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Nahuel Moreno

Letters to Joseph Hansen on the Key Issues of the Portuguese Revolution

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Table of Contents

Letters to Joseph Hansen on the Key Issues of the Portuguese Revolution

Foreword 1

Letter dated 16 July 1975 2

Letter dated 21 August 1975 6

I) Four principled points on which we totally agree and disagree with the majority 6

II) Strategy and Tactics in the Portuguese Workers' Revolution 8

Note dated 29 August 1975 11

Foreword

On 25 April 1974, the "Carnation Revolution" triumphed in Portugal, led by the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), which succeeded in overthrowing the long-standing fascist dictatorship of the Estado Novo headed by Marcelo Caetano. Various sections of the Fourth International (United Secretariat) were involved in the revolutionary process of those years, and there were significant theoretical developments and debates. In August 1973, the Morenoist current had formed, together with the SWP of the United States, the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction in opposition to the Mandelist majority (which had grouped itself within the International Majority Tendency in March of that year).

From 1974/75 onwards, the Morenoist current sent several leaders to Portugal (Antenor from Brazil, Pedro Fuentes and Aldo Casas from Argentina), and Moreno himself made several trips there. Various theoretical and political orientation papers were produced, characterising the situation in Portugal as the high point of the European revolution. In this regard, we may mention the two issues of *Cuadernos de Revista de América* (published in August 1975 and February 1976) and Moreno's important text, reproduced in *Cuaderno* No. 1, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Portugal* (available at nahuelmoreno.org).

We present here three letters from Nahuel Moreno addressed to Joseph Hansen, a leader of the SWP in the United States, in which points of agreement are highlighted, and certain issues are raised with a view to drafting a document for the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction. The differences with the SWP's positions on the development of the revolutionary process in Portugal became increasingly acute, and new points of contention emerged (among others, regarding the Angolan revolution), leading Moreno and his current to break definitively with the SWP and to found the Bolshevik Tendency in Bogotá in February 1976 — which remained part of the Fourth International (Unified Secretariat) until 1979.

The notes are from the editors.

The editors

November 2026

Letters to Joseph Hansen on the Key Issues of the Portuguese Revolution

Letter dated 16 July 1975

Buenos Aires, 16 July 1975

My dear Joe,[1]

I received your letter dated 4 July at the end of last week. Like you, we believe the Portuguese problem is of enormous importance for the future of our International, and we are delighted by the way you are consulting us on it. We attach so much importance to it that last month's issue of *Revista de América*[2] included a 12 to 16-page supplement devoted to the subject. We planned to publish Gus's[3] work, Livio's[4] two articles, the resolution of the Political Bureau of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR)[5] on [the newspaper] *República*, and an extensive piece of mine giving an exhaustive position on the subject. Unfortunately, my work, which is very long, has not yet — like the rest of the articles — been published because our printing press broke down. For the same reason, *Avanzada Socialista*[6] has been poorly published and late, as we had to resort to another printer. However, the delay has its advantages: it has allowed me to read Germain's[7] horrendous article in *Intercontinental Press (IP)*[8] this week. We plan to publish it and respond to it to update the long article with the latest developments. In a few days, the double issue of *Revista*

1 **Joseph Hansen** (1910–1979) was an American Trotskyist and the main leader of the Socialist Workers Party after the death of its founder, James Cannon. He was Leon Trotsky's secretary and lived with him in Coyoacán, Mexico City, when he was assassinated in 1940 by one of Stalin's agents. From the 1970s onwards, he led the alliance and capitulation to Mandelism, supported the bourgeois Sandinista government and the repression of the Simon Bolivar Brigade in Nicaragua in 1979, and the subsequent total shift towards Castroism.

2 ***Revista de América***: Magazine of the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores [Revolutionary Workers Party] (PRT-*La Verdad*) and the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores [Socialist Workers Party] (PST). The editorial board consisted of Hugo Blanco, Nahuel Moreno, and Ernesto González. Published in 1969–1973, 1975, and 1977–1978.

3 **Gus Horowitz** (1941-2024) was a central leader of the US Socialist Workers Party (SWP) from the mid-1960s through the 1970s. He also played a central role in the international work of the SWP and the Fourth International.

4 **Livio Maitán** (1923-2004) was the main leader of the Italian Trotskyist group and an ally of Mandel and Pablo. In 1967, representing the Unified Secretariat, he visited Argentina to support Santucho's faction in the PRT. Together with Mandel, he was a promoter of the guerrilla deviation approved by a majority vote at the Ninth Congress in December 1969.

5 **Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Workers League) (LCR)**, was the French section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.

6 ***Avanzada Socialista*** (1972–1976 was the weekly periodical of the PST.

7 **Ernest Germain**, pseudonym of **Ernest Mandel** (1923-1995), born in Belgium, was one of the main leaders of Trotskyism since post-war period, and also a Marxist economist. Together with Michel Pablo, he pushed for the reorganisation of the Fourth International after Trotsky's assassination, and from the early 1950s, they headed the opportunist sector that pushed for capitulation to Stalinism, social democracy and the bourgeois nationalist leaderships. They were responsible for the crisis and dispersion of Trotskyism ever since. From the 1960s until his death, he headed the so-called "Unified Secretariat" of the Fourth International. Moreno has numerous polemical works against Mandel, including *Argentina and Bolivia — A Balance Sheet* (1972), *The Party and the Revolution* (1973), and *The Revolutionary Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (1979) which can be found at nahuelmoreno.org.

8 **Intercontinental Press (IP)** was a weekly news magazine produced by the SWP on behalf of the Fourth International (FI) between 1963 and 1986.

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de América will be out, and you will be able to read our position "in extenso". Even if it isn't published, I am sending you a copy of the article to be sent urgently to New York, so you can know our position as soon as possible. Now, to the point.

We agree, in essence, with the points you raise. To avoid any misunderstanding, I would like to highlight some fundamental points of agreement with your letter. We agree one hundred per cent on "the importance of the struggle for democratic rights" and the characterisation of the Armed Forces Movement (MFA)[9] as a bourgeois government whose real objective is to maintain capitalism in Portugal. **Anyone who disagrees with this definition is crossing the boundaries of our International and our principles**. Almost all other points of agreement stem from this one. However, we have differences on the following points:

"2. – The MFA government is a bourgeois institution". We find this formulation confusing, or it means the same thing as the quote I made earlier. If so, it should be stated clearly. On the other hand, we also agree one hundred per cent with the characterisation that its "main task is to block the socialist revolution and retain as much of the colonial empire as possible, using neocolonial forms". We do not agree with the formula of bourgeois institution because we believe that it should be specified that it is a Kerenskyist expression; our formulation is "institutionalised Kerenskyism", that is, it fulfils the role of Kerensky, but as a group of officers.

Regarding point 3, we agree two hundred thousand per cent. To avoid confusion, it must be stressed that we want the "withdrawal of troops with their weapons now, right now". We must launch this slogan to combat the argument that some of the guerrilla groups should be given weapons because one is more progressive than any other. Throughout the year, we have followed with great concern the position of CS and the League in Portugal on the colonial problem. We have discovered that for the League, during the election campaign, the problem did not exist and, unfortunately, for CS doesn't either, as it only mentions the problem three times. Lately, to add insult to injury, we have seen them launch the stupid and pro-imperialist slogan of giving weapons to one of the Angolan organisations, exactly the same one that the charlatan Rosa Coutinho[10] ponders and says we must help.

We disagree with the way point 7 is formulated. It is one of the "outstanding issues", and not the only one. The other has to do with the soviets. This is where we believe the only fundamental difference between us lies. It is our opinion that in Portugal there is no Soviet process, but there are massive factory occupations and a great development of workers' commissions. All reports agree on this. **This is the most important fact, for us, of the ongoing Portuguese revolution: it means a kind of dual power, not Soviet but another, more immature kind, but dual power nonetheless.**

The development of this process is as important as the other, and the two are closely linked. **There is a counter revolutionary offensive by the MFA and the CP; this is the key to many incomprehensible phenomena if this fact is not taken into account**. We see the situation as follows: the MFA-CP are

9 **The Armed Forces Movement** (MFA) — which emerged from the ranks of middle and lower-ranking officers who led the coup of 25 April 1974 — overthrew the Estado Novo dictatorship headed by Marcelo Caetano and went on to lead the provisional governments during the Carnation Revolution. The Portuguese Communist Party and sections of the left presented it as an ally of the revolution, a position also shared by sections of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, particularly Ernest Mandel's faction. Nahuel Moreno argued against this characterisation, defining the MFA as a petty-bourgeois leadership and the regime as Kerenskyist in nature, and characterising the government as a bourgeois united front designed to channel the rise of the workers and the people towards bourgeois democracy. To explore this view in greater depth, we recommend reading *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Portugal* (1975), available at nahuelmoreno.org.

10 **Alva Rosa Coutinho** (1926–2010), known as the "Red Admiral", rose to prominence following the Carnation Revolution, when he was appointed High Commissioner in Angola. His role in the African colonies was to steer the decolonisation process along bureaucratic lines, ensuring control over the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and curbing the revolutionary rise of the masses.

very similar to the government of Largo Caballero,[11] Companys,[12] Negrin[13] in one: their objective is directly counterrevolutionary on all fronts. This applies to relations between powers at the level of factories, establishments and regiments, as well as to democratic freedoms. The main task of revolutionaries at this moment is to unmask the role of the MFA-CP as agents of the imperialist counterrevolution in all fields, mainly that of dual power and that of democratic freedoms.

I have deliberately left until last a very significant difference in characterisation that we have. We disagree with the first two sentences of point 4: "The MFA is the political instrument of the military hierarchy. In government, it is playing a bourgeois Bonapartist role." For us, the MFA is Kerenskyism and the government is a typical Popular Front government; that is, according to Trotskyist terminology, it is a Kerenskyist government of class collaboration. One cannot, as Gus does, say that the great danger is a Pinochet-style[14] coup and define the MFA and its government as Bonapartist. And the coup that may come, what is it? Fascism or Bonapartism? And what was Spínola's[15] coup, Bonapartist? With a definition of this kind, we disarm the movement. Leaving aside the fact that we do not believe that such a danger exists at present, the main and immediate danger is the MFA-CP.

Regarding the following sentence: "Individual members of the MFA may be of petty-bourgeois origin and, under certain circumstances, one or two, or possibly more, may join the revolutionary cause"; we also disagree, but only with the first part of the sentence, not with the second. For us, the **whole** MFA has a petty-bourgeois origin, not just some individuals. We base this not on the social affiliation of the lower officers (i.e., whether or not their parents are bourgeois), but on the socio-political characterisation of the army as a structure. According to Trotsky, the lower officers of the army are the expression of the modern middle class, and the armed forces in their structure reflect society as a whole. Because of this role, the radicalised lower officers can play their role as great class conciliators, as agents of the imperialist counterrevolution in the mass movement, using the reformist parties. In other words, it can once again play its Kerenskyist role. If it were merely an "instrument" of the high military hierarchy and of bourgeois origin, it would not serve as an intermediary between the bourgeois parties and the reformist workers' parties. This is why we agree with the end of the sentence, although we would change "government" to "MFA" or leave both words: "that is why it would be a violation of the principles of Trotskyism to base one's attitude towards the government and the MFA on the possibility of ...", and we would change the last two words to these: "that it may come to have a working-class and revolutionary orientation, since, despite being the expression of the modern imperialist middle class, it is a perfidious counterrevolutionary agent of imperialism". And we would add: 'this does not mean that some individuals or sectors cannot orient themselves towards left-wing positions, but, with few exceptions, those positions will also be at the service of the bourgeois counterrevolution, which does not mean that we should not use and promote them."

11 **Francisco Largo Caballero** (1869-1946). Leader of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) and the General Union of Workers (UGT), he was a minister in the governments of the Second Republic and became Prime Minister in 1936, during the Civil War. He led the wing that radicalised to the left. Pierre Broué, in his book *Trotsky and the Spanish Civil War* (Jorge Alvarez Editores, Buenos Aires, 1966), recounts that young socialists marched with posters of Lenin and Trotsky and that Largo Caballero, in one of his speeches, proclaimed the need for a Fourth International.

12 **Lluís Companys** (1882–1940) was a Catalan politician. He was the President of Catalonia from 1934 to and during the Spanish Civil War.

13 **Juan Negrín López** (1892–1956) was a Spanish physician and politician who served as prime minister of the Second Spanish Republic. He was a leader of the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) and of the Popular Front government during the Spanish Civil War. He also served as minister of finance and minister of defence. He was the last republican premier of Spain (1937–1939), leading the government forces defeated by the Nationalists under General Francisco Franco. He went into exile in Paris, France, where he died in exile on 12 November 1956.

14 **Augusto Pinochet** (1915–2006) was the leader of the military junta that overthrew Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government in Chile on 11 September 1973. He headed a pro-American, genocidal dictatorship between 1973 and 1990, during which tens of thousands of opponents were tortured and many were killed. He was arrested in London on international charges of crimes against humanity. When he returned to Chile, he was granted house arrest "for health reasons" and due to his advanced age. He died before the trial was completed.

15 **Antonio de Spínola** (1910–1996) was an important military leader during the Salazar/Caetano dictatorship. After the Carnation Revolution, organised by low-ranking military captains, he was invited to become the first President of Portugal. See more in *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Portugal* (1975), at nahuelmoreno.org.

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We are also concerned about what *Tuny*[16] and Mario [Doglio][17] may have said. Although we found an explanation in the memorandum with a very hypothetical intervention by me, which was sent to Mario and Aldo [Casas],[18] clarifying that it was useless and that we only wanted to encourage you to send us documentation. This memorandum, with Mario's telephone responses and comments, was known to *Tuny*. All of this may have led to confusion. *Tuny* gave us some preliminary comments on your document. Speaking with Mercedes [Petit][19] before leaving New York, he told her, very alarmed, that he believed the faction could be divided over this issue and that there were two points on which he believed there would be no agreement with Aldo and Mario: The *República* and Angola. Mercedes asked him to summarise what the document said. Upon learning your position on these two issues, she immediately replied to *Tuny* that we were in complete agreement on both issues and that our disagreements were with Mario and Aldo. Mercedes did not know what to make of *Tuny*'s confusion. With great care, to avoid a crisis, we called Mario on the phone and told him that there was a long document of mine on the Portuguese situation and that he should please read *Avanzada Socialista* to find out our position on the *República* and be very careful with what he said and did until he had thoroughly researched the ongoing discussion. We did not want to intervene more fully because it is not our custom. Personally, I have not made any calls or written any letters. I have only written an article, and now I intend to polemicise directly with Germain. On the other hand, I think you are right and, if we do not have a clear and categorical principled position on Portugal, the dissolution of the faction is justified in order to call for the formation of another faction. Germain's position is POUMism[20] of the worst kind and must be fought mercilessly. But, in all honesty, we must clarify what factory occupations, soldiers' committees and workers' commissions mean. Is this dual power or not? Should they be promoted or not? Is this the greatest achievement of the workers' and mass movement in Portugal, together with the Constituent Assembly and democratic freedoms, or not? About these, we believe that freedom of association must be defended to the death, but that the existence and development of the Intersindical and the industry unions must be defended just as much as that freedom. Separated from this defence of the Intersindical and the industry unions, it can be used by the reactionaries. This does not mean that we should not unite to fight for freedom of association, and only for that, with anyone. But, as Trotskyists, we must make it clear that we are staunchly in favour of the Intersindical and the existing industry unions, and that we are also against the bureaucratised Stalinist leaderships.

I believe that there is sufficient common ground to achieve a platform for the faction in Portugal.

Hugo

16 **Raúl Marcos *Tuny* Kollmann** (1949–) is an Argentine journalist, writer and presenter. Between 1976 and 1980, he lived with his family in Colombia.

17 **Mario Doglio** was a leader in the La Plata regional branch and the PST's representative in the USec during those years. He spent some time in exile in Bogotá.

18 **Aldo Andrés Casas**, pseudonym **Andrés Romero** (b. 1944), joined the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT) in 1965. He was a member of the leadership of the PST and the MAS. He was active in Venezuela, Portugal after the fall of the dictatorship, and also in France. He broke with the Morenoist current in 1993. From the magazine *Herramienta*, he promoted horizontalism, anti-party and "socialism from below" positions. He supported Zapatismo in Mexico and Chavismo in Venezuela, and for several years, he was a member of the Dario Santillan Front in Buenos Aires.

19 **Mercedes Petit** is a Trotskyist militant, journalist, and researcher. In the 1960s, she joined the current headed by Nahuel Moreno, with whom she collaborated in theoretical elaboration and propaganda tasks. After the 1976 military coup, they shared exile in Colombia. Petit wrote *Elementary Political Concepts* and *Our Experience with Lambertism* in 1986, together with Nahuel Moreno (both available at nahuelmoreno.org); i(2005), and *Working Women and Marxism* (2009, with Carmen Carrasco). She writes in *El Socialista* (izquierdasocialista.org.ar) and *International Correspondence* (uit-ci.org).

20 It refers to the politics of the **Workers Party of Marxist Unification (POUM)** arising from the union between the Spanish Communist Left (ICE), led by Andrés Nin, and the reformist organization Workers' and Peasants' Bloc, which was headed by Maurín.

Letter dated 21 August 1975

Oberlin, 21 August, 1975

Dear Joe,

The purpose of this letter is to convey our observations on the draft of *The Key Issues in the Portuguese Revolution*.[21] Since I arrived in the United States and became acquainted with your last letter to us, we deliberately decided not to answer it in order to concentrate on the discussion of the key problems and avoid any polemical digressions. We are telling you this because we intend to clarify some statements in your letter in another reply, even though we generally agree with it.

Before making our observations, we would like to point out that we would prefer the Portuguese document to have a structure similar to that of your national document. The fact that Portugal is experiencing a revolutionary situation makes it more imperative than ever to define the essential features of the stage we are living through and the major strategic lines. We say this anticipating the possible objection that the document on the United States has that structure precisely because you are not experiencing a pre-revolutionary stage. We believe that in a pre-revolutionary stage, where the situation, slogans, and tasks change daily, it is more crucial than ever not to lose sight of the strategic direction and the general definition of the stage in the tactical issues of the moment.

I) Four principled points on which we totally agree and disagree with the majority

Jack [Barnes][22] was the first to specify a series of ideas that we want to emphasise. If we remember correctly, he pointed out that the three major issues of debate between majority and minority in the last seven years have been synthesised, updated and magnified around the Portuguese revolution. Specifically, the old differences have become explosive. These three major topics of discussion, reconsidered in Portugal, have been the following:

1.– The debate on the guerrilla strategy in Bolivia and Argentina, as in Latin America, which marked the beginning of the factional struggle, involved another, deeper problem: It was an expression of the majority's strategy of creating phantom organisations, "armies of the people," guerrillas, "grassroots" organisations — against the unions and the organisations and mobilisations of the masses. Today, this same difference exists in Portugal, amplified to incredible degrees. The debate around "*República*" and "the rights of the Socialist Party" is a repetition of the old debate. To pit future soviets or organisations — such as the people's assemblies created by the MFA for its counterrevolutionary objectives — against an existing mass organisation, such as the Socialist Party and its rights, is to fall into the same old but aggravated error. This

21 ***The Key Issues in the Portuguese Revolution***, was 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.

22 **Jack Barnes** (b. 1940) has been the national secretary of the Socialist Workers Party of the United States since 1972. Barnes was a key proponent of the party's "turn to industry" in the 1970s, its departure from the Fourth International (Unified Secretariat) in the 1980s and its complete capitulation to Fidel Castro and the Cuban Communist Party in the 1990s, which definitively alienated the SWP from the ranks of Trotskyism.

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aggravation stems from the fact that the people's armies and guerrilla groups were a pure expression of the far left, but in the Portuguese case these "phantom" organisations are a directly counterrevolutionary expression, in which the far left plays the role of "useful idiot". In other words, it is much more serious: the majority has gone from supporting "phantom" organisations of the far left in Latin America to supporting "phantom" organisations of the Bonapartist counterrevolution.

2.– Our faction's European document clearly highlighted the difference with the majority in the orientation of work was clearly highlighted. While the majority faction was orienting itself towards the new vanguard, the far-left groups, trying to achieve a common program that would mobilise these sectors and enable us to carry out exemplary actions, the minority faction put forward the traditional Marxist position of orienting ourselves towards the masses with the method of the transitional program to achieve their mobilisation. This theoretical, political, and programmatic difference has manifested itself in the streets of Portugal. While on the one hand, the majority, with Alain Krivine[23] at the head and his hordes of "revolutionary tourists", parade through the streets of Lisbon, arm in arm with this new vanguard, carrying out various "exemplary actions" — for example, demanding the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and supporting COPCON,[24] the MFA and their popular assemblies— on the other hand, we should and could have accompanied or participated in the mobilisations of the socialist masses who defended their democratic rights. More specifically, we were politically in opposite demonstrations: they accompanying the new vanguard and we accompanying the movement of the socialist masses.

3.– The third major difference centred on the defence of bourgeois democratic freedoms and their institutions in Argentina. With its characteristic confusion, the majority has operated with the principle that bourgeois democratic freedoms should not be defended and that the only ones that deserve to be defended are the workers' freedoms. When cornered by us, they have grudgingly accepted that some bourgeois democratic freedoms can be defended but not the institutions that give concrete form to these freedoms. This is what they say, although we confess it is almost impossible for us to understand and explain it since we do not know how one can be for divorce and not for the law that sanctions it, that is, for the bourgeois democratic institution "divorce". But this is what they have said, and along these lines we have fought. The majority has rightly pointed out that we uncompromisingly defend bourgeois democratic freedoms and their institutions against any attack by the bourgeois reaction. This difference in Portugal has also manifested itself in the streets and around the highest institution of bourgeois democracy, which is the Constituent Assembly. While the far left and the majority support the struggle against the Constituent Assembly with the argument that it is a bourgeois institution, playing into the hands of the counterrevolutionary plan of the MFA to suppress it, we defend the Constituent Assembly; we fight against the pact, we defend the right of the people to choose their government through the vote, as well as freedom of the press and the rights of the socialist party and we confront the counterrevolutionary plan of the MFA-CP.

4.– These three programmatic and principled issues, which we have discussed with the majority — and which have taken on an explosive character in Portugal, have combined with a new matter of principle: **the character of the Portuguese government**.

The fact that the MFA government is the first imperialist government in the last 30 years to be extremely weak in the face of the mass movement — due to the colossal rise of the masses—has had several consequences. The first is that this government has been forced to carry out all kinds of demagogic, divisive and diversionary manoeuvres to slow down or fragment the mass movement, with the specific aim of defeating it. The second is that the majority, like the far left, has mistaken the weakness of the government in the face of the masses, as well as its manoeuvres and demagoguery, as positive facts that change the counterrevolutionary imperialist character of this or some of its factions. The third is that the majority has ceased to fight the current Portuguese government, with all its factions, as the main political enemy of

23 **Alain Krivine** (1941–2022) was a French Trotskyist leader. He was one of the main youth leaders of the great upsurge that began in France in May 1968 in Paris. A founder of the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), the French section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. He was the LCR's candidate in the 1969 French presidential election, obtaining 1.05% of the vote, and served as a Member of the European Parliament from 1999 to 2004.

24 The **Comando Operacional do Continente (COPCON)**, [English: Operational Command of the Continent] was a military command for Portugal created by the Armed Forces Movement in the period following the revolution of 25 April 1974 and was dissolved after the failed coup of 25 November 1975.

the Portuguese workers, since it is the repressive organ of imperialism. And the government does not lose this character even during moments of counterrevolutionary coup either, even if we change our tactics of struggle against it. Instead of directing all its agitation and propaganda to denounce this government with all its factions as an agent of the imperialist bourgeoisie, we have begun to hear expressions such as "power vacuum", "the left wing of the revolutionary, unconscious MFA", "which would be oriented towards workers' power", or other similar variants.

As I pointed out to you in my letter of 16 July, to be a Trotskyist today, it is crucial to agree with your characterisation that "the MFA is a bourgeois government whose real objective is to maintain capitalism in Portugal" and also imperialism; as can be seen from other points in your letter.

Where, then, can the differences lie if we agree on these four points of principle? When various comrades have asked us what the essential differences are between us, we have had to answer: "We do not know if these differences exist". In an effort to clarify the positions well, we will point out the issues that, in our opinion, are not properly specified in your draft.

II) Strategy and Tactics in the Portuguese Workers' Revolution

We believe we are in agreement – although the draft does not state this explicitly –that since the putsch of 25 April last year, what we are seeing in Portugal is an ongoing workers' revolution. In other words, that the stage that has opened up mainly since the last coup in March is nothing more and nothing less than that of the socialist revolution. Portugal has entered a stage of a few months or years that has, exceptionally, occurred in some imperialist countries every 20, 30, 40 or 50 years. It is an exceptional situation. It does not matter whether we define it as pre-revolutionary or revolutionary; what is important is to recognise that the workers' movement, through its mobilisations and supported by the mass movement in general, has achieved a capacity for mobilisation that has the bourgeoisie and its representative — the MFA government — in check. Specifically, it is an acute pre-revolutionary or outright revolutionary situation, because the working class together with the broad masses has begun a process of general mobilisation in pursuit of various objectives and needs. So, what is required is to do the same as you did with your national document, that is, to point out the broad strategic lines for the stage that has opened up of the generalised mobilisation of the Portuguese masses.

From reading the draft, one can get the false impression that the great strategic objective for the stage that opened up in Portugal is the defence of the current Constituent Assembly, that is, the defence of the highest bourgeois democratic institution. We shouldn't debate whether or not to defend it, as we agree that it is a matter of principle to defend it and to promote it against the MFA's attempts to dismantle or curtail it.

If we think so — which we don't — it must be stated with absolute clarity: the essential objective that we propose to the masses for the present historical stage is the establishment of a free and sovereign Constituent Assembly. If this were the case, we would disagree.

We believe that the Constituent Assembly, like democratic freedoms, is one of the primary or principled political objectives, the only or almost the only one capable of mobilising the masses at present. But strategically, for the entire open stage, our main, strategic objective is to encourage the masses to found their organs of power against the MFA and the bourgeoisie. This means promoting, under all circumstances, the possible organs of workers' power. To put it another way, for us it is a Trotskyist principle that when a situation of widespread mass mobilisation arises in a country — or, what is the same, when a revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situation arises — the essential, strategic focus is to encourage the masses to develop their organs of workers' power so that they may seize power and make the socialist revolution.

We consider it appropriate to point out, in one way or another, the following points:

1.– That this long-term, principled strategy of Trotskyism in a pre-revolutionary or revolutionary stage is the one that is applied today in Portugal.

2.– There is no possibility of developing this strategy without an appropriate tactic to mobilise the masses around all their present needs and aspirations.

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3.– That the correct tactic at this moment is fundamentally the defence of democratic freedoms, the defence of the rights of the Socialist Party, the struggle to impose a free and sovereign constituent assembly and the breaking of the pact. Without these political struggles there is no possibility of carrying out the strategy.

4. That these tactical necessities must not and cannot make us forget the strategic necessity of developing the organs of workers' power.

5.– This strategy for the stage is permanently combined with our fundamental historical strategy: that of building mass Trotskyist parties. We didn't place it as the first point — as the main strategy — because this is precisely not the specific one for this stage, as is the development of workers' power, but it is the permanent strategy that exists above and beyond the different stages. In this sense we can say that in relation to the historical task of building the party, the strategy for the stage — namely, of developing the organs of workers' power — is a historical tactic and, as such, is subordinate.

These points are of fundamental importance, even if they may seem very general and even though the disastrous politics of the majority appears to be hidden behind these strategic assertions. We must make explicit our agreement on them, because if there are no discrepancies, it is not redundant to point them out.

We are working on a memorandum of observations and a few modifications to the draft. We thought it was essential to send you these very general considerations because the memorandum is not of great importance.

A hug,

Hugo

PS: This whole strategic question may seem to the comrades who have recently arrived at the movement somewhat declamatory. However, it is of decisive importance for day-to-day activity, as you and the SWP know better than anyone. Let's take an example from present-day Portugal: the socialist demonstrations. Our participation in them was the only way to strengthen or establish our relations with the potential organs of power and directly with the class, as well as to strengthen the party and weaken the manoeuvres of the Socialist Party leadership. Let's take a closer look at this policy. The Socialist Party leadership does not want many demonstrations in the streets, nor permanent mobilisation of the workers — let alone that of other parties — for the defence of their rights. It wants a limited mobilisation to defend itself and counterattack, to impose its Popular Front government on the MFA. It is a tactic of limited pressure on the government to impose its strategy of Popular Front government.

By participating and marching a short distance alongside the Socialist Party and its workers, we have different objectives that will be reflected in our own tactics. First and foremost, around the common objectives for the defence of their rights, we disagree on the methods. While the Socialist Party only wants to hold concentrations spaced out in time and space, from city to city, we intend to mobilise the socialist masses first, and then the entire mass movement to confront the government and defend the rights of the Socialist Party. Hence, in such a joint action with the socialists, we aim to link ourselves to the socialist workers' activists. This contact, this dialogue with their activists, must have a clear objective: that these activists join us in going to the workplaces, to the workers' commissions (if they actually exist), and to their union to call for assemblies where we can discuss doing what their leadership does not want them to do: agitating against the military dictatorship at the grassroots level, and trying to get the rank-and-file comrades of their factory, their union or their workers' commission, to speak out in defence of the rights of their party and to participate in its demonstrations. If successful, policy can lead us by the hand to the possibility of raising the slogan: that the Socialist Party, together with the workers' commissions, the ad hoc committees and the unions that support their democratic rights organise a general strike in defence of those rights. This policy would allow us to engage with hundreds or thousands of socialist workers, dozens of activists, and to promote many factory assemblies together with socialist activists where it would be possible to orient the workers' commissions towards the struggle against the government, which would help to revitalise them. The possibilities of growth and penetration in the workers' movement, as well as

of promoting or propagandising grassroots organisations, would mean a colossal leap in the building of the party.

All our policy and strategy would be summarised in this simple proposal of our rank-and-file Trotskyist militant to the socialist worker that we will contact in the demonstrations. We will tell him: " Socialist Comrade: we stand shoulder to shoulder with you and your party in the defence of *República*, in the right you have to own your press, radio and television. Don't you think about raising this issue with your factory comrades? How about we raise it together? How about we campaign together to get them to come to the next demonstration, to support our struggle for your party's rights? Wouldn't it be a good idea to hold a factory assembly as we did during the two Spinola coups? Doesn't the situation with *República* seem similar to that under Spinola?

This is the only way we will bring our strategy to the heart of the workers' movement. Is this workerism? For us it is quite the opposite; it is the tactical application of the principles of Trotskyism.

Propositions for corrections and additions to the document The Key Issues in the Portuguese Revolution.

These corrections aim to point out what we consider incorrect, and we leave open the possibility of modifying nuances in the final draft of the text.

First correction: Page 3, third paragraph: Strike out "classical Bonapartist government", leaving the rest and adding "with a counterrevolutionary Bonapartist plan that the masses through their struggles have so far prevented from being carried out to its ultimate consequences".

Second correction: Page 9, where reference is made to "five axes of the revolutionary process in Portugal at the present stage". We would say: "six axes of the revolutionary ...". "f) The struggle against the economic crisis, through transitional demands."

Third correction: Fourth paragraph, right-hand side, where it says "The future..."; add at the end of the sentence: "To mobilise the masses, through their organs of power, towards the socialist revolution." [Here Moreno makes a handwritten correction that I could not decipher]

Fourth Correction: Chapter on the Constituent Assembly. Rewrite it in such a way that the following aspects can be incorporated:

1.– Make it absolutely clear that our policy for a free and sovereign Constituent Assembly will continue even if this constituent assembly is dissolved or ceases to function. Furthermore, that this same policy will also continue, becoming more and more current, as the organs of workers' power develop. Both policies — the Constituent Assembly and the organs of workers' power — are closely linked.

2.– We consider it necessary to crystallise in a slogan the political wisdom of the document to raise the line of "fight for popular sovereignty". We suggest, for example, "Out with the military government that no one voted for. For a government freely voted for by all the people."

www.nahuelmoreno.org

Note dated 29 August 1975

New York, 29 August 1975

Dear Joe,

In a few hours, I am leaving for London, and I will try to greet you by telephone. I have been thinking about the arrangements that I consider necessary to make to the Document on Portugal, and I have reached the following position: We must add two chapters to it: one, as an introduction, on the importance of the Portuguese socialist revolution and another, as an epilogue, with the transitional program for it. If I recall correctly, your speech at the FLT meeting had that orientation, especially with regard to the program.

So, unless I have misunderstood, I am enclosing a draft for the introduction, and for the programme I suggest you take as your basis the one included in my article published in the Cuaderno de *Revista de América* (X. 4, pp. 65–66), adapting it, of course, to the text that emerges from the overall document.

I think that the program's introduction could be worded as follows: "We must resist any temptation to draw up a program that is a collection of slogans of all kinds. The program should be a set of slogans for a particular stage of the struggle, organised around a central theme; a programmatic structure, not a collection. The central theme must be the one already pointed out in this work: to defend the constituent assembly, popular sovereignty, and within this framework to demand government for the Communist Party and the Socialist Party, but all this to develop and centralise the seeds of dual power so that they can take power. Only in this way will we achieve a comprehensible program for the Portuguese revolution."

Following this criterion, it is appropriate to modify point G (p. 66) in the sense of the defence of the current constituent assembly, but I believe that this should be combined with maintaining the slogan of a new revolutionary constituent assembly, because I am convinced that "the constituent assembly was born dead".

It must also be clearly stated in point C (p. 65) that all nationalisations must be carried out without expropriation.

Furthermore, I have drafted the text and, in some cases, I have merely indicated the general idea of the corrections that I understand reflect the discussion we have had within the Faction, and that will bring us decisively closer to the Portuguese reality. I have marked the paragraphs that need revision on the Spanish version, and for this I apologise.

All the work has been prepared with Mario, who can clarify the meaning of each correction and the significance, for us, of the additions.

I apologise once again for not having worked on the English version.v

I trust we are in full agreement.

A hug,

Hugo

PS: I would like to know if you plan to publish my article on Portugal. In this regard, I hasten to tell you that I intend to rewrite the entire final part to align it with the discussion that we have carried out and, above all, to include all the documentation on the development of the dual power organisations and their real situation, that I may gather on the trip. I confess that I hope to publish a short book[25] based on my work.

Please feel free to share your comments with Mario.

Affectionately,

Hugo.

25 See *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Portugal* (1975) at nahuelmoreno.org.

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