

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
October 23, 1975

TO ALL NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

The national office received a copy of the attached letter from Pierre Frank to two former members of the SWP. You received the letter from Murry Weiss and Myra Tanner Weiss that Comrade Frank refers to a few weeks ago.

Comradely,

Doug Jenness
Doug Jenness
SWP National Office

October 6th 1975
[copy received Oct. 18, 1975]

Dear comrades Murry and Myra Tanner Weiss,

I have read your letter to the SWP of August 30 on Portugal, which has been circulated to the members of the NC and organisers of the SWP, and I take it as an opportunity to find contact with you. I surmise that you have by now read the article "On defense of the Portuguese revolution" of August 10, by Mandel, Maitan and myself (Intercontinental Press, September 8).

It is obvious that these two texts have a common estimation of the problems of the Portuguese revolution as "the first socialist revolution in Western Europe." Both agree too that under the banner of "democracy" and "civil liberties" has taken place and is still carried a struggle against the revolution, that "the most important task in Portugal is precisely the organisation of Soviets" and that Trotskyists have the duty to sustain and further the present existing committees in order that they develop in full fledged soviets. There is also full agreement, it seems, in your and our criticism of the line taken by the SWP, of their whole schematic view of the question of democracy, of their support almost uncritical of the SP and of the Constituent Assembly against the present workers committees, of their identification between democratic rights of the masses (which of course we defend in all conditions) and bourgeois democracy which fundamentally is a system of bourgeois rule, where the working class has been able to acquire some rights only through hard struggles, acquiring and extending them first by violating the existing laws. You are correct when you write to the SWP that "[their] methodology, analyses and political conclusions. . .propel you, however unexpectedly or unwittingly, into the camp of American imperialism." Your words there are even stronger than ours.

Such a field of agreement in the general analysis and the main tasks of the Fourth International in Portugal will make, I am sure, easier to discuss our differences concerning the estimation of the MFA and the policies of the Portuguese CP. You use many quotations of serious bourgeois newspapers as the New York Times. But, as a matter of fact, the bourgeois press, even the most serious one, in the period preceding the offensive of the bourgeoisie and during it, has systematically distorted many positions of the MFA and the CP in order to build a scarecrow, to present Portugal threatened by a "Communist" and "military" dictatorship. Besides, I think that the most recent events of the last few weeks will help to clear the matter even better than our own arguments.

It was not wrong to make some comparison with the Cuban revolution, which has taught us once more, if necessary, that life is richer than theory and that it should help us to enrich our theory, not to think by labels as is presently doing the SWP. But there is a big gap between Castro (linked to the Che) and the MFA as a whole. The MFA was not a revolutionary body with a confused line, no more--let me add--than a "tool of Portuguese

finance capital" as we could hear in a session of the United Secretariat. It was an organisation of officers united to stop the Portuguese imperialist wars in Africa because these wars were hopeless. Its range went from officers with a confused socialist orientation to very bourgeois minded ones, democratic or of a gaullist type. Besides, even an important part of Portuguese bourgeoisie wanted to stop these wars. The MFA (with the collaboration of Spínola) brought down the Caetano regime. This triggered off, unexpectedly for most of the officers the revolutionary upsurge of the masses, which then developed much quicker than even we expected after 48 years of fascism. In the course of events, divisions occurred in the MFA. One of the most important persons in it, major Antunes, had a similar policy to the SP's, perhaps a bit shrewder. After March 11, he wanted to stop the revolution. He intervened in the MFA, at the same time as Soares left the government, and one cannot doubt that the two moves were coordinated. Now, with the new government, there are, as some people in Portugal say, "many MFA;" in other words the disintegration of this body is on the march, as could be expected from the start. Of course there are officers who are progressing more to the left with the mass vanguard, like this captain who "stole" thousand guns to give them for workers' militias. Amongst them are those who have understood that a victory of the reaction would mean the loss of their own life. There is not even today a clear cut division among officers--the part of which will go with the masses depends largely on the strength of the revolution, of its capacity to fight for power.

Concerning the Portuguese CP, it is necessary to start with the aim it had from the beginning in order to understand its policies and its variations since the fall of Caetano. In April 1974, the Portuguese CP sought a similar development to the one the French and Italian CPs expected after the last war, but which did not take place, the one also that the Spanish CP expects in Spain after the fall of Franco. It wanted to establish in Portugal an "enlarged democracy," that means mainly some nationalisations within a bourgeois system in which the monopolies would be kept in check. There the CP would have a firm control of the masses and the foreign policy, whilst not breaking formally with NATO, would be of a gaullist type suitable to the Kremlin. Useless to tell you the fallacy of such a policy. But, whilst in France and Italy after the war the CPs succeeded to break the revolutionary upsurge and in spite of that to maintain a firm control on the masses, the Portuguese CP started soon to have some trouble because part of the masses, and not a small or insignificant part, went out of its control. It sought then to reestablish the situation thanks to a part of the MFA which had similar views about the future of Portugal, i.e., to make of it in an orderly process a country independent of multinational monopolies, of imperialism. (Many officers had been influenced during their stay in the former Portuguese colonies by the ideology of the Frelimo, the MPLA, etc.). So the CP supported officers like Gonçalves, and it tried to use all bureaucratic means at its disposal to establish its authority in as many fields as possible.

It also adjusted its phraseology concerning the workers' and other committees. The CP acted all the more in this way that it was much disappointed by the results of the elections and had to make a "left" turn. Its bureaucratic methods created much hostility in the masses. When Soares thought that because of that the ground was propitious, he took the offensive with "democracy" as a banner. The press has given much place to the attacks against CP's and other organisations headquarters, and no one should underestimate the danger it constitutes. But at the same time the CP lost--and that was much worse for it--the control of over 35 trade unions, because of the hostility against its bureaucratic methods, partly to the SP, but partly also to the extreme left. Besides bureaucratic methods, the CP occasionally used some "third period" vocabulary ("social-fascists").

It is because of its difficulties and isolation that the CP leadership appealed to the far left, including our own organisation, not acting of course on "orders" of the Kremlin. But whilst using left language, the CP has again accepted to enter in the government, even on an inferior status, because it remains on its fundamental line, that of an "enlarged democracy" for Portugal. So, in no way can we say that the CP deserves the major credit for the advances of the Portuguese revolution. It tries to adapt to it, it may go in the future further than it wants to go. But, in the meantime, its eclectic line--one step to the left, a few ones to the right--is now adding to its troubles, because in spite of all the confusion that exists in the far left, the CP does not possess such an apparatus with which it could control the masses. Many people have come to it who expect from it to carry the revolution to the end. It will depend largely of us that its difficulties are solved not in its favour as a reformist or a centrist organisation, but in a revolutionary way towards a workers' state.

We are following the Portuguese situation as closely as possible, informing of what takes place through Inprecor, Rouge, etc., and we are trying to strengthen as much as possible our Portuguese comrades. In spite of errors in formulations they are doing a good job, not only for the development and the centralisation of the Workers' committees, but also for the politisation and organisation of soldiers, as witnessed by the demonstrations that took place recently in Porto and Lisbon.

What is the most perturbing problem for our movement--and your letter itself shows that it is also your main concern--is the line followed by the SWP. There are the unqualifiable articles by Foley which are still printed by IP and The Militant. There is in it the wrong political line on the Portuguese revolution. But there is more than that. You have mentioned some "stalinophobia" which is dangerous in the United States more than anywhere else. But, there is another feature of the policy of the SWP which is no less dangerous. It is what I called at our last World Congress their obsession of ultraleftism. We have to fight the latter ideologically and we are doing it. But we have to fight it not only ideologically, and there the problem is not a simple one in the present conditions of mass upsurge in large

parts of Europe. This mass upsurge is not and cannot be an even one. Some layers, small at first, bigger with time, are marching quicker than others. In spite of all of our efforts, parts of them are used by ultraleft groups, though they are not congenital ultralefts. This is a phenomenon of every revolutionary period. The line of the SWP is to condemn and ignore these currents and to align itself on the average workers. But, besides the arbitrariness in defining the "average" which is unavoidably nearer to the tail than to the head, such a policy leaves completely the field to the ultraleft groups and thereby leaves the most advanced layers, the people who progress politically "too quickly" and are without an understanding of a revolutionary strategy, to the attacks of the bourgeoisie, by isolating them from the bulk of the working class. It seems that, in this matter, the SWP has forgotten the lessons of the "July days," which Trotsky explained so well.

And, crowning the whole, there are what you have rightly raised, i.e., the false views contained in comrade J. Hansen's article on "democracy." This article piles up mistake upon mistake from a theoretical point of view and this error has brought the SWP to see in the attempt of a counter-revolutionary move (which has happily not gone as far as Noske's in 1918-1919, because Soares could found [sic] generals but no soldiers up to now to do the dirty work) a progressive step of the revolution.

A leading member of the SWP said at its last Convention that the Portuguese question was an "acid test." It is the only sentence on which I agree with him. The mistakes made by the SWP do not obviously help the Fourth International as a whole. But at least it does not hinder too much our work in Europe where such views are practically inexistent. But they can become fatal for the SWP itself in the future. I hope that your intervention, though you are no more formally members of the SWP, will have some good repercussions in it, and that it will help the interventions of the United Secretariat, which try to stop a big theoretical revision with the disastrous political consequences it would unavoidably imply for the SWP.

If you have any remark or suggestion on our article or on my letter, I would be very pleased to read them.

Yours fraternally,

Pierre Frank

Copy to the United Secretariat and the SWP.