by Soares or his supporters was that there was a clear minority of PCP members amongst the paper's workers,

some of the workers were members of Soares' own party, the Socialist Party.



Soldiers and workers in Lisbon on 17 July:

2. The agent of reactionaries
The second reason for the PSP's decreasing popularity in the working-class is the way it has set itself up as the leader of the revolution's opponents. Soares' challenge to the government has been taken as the signal for a series of attacks on the Left, especially the PCP, in the rural areas.

There is no doubt that these anti-communist riots were organised by the forces of reaction - the land-owners, the church, and the right-wing parties. But it is also true that they had mass support - support of the base members of the Socialist Party, support of the small and middle peasants, support of many left wing agricultural workers. In these sectors there is a strong anti-PCP feeling which is not reactionary: it is an anti-authoritarian feeling that has developed over the last 18 months as the PCP has repeatedly behaved in an arrogant, dictatorial, Stalinist fashion. In many villages and small towns, PCP members from outside the area have invaded the town-halls and declared themselves mayor and taken over local government. This has been rightly resisted by the agricultural workers and small peasants: in some villages, PCP militants have tried to drive the UDP, which has a growing base in the rural areas, out of town. As the classical Stalinists they are, the PCP have tried to impose with 'bureaucratic rigidity' their schemes for collectivization of the land. These have been violently opposed, especially in the North-East of the country where many small peasants own a bit of land. (cont.)

Julia Abrantes is a shop steward in Plessey, Portugal, and a member of the revolutionary organisation MES (Left Socialist Movement). Towards the end of July she and her husband, Marcolino, who is vice president of

the textile workers union, made a speaking tour of the North West, organised by the Portuguese Workers Co-ordinating Committee. This is what she said to a meeting in Manchester.



Julia Abrantes in Manchester; 'the multinationals are in the front-line of the attack on Portuguese socialism.....'

Comrades,

I am going to restrict myself to talking about the struggles that have been going on in the multi national dominated electrical and electronic industry in Portugal. These international companies such as Plessey, where I work, Philips, ITT (Standard Electric) Westinghouse, G.E.C., Applied Magnetics, Grundig, established themselves in Portugal under the fascist regime in order to take advantage of the low wages which were forced upon Portuguese workers by the fierce repression of the regime. They use mainly young women (15-16) for their labour force.

Trade unions were government controlled. Strikes were forbidden by law and the secret police was ever present. In this industry the minimum wage in 1973 was £5 for a 48 hour week, with the cost of living about the same as in Britain.

In 1973, faced with raging inflation, we began to organise underground in order to obtain a national wage agreement giving a minimum wage of £20. Despite the heavy repression many short strikes and go slows took place and an interim wage increase was obtained.

Immediately after the fall of fascism on the 25th April, we began to fight for the signing of the agreement. But this time there was no possibility of using the repressive apparatus against us.

Many of the multi-national companies began to allege that they could not afford to pay the new wages and that there would be only two solutions. Either they did not pay the higher wages, or there would be many redundancies. They threatened that if both these solutions were opposed they would withdraw from Portugal altogether. The TUs began to negotiate on the question of redundancies. Trying just to minimise the number. But we in the rank and file rejected this and began to struggle against it. The multi-national Applied Magnetics, which deliberately showed a loss in Portugal by importing components from the parent company at highly inflated prices and by

exporting the assembled computer memories to the parent company at prices well below the world market prices, began to stop paying wages. The workers replied by occupying the factory. The Yankee general manager took a plane to New York from where he sent a telegram to the Portuguese Minister of Labour telling him to sell the factory and machinery to pay the wages outstanding because they were ending their operations in Portugal. In any case the company had been set up with a loan from the Portuguese fascist government which had never been paid back.

Plessey began by saying that they had to close down altogether their computer matrix section which employed 400 workers. They claimed that matrices were becoming obsolete. Matrix work involved very fine weaving of wires through rings under a microscope. The matrix workers, all women, had to start wearing glasses after 6 months of work. The strength of their lenses had to be increased every 6 months— after three to five years of work, most of the women had become almost totally blind and were sacked as unemployable. Because there was no unemployment benefit that meant total poverty. We soon found out that their story of the matrix being obsolete was untrue. Management had in fact transferred matrix production to Malta since September 1974. In recent months the attempts at creating redundancies have become general. Also, foreign suppliers of components to our factories have begun to demand immediate payment for goods which they had previously supplied on credit. A number of British suppliers to our company have claimed that this restriction is being imposed because British bankers are refusing credits for anything to do with Portugal. In the attack which international capital is carrying out in order to try and stop workers setting up a socialist society in Portugal, the multi-nationals are in the front line.

The international working-class must develop an international strategy to counter the international strategy of the multi-nationals.

CLASS JUSTICE

An event of great importance took place in Tomar last Friday. A people's court, replacing a normal court, acquitted an agricultural worker of the murder of a big landowner who threatened him with the sack.

The case is a symbol of the struggle of the agricultural workers for land reform. It takes place against the background of the long-standing land occupations which began in February, mainly in the Alentejo.

The Alentejo is a vast plain in the centre of the country where over 200,000 men and women work for dozens of landlords who were among the main pillars of the fascist regime, and were involved in Spínola's plots for a coup on September 28 and March 11.

This is the context in which 1000 peasants set up a people's trial which is likely to undermine the whole judicial system of the state.

The guide lines for the creation of people's power, adopted by the last MFA Assembly, list among the tasks of the people's assemblies

To set up alongside local organs of power. To set up alongside local organs of popular power, a people's court for dealing with non-criminal questions.

But it looks as if in this part of the Alentejo, the guide lines have already been overtaken by reality.

(This report is taken from the French revolutionary newspaper, Libération, for 28 July)

DIRECT DEMOCRACY

This report is taken from República for 15 July — the second edition under workers control. We doubt whether this report would have appeared in the paper when it was still controlled by the Socialist Party.

This Sunday the Popular Assembly of Pontinha met for the third time on the sports field of the 1st Engineers.

The meeting, which was attended by numerous factory commissions, tenants commissions and delegates from military units, completed the writing of the constitution.

The commissions attending the meeting reported back on the measures their members thought needed to be taken most urgently. At the next meeting, a Revolutionary Committee for the district will be elected.

At present, the Pontinha Assembly is the first in Portugal to be formally set up. It's the result of the pioneering decisions taken by the recent MFA Assembly for creating links between the people and the MFA.

This has been done here because it's realised that it's through these assemblies, with delegates elected at mass meetings and the power to recall them at any time, that the power of the workers has to be organised and strengthened from the bottom upwards. This kind of organisation provides the means for bringing together all those forces which are fighting against the dictatorship of capitalism. It's also the only organisation, because it is profoundly democratic and representative of the working class, which can guarantee that the exploited masses themselves will be able to control their own future.

The constitution approved by the Popular Assembly shows that the truth of all this was reflected in the meeting of workers and soldiers. Amongst the objectives agreed,



República — under workers control.

the key ones are

- † to mobilise the masses in the tasks of building socialism,
- † to create the basis for a new state at the service of the working class,
- † to guarantee to the masses themselves control over production, prices, rents,
- † to defend the revolutionary process from the attacks of reactionaries at home and from imperialism.

SOCIALIST PARTY and the REACTIONARIES (cont.)

This clumsy and brutal behaviour of the PCP has posed a tough problem for the revolutionary left who have had to clearly support the PCP where the attacks against it were part of a right-wing offensive. But they have not wanted to support the PCP where there was justified popular antagonism, towards it - the left-wing of the military have been in the same dilemma. But in the last weeks it has become clear to the revolutionary left that it had to state clearly that it would not take the rap for the PCP. The left groups are demanding their own representatives in the 5th government and COPCON and RAL 1 have made it clear that they are not prepared to defend PCP offices. The balance of forces is shifting against the PCP and it no longer seems likely that the Stalinists will be able to get away with a 'democracy' on the lines of the ones they set up in Czechoslovakia and Hungary after World War II. The Portuguese revolutionary process has gone too far for it to be shunted down an authoritarian Stalinist dead-end.

While aristocrats organise the sacking of PCP offices and bishops lead anti-communist marches, Soares' speeches are also being used abroad as the pretext for creating economic chaos. Among the leaders of this campaign is Harold Wilson. The first step has been to make an EEC loan to Portugal conditional on Soares forming a government. The second move has been to put tax on Portuguese textile imports which can only drive up unemployment in Portugal, while having almost no effect on the British textile industry. Less publicly, foreign investors are steadily withdrawing from Portugal. Portuguese factories are being starved of supplies of foreign machinery and raw materials. These are the tactics used against the Popular Unity government in Chile.

Every weakness is being exploited. The US is actively supporting right-wing pseudo-liberation movements in the colonies. The greatest test is coming in oil and mineral rich Angola where the US-backed FNLA is fighting fighting hard to destroy the MPLA, the liberation movement with the greatest popular support and the one which bore the brunt of the 13 year war against Portuguese colonialism. Regrettably, Communist China has also given its support to the FNLA. This is a grave mistake. The explanation is that the Chinese see their support for FNLA as a way of counteracting Russian influence in Angola via the Soviet Union's support for MPLA. If the FNLA wins, Angola's natural resources will continue to be exploited for the benefit of the multi-national corporations. Meanwhile, the fighting threatens all the gains made in Portugal itself.

In the first place, the thousands of white settlers who are fleeing to Portugal on every available plane and ship are likely to strengthen the ranks of the right. The fighting also places the Portuguese army in a dilemma. The troops' reluctance to stay in Angola is causing rifts inside the MFA. The only solution is a determined attempt to back the MPLA. The present dithering is weakening army morale and playing into the hands of the FNLA.

The US is also active in the Azores and Cabinda. Cabinda is a tiny enclave cut off from Angola by pro-US Zaire. The declaration of independence by the local 'liberation' movement means that Cabinda's offshore oil resources will remain in the hands of Gulf Oil. US backing for the separation movement in the Azores is being given in exchange for continued use of the islands as an air staging post, vital for US control

SOLIDARITY WITH THE PORTUGUESE WORKING CLASS

March through London, Saturday 20 September 1975. Starts from the Embankment (Charing Cross) at 2pm. Organised by the Portuguese Workers Coordinating Committee.

† No Economic Boycott

† Big Business, NATO, CIA — Hands Off Portugal!

† Portugal Will Never Become Another Chile.

The Demonstration will take place in the week before the Labour Party Conference to which Mario Soares has been invited as a fraternal guest. It will show that the British working class does not regard Soares or his 'Socialist' Party as the acceptable representatives of the Portuguese working class.

The Solidarity Campaign with the Portuguese working class was set up to mobilise the British working class movement against the possibility of intervention in Portugal by international capitalism. Many political organisations and trade union branches have already affiliated to the Campaign and receive the monthly bulletin, Our Common Struggle. Now available at the Campaign from the Portuguese Workers Coordinating Committee, 11 Pinner Road, London NW3.

