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over Key Issues

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Summary of the oral intervention by Comrade Nahuel Moreno, made to a delegation from the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) of the United States, formed by Comrades Joseph Hansen, Jack Barnes, Peter Camejo, Ed Shaw, Barry Sheppard, and Marie Alice Waters, before the National Convention of the SWP

1. Because *Key Issues*¹ arrived to us behind schedule, while we were visited by Comrade Ed, we have had no time to send you our criticisms in writing. Perhaps this accident was fortuitous, because the oral discussion will allow us to define, if indeed the deep differences that we believe we have with your draft, are there or not. A written critique may have hindered the clarifications and the possibility of an agreement, as it would have widened the existing or imaginary gaps.

2. If it is confirmed that have incompatible positions, as initially we believe, we must strive to provide a high example of Bolshevik seriousness to the entire international Trotskyist movement. For this purpose we bring two propositions we want to discuss with you, before raising them to the faction, so you can tell us which one you believe is most convenient, politically and organisationally, for the progress of the faction. The first, that Key Issues be withdrawn from the agenda of the faction to replace it with a common program for Portugal in everything we do agree, leaving for discussion in the ranks of the whole movement the points or topics in which we are not in agreement. The second is that we withdraw fraternally from the Faction, while clearly indicating the points on which we disagree, to continue the discussion that will allow us, no doubt, in a more or less short term, to reunify in a common faction if unfortunately the factional struggle against the majority continues. You tell us which proposition is the most convenient.

3. To go straight to the point we can tell you that we cannot vote for a resolution such as Key Issues, which in our opinion gives essentially a democratic and non-transitional program for Portugal and an evolutionary, non-revolutionary perspective. The synthesis of our paper and our criticism can focus on the paragraph in which you specify the more general perspectives for the class struggle in Portugal: “The future of the mass movement depends on how democratic conquests are defended by the mass movement of the working class and the peasantry, how they are used in the struggles to improve their living conditions, and how they are driven to educate the masses and promote self-confidence, in the development of revolutionary cadres” (Key Issues, Ch. 3).

For us this phrase is directly Bersteinian² and we cannot vote in favour of a document which largely revolves around this phrase. If we remove the revolutionary cadres, which does not mean much more than the invocations of Social Democracy to socialism, the rest of the phrase, “how democratic conquests are defended by the mass movement”, “how they are used in the struggles to improve their living conditions”, “how they are driven to educate the masses and promote self-

1 It refers to “The Key Issues in the Portuguese Revolution”, approved by the steering committee of the Leninist Trotskyist Faction on 30 August 1975, and published in *International Internal Discussion Bulletin*, Vol XII, No. 6, October 1975, pp. 3-12.

2 Nahuel Moreno refers to Eduard Bernstein (1850–1932), a German political theorist and politician, member of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), and the founder of revisionist reformism.

confidence”, is indicating the possibility of a future of the class struggle in Portugal. In this future it would be possible to defend the democratic gains, improve the living conditions and educate the masses and promote self-confidence, without the triumph of the workers’ revolution. In other words, without transitional tasks performed by the mass movement (the only tasks this phrase poses for the future of the mass movement are democratic and minimal, improvement of living standards), without raising that without the creation of organs of workers’ power to make .the socialist revolution led by a Trotskyist party, there is no possibility of “defending democratic conquests” and “improving living conditions”. In other words, in Portugal we move towards the socialist revolution of the organs of workers’ power in a process of permanent revolution or we go backwards with the triumph of the bourgeois counter-revolution that will make us lose all the gains and prevent us from “improving the standard of living”. In Portugal there cannot be an intermediate stage of the revolution, that will enable to achieve in a future to keep the “democratic conquests” and “improve” the standard of living, unless it is through for development of organs of power that go towards taking power.

4. We believe it is essential to radically modify the wording of this paragraph and the document as a whole to make clear that “the future of the mass movement depends on how democratic, as well as economic and transitional (nationalisations) conquests are defended by the mass movement of the working class and the peasantry, and how they are used in the struggles to improve their living conditions, and how they are utilised to educate the masses and promote self-confidence, so the masses can promote, develop and defend and centralise the existing commissions of workers, peasants, residents and soldiers, or to form them if they do not exist, to take power and make the socialist revolution, with a transitional program, led by the Trotskyist party”.

5. The second objection we have is with regard to the characterisation of dual power and our policy towards it. We believe that your document and the articles by Gerry Foley clearly indicate that there is in Portugal a strong dual power, fragmented, embryonic, but widespread, which is manifested at all levels and in all places, although sporadically, it does not achieve a permanent character.

Key Issues says very clearly in this regard:

“The workers in the factories and the poor masses in the neighbourhoods organised spontaneously. Hated bosses and strikebreaking goons were purged. Unused housing was seized. The workers asserted the right to hold meetings and organise assemblies in the plants. The factories became centres of political discussion and activity. [...] Democratic factory committees sprung up in most of the big plants. They were elected by general assemblies involving all the workers” (p. 6).

“The most advanced revolutionary democratic forms of organisation that have yet appeared in Portugal are the assemblies and committees of soldiers and sailors that have sprung up in various units at certain times. However, these have not become standing committees on any substantial-scale except in the navy, which is not the politically decisive branch of the armed forces” (p. 10). [...] the workers have already asserted control in many instances for protect their specific interests against in the face of government assaults, employer sabotage and mounting unemployment and inflation” (p. 10).

Putting aside that we believe conveniently that a special chapter be written meeting these comments to point out that these are the highest organisational and political conquest of the movement of the Portuguese masses, the important thing is that if we add to these scattered comments some more categorical comments by Foley, we will reach the conclusion that in Portugal there is a strong dual power at the enterprise level, that it accompanies all the rise of the mass movement, although as all dual powers it goes through the ups and downs of the class struggle and, much more this time when none of the major parties of the workers’ movement promotes or defends these atomised, molecular embryos of dual power.

On the contrary, if a definition exists it is apparently the opposite: “The Portuguese workers are still at an early stage of organisation” (p. 10). This statement was made based on the true fact that in Portugal there are no industrial unions like in the United States and the Western countries.

They forget that this situation was already foreseen by Trotsky as a way to overcome the traditional forms of organisation of the working class after the fall of fascism and as a confirmation, we add, of the law of uneven and combined development.

Trotsky in the *Transitional Program* when referring to the mass movement of fascist countries states: “As soon as the movement assumes something of a mass character, the democratic slogans will be intertwined with the transitional ones; factory committees, it may be supposed, will appear before the old routinists rush from their chancelleries to organise trade unions; soviets will cover Germany before a new Constituent Assembly will gather in Weimar” (L. Trotsky, *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1973, p. 101).

The essential flaw of the document is precisely that not only it does not characterise the events it describes, but something much more serious; it does not give a political line for these events. Should we or shouldn't we continue driving the occupations of factories and land, the factory committees and their centralisation and the assemblies of soldiers? Except for the occupations, which the document notes in passing as a task, the others are completely ignored.

The only task that is emphasised for the workers is: “In this situation, propaganda and agitation for industrial unions, a united democratic union structure, and the transformation of the embryonic factory committees into action committees combine closely with other revolutionary tasks and form an essential component of a concrete revolutionary answer to the concerns of the masses of workers” (p. 10).

For the armed forces this ignorance of a policy for and a characterisation of dual power is truly regrettable. The only thing that it says is that there is “the struggle for democratic rights of the ranks of the armed forces” (p. 10), not a word more. We ask, do we have to fight or not to defend or develop in all armed forces the soldiers' assemblies and the committees that already and “permanently” exist in the navy and sporadically in the other forces? Do we wash our hands on the face of these fundamental phenomena which mean nothing more, nothing less, than the emergence of dual power in the armed forces? Should we or shouldn't we raise the slogan that the other armed forces organise and develop committees as the navy does? Should we or shouldn't we raise the slogan that these committees be linked to the workers' movement and that the latter form militias with these committees, forming embryonic neighbourhood soviets of workers, soldiers and tenants? Should we or shouldn't we propose the election of officers in soldiers assemblies? In a general and strategic document, should we or shouldn't we point out that we must place as a central point the destruction of the bourgeois armed forces developing the pole of autonomous organisation of the soldiers in intimate union with the working class? And, finally, isn't this bold policy of development of dual power the only way to achieve the armament of the working class?

6. The third objection has to do with the nationalisations and other achievements of the mass and workers movement, which are not democratic, but transitional, as the occupations of houses; or revolutionary democratic, such as the occupations of land. It is not a question of describing them, but of characterising what they mean and what policy we have to face them. In Portugal 60 percent or more of bourgeois property has been expropriated. Especially the expropriation of the banks and the largest national financial consortia is a transitional and not a democratic conquest. It is no coincidence that this colossal task of defending these transitional conquests is not characterised as an expression of dual power and that it is not presented as fundamental task to defend them, since they are not even mentioned.

Something similar happens with the agrarian revolution in course, with its land occupations and the problem of the church. Among the key tasks identified by the document not a single word is said about these key tasks, that the Portuguese masses have begun to carry out.

7. The scariest problem the Portuguese workers are facing is the economic crisis and unemployment. The document does not even raise the problem, nor does it attempt to give an answer. Here we must develop a transitional program that responds to the most urgent need of the Portuguese masses: to save their standard of living and work.

8. We have many other objections of detail and some very important, as the characterisations of the government as a classic Bonapartist and of the MFA as a direct political tool of the bourgeoisie and the high command. But all these differences are ultimately secondary if we agree that the essence of the program for Portugal and for any country that goes through a pre-revolutionary or revolutionary situation is to form if none exist, to develop and centralise them if they exist — even if they exist in an embryonic form — the organs of workers' and people's power. Everything else that we agree about, on the importance of democratic slogans, etc., becomes tactical problems of fundamental importance, because without a Trotskyist solution of them there is no chance of achieving the strategic objective that we have pointed out. And without specifying the appropriate strategic objective, as well as the tactics necessary to carry it out, there is no possibility of developing and transforming Portuguese Trotskyism into a mass party.

9. These arguments were answered by Comrades Barnes and Hansen. The highly summarized synthesis of their positions, that is not up to us to carry out and that we let them expand was as follows:

a) Jack Barnes pointed out he saw no possibility or need for us to split up, not for a minute, not for a day. He made a presentation that was summarized by us in the letter we sent to Comrade Joe Hansen, on 21 August this year in the first three points of the chapter "Four principled points on which we agree completely and we disagree with the majority". He insisted he saw no difference and that the objections we noted could be obviated in the final version of the document. He insisted, on two or three opportunities, that he did not see the need for the slogan of "development and centralisation of the workers' committees and the soldiers' committees" because it could be misleading.

On dual power he noted it was embryonic and that the problem was political, with what political slogans we should develop it. Seeing that there was a principled agreement on these slogans he saw no problem to achieve a common document.

b) Joe Hansen indicated that what we said was serious, because under no circumstances could we divide at this moment when the struggle of years in common against the majority put us to on a stage where this struggle was clearer, more principled than ever. This unity of such a long tradition forced us to enter the new stage more united than ever.

He said there was no inconvenience to modify the text, not because he considered that it was wrong, but, as in the case of the phrase in which we had accused the document of being Bernsteinian, because if comrades like us considered it confusing we had to take this as a sign that phrases like that could obscure the true position of the document. Since he had read our document in *Revista de América* and saw no difference in principle between us, he considered a grave error not to come to an agreement. The faults we pointed out were not such because the document assumed that we were for the transitional program. §