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Lower East Side

September 24

Dear Mary-Alice,

Here is a letter for the LTF Coordinating Committee.

Comradely,

Dave Kay

David Keil
c/o SWP
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September 24, 1975

Coordinating Committee
Leninist-Trotskyist Faction

Dear Comrades,

I disagree with two terms used in connection with the Liga Comunista Internacionalista of Portugal. Both can be found in the September 22 Intercontinental Press.

In an article by Andy Rose, the author refers to the LCI as "Trotskyist" (p. 1232) In an article by Gerry Foley, the LCI leaders are referred to as "sincere revolutionists." (p. 1227.)

Presumably the writers were using the terms in the broad sense. In my opinion, this is too broad at this time, imprecise, politically wrong, and harmful in the context of what the LCI has been doing in Portugal. Supporters of the LTF are mistaken to use these terms in reference to the LCI leadership; they would also be mistaken to use them in referring to the IMT leadership, which supports the LCI leadership. The LCI and IMT are centrist in character. This means that they are not Trotskyist and not revolutionary, from an objective point of view, even though they may call themselves Trotskyist and many people may consider them revolutionary. It would be better just to identify the LCI as a sympathizing organization of the Fourth International and leave it at that.

If the LCI were Trotskyist, it would not have signed the August 25 "Unity Accord" with the Portuguese CP and others. Nor would it have sent its representatives to the press conference where the Manifesto of the Front of Revolutionary Unity was presented. These documents clearly support the bourgeois MFA and the Stalinist party, politically, and in fact give overall support to the stated program of leading direct representatives of the Portuguese imperialists. The Manifesto, for example, calls for "national independence" for Portugal and the Unity Accord says that the Copcon document published August 13 and the "Lines of Programmatic Action" document of Goncalves "constitute a valid working basis for the elaboration of a revolutionary political program."

If the LCI were revolutionary, it would not have even considered joining these utterly reactionary blocs.

The LCI leadership has indicated it has differences with certain major parts of the earlier document. If it were sincere and politically honest, it would not have signed the document which it claims to disagree with.

The LCI leadership has totally discredited itself, in my opinion. If anyone can present evidence that the LCI has any attraction for revolutionary-minded people in Portugal (as opposed to the ultraleft-minded people among whom it seems to swim), it should be brought forth. Having abandoned any pretense to political independence, the LCI has itself been abandoned by its Stalinist August 25 ally.

To call the LCI "Trotskyist" rather than centrist would completely disorient any genuinely revolutionary-minded militants who remain inside it. Their task is to form a hard faction to win others to their side by counterposing the Trotskyist program to that of the LCI leadership. A split in this organization, provided it is along clear programmatic lines, would at a certain point be a big step forward given the big opportunities for even a small Trotskyist organization in Portugal. Gerry Foley has emphasized these opportunities which exist and correctly has strongly implied that the LCI is not such an organization.

The illustrious literary collaborators Mandel, Maitan and Frank are not Trotskyists, either. They are centrists. Could this be more obvious?

Their support for class-collaborationism in Portugal (e.g., the Copcon document which they defend in their opus) is related to their support for the Union of the Left in France. This in turn was foreshadowed in their position on Ceylon in 1964, as reflected in the United Secretariat letter dated April 1964, published in the same issue of IP, p. 1261. Here the Secretariat correctly warned the LSSP against accepting posts in a capitalist government in Ceylon. But it did not take a clear position against all coalition governments. Instead, specifying very clearly, it said that "any form of coalition with such a party [as the bourgeois SLFP], as long as it remains the dominant majority within such a coalition," must be rejected. (My emphasis.) This left open the possibility of support for popular fronts like the Union of the Left in France where the bourgeois parties are not a "majority."

These people have been centrists for a long time. They did not become Trotskyists simply by virtue of reunifying with Trotskyists. They did a service, but they did not become instantly Trotskyists.

Nor is it sufficient to stay out of coalition governments for someone to be considered a Trotskyist.

To be a Trotskyist, one must accept the Trotskyist program and be part of a Trotskyist organization. Mandel, Maitan and Frank do not fit the definition. They delude themselves if they think they are Trotskyists. So does the LCI.

If my differences with the two articles I mentioned above are merely terminological and you would agree with me that the LCI (and Mandel and Company) are not Trotskyists but centrists, then I hope you will pass this letter on to Gerry Foley and Andy Rose. But if there continues to be a quite different assessment of the nature of the IMT, then I think I have very serious differences with you.

On May 1 and August 13, 1974, I co-signed letters to the LTF steering committee arguing for a more organized faction to prevent a total split and for more emphasis on the opportunist side of the IMT's line. These letters pointed out that this line was "irreconcilable with the program of Marxism" in every way. Last summer, I wrote in two different articles in the SWP Discussion Bulletin that the IMT is centrist. Since then more evidence has appeared in Portugal to reconfirm what I wrote.

Are the IMT and LCI centrist, or are they variations of Trotskyism?

In my opinion, we will not be able to prevent the already-open split from becoming total simply by diplomatically assuring the IMT and LCI leaderships that we think they are Trotskyist. To say this would on the contrary tend to disorient the followers of these leaderships. It would tend to disorient the LTF as well.

Comradely,

David Kail