

# Thirty years since the Portuguese Revolution—Part 3

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*The following is the conclusion of a three-part series. Part one was posted July 15 and Part 2 was posted July 16.*

FUR was a popular front set up to betray the revolution at the most critical time and it was to receive the support of most of the radical groups. These groups claimed the MFA (Armed Forces Movement—Movimento das Forças Armadas) / COPCON (Continental Operations Command—Comando Operacional do Continente) proposals were a “valid basis of work for the elaboration of a revolutionary political programme” and that the assemblies referred to as the “autonomous organs of popular power” constituted “a way forward for the revolutionary process.”

Amongst the parties signing a “Unity Accord” and joining FUR were sections of international organisations claiming to be Trotskyist.

The International Socialist (IS) organisation (today’s Socialist Workers Party in Britain) was represented by the Revolutionary Party of the Proletariat (PRP—Partido Revolucionário do Proletariado). The founders of the International Socialists had broken from the Fourth International in the 1940s, claiming that the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and its satellites was a new class in a new social system (state capitalism). This not only granted the Stalinist bureaucracy a certain legitimacy not due to its parasitic character, but expressed a prostration before the post-war stabilisation of imperialism. The IS’s radical phraseology, its glorification of trade union syndicalism combined with a semi-anarchist stance, served only to conceal its refusal to challenge the political domination of the working class by the social democratic and Stalinist bureaucracies.

The PRP gave unconditional support to the MFA and COPCON. It greeted “the MFA proposal of liaison between the MFA and the people” as a “great victory for those who have fought for months for the building of revolutionary councils.” The MFA proposal for a “military government without parties” neatly coincided with its own slogan of “a revolutionary government without parties.”

The United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec) had two organisations in Portugal—the official International Communist League (LCI—Liga Comunista Internacionalista) and a “sympathising” section—the Workers Revolutionary Party (PRT—Partido Revolucionário dos Trabalhadores). The USec arose from a split in the Fourth International in 1953. Led by Michel Pablo, the majority of the FI leadership concluded that Stalinism had proved capable of overthrowing capitalist power. It followed that the deformed workers states that the bureaucracy had set up in

Eastern Europe were the pattern of the future. Pressure on the bureaucracy—even a Third World War between the USSR and the United States—would force it into further political struggles, to take state power and institute “centuries of deformed workers states.”

The International Committee of the Fourth International rejected such impressionistic conclusions about the strength of Stalinism reached by the IS and USec and defended the analysis made by Leon Trotsky that either the working class would remove the parasitic bureaucracy in a political revolution or the bureaucracy would oversee the restoration of capitalism.

In its international magazine *Intercontinental Press* the USec rejected the MFA assembly proposals, saying Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho Carvalho was attempting to establish a “non-party military dictatorship.”

Whilst this was formally correct, the USec oriented towards the PSP and Constituent Assembly, hailing it as “the only forum in which the problems of the masses could be discussed openly.” Instead of calling for genuinely independent workers’ committees, the USec said calls for soviets were “anti-democratic” and “unreal.”

In Portugal both the Pabloite organisations supported the MFA and COPCON, calling on it to form “a real and solid unification with the movement of the exploited masses.” The PRT declared its previous characterisation of the MFA as “a bourgeois movement ... defending the fundamental interests of capital” was wrong now that it was introducing “dual power” and the military committees had become “an initiative in soviet power.”

The inability of the USec to provide a consistent analysis of the events in Portugal and at the most critical periods was shown in the August 4, 1975, issue of *Intercontinental Press*. One article said there was no threat of a military putsch, whilst another said events were moving towards an open military dictatorship. In the September 8 issue, an editorial by the USec’s chief theoretician Ernest Mandel reversed its previous line, condemning *Intercontinental Press* for its support for the Constituent Assembly and criticising the LCI for the way it collaborated with the PCP in the RUF.

This criticism was made not from the viewpoint that there must be an irreconcilable struggle to break the working class from the counterrevolutionary leadership of Stalinism, but because Mandel believed that the Portuguese had failed “to seize the opportunity to lead the PCP to take a position on the implementation of the essential tasks necessary for the progress of the revolution.”

Support for the MFA and COPCON came from the 70 or so other radical parties.

The Movement of the Socialist Left (MES—Movimento de Esquerda Socialista), which had arisen in a split in the PCP, in 1973 said that “working class support for the MFA must go hand in hand with support by the MFA for the working class.” It claimed it was not the right time to form a party—hence its claim only to be a movement—and that the PCP was “the only party able to mobilise the masses.”

The League of Unity and Revolutionary Action (LUAR—Liga de União e de Acção Revolucionária) had formed in 1967 as a direct action group concentrating on local issues under the slogan “socialism from below.” This organisation gave conditional support to the MFA for its “progressive measures,” claiming they would allow the workers to “create the embryos of alternative forms of social organisation.”

There were also a number of Maoist groups, the most important of which was the Revolutionary Movement of the Portuguese Proletariat (MRPP—Movimento Reorganizativo do Partido do Proletariado). The MRPP split from the PCP in 1970, which it now called “social-fascist.” The group lined up openly with the bourgeoisie. In the presidential elections of June 1976 the MRPP told their supporters to vote for Ramalho Eanes, the PSP-backed law-and-order candidate. MRPP leader Arnaldo Matos called COPCON “the most democratic police force in the world,” only to have it arrest over 400 MRPP militants in the Lisbon area in May 1975 using information held in old secret police files.

The MRPP’s only lasting “legacy” is that José Manuel Durao Barroso, a leader of the organisation during the revolution, is now prime minister of the right-wing-led Social Democratic Party coalition government.

In the face of continuing unrest during the “hot summer” of 1975, the “Group of Nine” officers around Melo Antunes on the Revolutionary Council warned of the state “degenerating into anarchy” and persuaded a majority of army delegates to remove Vasco Gonçalves. Having lost his majority, Prime Minister Gonçalves resigned. The PCP-dominated Fifth Provisional government, faced with an appeal to the working class to take power, simply resigned along with Gonçalves.

The PSP and PPD rejoined a Sixth Provisional government—yet again with the PCP—headed by Admiral José Baptista Pinheiro de Azevedo. Immediately the government circulated a secret plan known as the “Plan of the Colonels” calling for the implementation of the Antunes economic plan to revitalise the private sector and restructure the state sector. It called for laws to punish armed civilians, the formation of Groups for Military Intervention to disband COPCON and a purge of military units under leftist influence, to return Republica to the PSP and to “solve the problem” of Radio Renascenca. The workers at Radio Renascenca had taken over the station, which was owned by the Catholic Church, and it had become the main mouthpiece for FUR.

The crisis reached fever pitch. The newly formed Sixth government and the Council of the Revolution were opposed by so many sections of society that a situation of dual power existed.

On September 29, Prime Minister Pinheiro de Azevedo ordered the military occupation of all radio stations. COPCON swore to

“defend the workers.”

On November 7 the transmitters at Radio Renascenca were blown up. The next day, having learned nothing, the PRP appealed to officers in the MFA to lead an armed insurrection, saying, “Knowing the devotion to the revolutionary process of a great many officers of the Army and Navy, and knowing also the positions which they hold at the level of unit commands, it is easy to think of a scheme based on a sortie by these troops, in an operation of the type of April 25th.”

The PRP continued, “As all history shows, the bourgeoisie promotes civil war to defend its interests. Happily in Portugal the right wing does not have an army. They rely on mercenaries with bases in Spain, or on the armies of the US and NATO.”

Within days, the right wing showed just how wrong the PRP had been. Colonel António dos Santos Ramalho Eanes declared a state of emergency on November 25, 1975. The army and the United Military Front (FMU—Frente Militar Unida), which included the MRPP, Antunes and Ramalho Eanes, moved in to dismantle barricades and disarm workers and soldiers with scarcely a shot being fired. COPCON, along with “rank-and-file” military organisations such as Soldiers United Will Win (SUV—Soldados Unidos Vencerão), which in the previous weeks had mobilised tens of thousands in demonstrations, dissolved in the face of some 200 commandos.

In January 1976 food prices increased by 40 percent, Radio Renascenca was handed back to the Church and most of the secret police in PIDE released.

A new constitution was proclaimed on April 2, 1976, pledging the country to realise socialism. It declared the nationalisations and land seizures irreversible. Several weeks later elections for the new parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, were held—leading to a PSP victory. Almost immediately Soares turned to the IMF and implemented a structural adjustment programme.

Over the years the bourgeoisie have taken back what they had been forced to concede. The current government of Durao Barroso is completing the gutting of social conditions with its policies on labour flexibility (exploitation), redistribution of wealth to the rich and privatisation.

That the Portuguese bourgeoisie weathered the revolution is thanks to the betrayal of the PCP and its radical hangers-on who tied the working class to the bourgeois parties, the state machine and the MFA. The success of the Portuguese Revolution would have been a mighty blow to international capital and inspired the movements developing throughout the world in the 1970s.



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