

## REVOLUTIONARY INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS OF GREAT BRITAIN AND THE PORTUGUESE REVOLUTION

Tony Cliff, a leader of the Revolutionary International Socialists of Great Britain, was asked a number of questions. Here are his answers.

### **Q. Who are the Revolutionary International Socialists of Great Britain?**

A. They are revolutionaries who fight for the overthrow of capitalism, for the smashing of the capitalist bureaucratic military and police state machine, and for the establishment of workers' power through workers councils, for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. They have 3,000 members, organised in 250 branches based on places of work or of living.

The main aim of the party is to raise the consciousness, activity and organisation of the workers in struggle. With Lenin we believe that the Party paper is of central value as being the collective organiser, agitator and educator. Hence we publish a weekly paper called *Socialist Worker*. We also publish three papers for black workers: *Chingari* (Spark) in Urdu and the Punjabi languages, and a monthly paper for black immigrants from the West Indies called *Flame*.

No issue affecting workers' lives is too small for the party. The party has to care and intervene in every issue. It organises the party members and sympathisers in each factory, each industry and each union to fight for revolutionary politics. The fight for workers' power is intimately connected with the fight against the trade union bureaucracy which collaborates with the employers and the government. Hence the struggle for workers' control over the unions is a central plank in our policies in the trade unions. We fight for the regular election of all trade union officials (in many cases they are at present nominated or elected for life); against all privileges for union officials. (Usually they have fat salaries accompanied by a number of sinecures and perks - free housing, cars, fat expense accounts, etc.) We demand that all union officials should be paid the same wages as the workers in the industries they presume to represent.

We organise our members and supporters in rank and file organisations around papers especially written, edited and sold by the members in the relevant industries and unions. Thus our docker members publish a monthly paper called *Dockworker*; our car workers produce two monthlies, one called *Leyland Worker*, the other *Chrysler Worker*; our teachers produce a monthly *Rank and File Teacher*; our hospital workers produce seven regional papers, including one, in Portuguese.

In a number of unions (which have tens of thousands, or even hundreds of thousands of members), we have individual members of our party on the National Executive (printers one, journalists one, constructional engineering workers one, teachers two, local government workers one, etc.) The aim is to use their position to mobilise the rank and file for an active, independent struggle against the trade union bureaucracy, against the employers and the government.

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*In a number of unions we have individual members of our party on the National Executive. Thus we have one member on the executive of the 100,000 strong print union, one on the executive of the 430,000 strong local government workers' union, two on the executive of the 310,000 strong teachers' union, one on The executive of the 25,000 strong Journalists' union. The aim of these members is to use their positions to mobilise the rank and file for active, independent struggle against the reformist trade union bureaucracy, against the employers and against the government.*

In every factory we organise our members and sympathisers into groups that fight for revolutionary leadership of the workers' committees. These groups issue leaflets and regular bulletins to agitate and organise the rank and file.

We believe that in a revolutionary party there should not be a rank and file, that every member should give a lead; and by involving our members in the different industries, unions, etc. we are trying to achieve just this.

**Q. IS is called a Trotskyist organisation; what is the basis for this statement?**

A. We believe that the experience of the revolutionary movement of different countries and different generations is a treasure that every revolutionary must study. Our teachers are Marx, Engels, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky and others.

In the struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy that oppressed the Russian proletariat, and used the Communist parties abroad opportunistically in the interests of this same bureaucracy, Trotsky played a very prominent and honourable role, for which he was murdered by Stalin's agent.

We go further than Trotsky, however, in our opposition to the Stalinist regime. While he still thought Russia was a workers' state of a sort, we are convinced that it is nothing of the sort. The regime of Stalin and his heirs is a state capitalist regime. Factory managers earn many times more than the workers, army generals are paid hundreds of times more than privates; workers are deprived of the right to strike; one-man-management rules industry.

The exploitation and oppression of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and the other colonies occupied by the Russian army show the reactionary role of Russian imperialism. But in Portugal the main enemy is, of course, America, not Russian imperialism.

### **Q. What are the prospects for the revolution in Britain?**

A. For generations the British working class had a relatively high standard of living, living in the richest, biggest imperialist country in the world. The dead weight of bureaucracy and reformism have numbed workers' political consciousness.

But things are changing. British capitalism is in a very grave crisis. At present British capitalism is one of the weakest links in the world capitalist system. The result is a massive attack on British workers' standard of living. Prices are raising by more than 25% a year, far more than wages, which are limited by law to a rise of 10%. Unemployment is rising, exceeding 1.45 million.

British workers have had very strong industrial organisation for a long time, while at the same time being very weak politically. To understand their industrial power, one should remember that Britain has by far the strongest trade union movement in the world; there are 11 members in British trade unions, with 300,000 members on Workers' Committees (shop stewards).

Because of the deepening crisis of capitalism the attack on workers' living standards, spearheaded by the state, forces the workers more and more to use their industrial power for political ends. Thus, to quote two very important events in recent years. In July 1972, five dockers were thrown into prison for their industrial activity. All the dockers in the country, 42,000 of them, plus 20,000 printers of the daily press came on strike. The movement started snowballing, and the government in fear freed the five.

Then again, in February 1974, a miners' strike against wage restraint imposed by the government led to the fall of the government. We are convinced that the

deepening crisis of capitalism will force British workers to look to a way of bridging the struggle for the defence of living standards with the political struggle against the system.

### **Q. What is IS policy on unemployment?**

A. A couple of weeks ago we started a campaign for the Right to Work. In every locality we are aiming to build rank and file committees - of delegates from places of work, trade union branches, etc.

These committees should campaign to:

1. ban overtime working
2. cut the working week from 40 hours to 35 hours
3. in case an employer decides to close his factory or to carry out mass sackings, to occupy the factory force its nationalisation in order to guarantee the jobs.

One date in this campaign will be a massive demonstration in London on 26 November, and then numerous occupations of labour exchanges, local demonstrations etc, leading to a massive national demonstration throughout the country starting at the end of February and ending in London on 20th March next year.

### **Q. What do you think of the Portuguese revolution process?**

A. The overthrow of fascism after 48 years was a marvellous spring not only for the Portuguese workers, but for all workers all over the world.

However we believe that the revolution has not yet been won. Portugal is a half-way house. In many factories a saneamento of the Right was carried out - alas, not far enough. The multinationals still control key sections of the economy. Side by side with beggars one can see in Lisbon the sports cars of the rich. In the army, next to SUV, are the right-wing officers. Side by side with FUR and parties like the PRP, Luar, etc., are the PPD, CDS, PS; and in between, on the fence, the PCP.

As the present governmental set-up is a passage towards one of two dictatorships, the working class needs to build a representative democratic organisation that covers the whole of the working class, i.e., soviets. Parties, even large ones, can only include a minority of the proletariat. Soviets can overcome the isolation between workers in different workplaces, different industries, different trades and occupations.

Secondly the proletariat needs the immediate reconstruction of a mass revolutionary party to lead in the struggle. The working class is the product of capitalist society. Its consciousness and militancy and understanding is necessarily extremely uneven. To act, even in sectional struggles, it requires organisation. For it has to act as a class for the biggest aim of all, the taking of power and the socialist reconstruction of society, the most conscious and confident workers must be welded together. They are the actual or potential leaders of their fellows. United they can, under favourable circumstances, carry the whole mass with them. The union of these advanced workers is the revolutionary workers' party.

A victory for the proletarian revolution in Portugal will open a new chapter in world history. Portugal, the weakest link in the capitalist chain in Europe, can become the launching pad for the socialist revolution in the whole of the continent. The stakes are extremely high for both the working class and the capitalist class. NATO, CIA, EEC, the State Department and the Foreign Office, Tories and Socialist Democratic leaders have joined together in a holy alliance to defend "democracy". The international proletariat should close ranks behind their Portuguese brothers and sisters to see that Portugal does not turn into another Chile and that the struggle culminates in workers' power and socialism.

### **Q. How can British revolutionaries help their Portuguese brothers?**

A. First of all we have to do our utmost to break the economic blockade of Portugal. To give a few examples, In London a month ago 300 workers employed by ITT were sacked, because management said it could not sell the telephones it produced to Portugal, as hitherto. At the same time in Portugal, at the ITT factory, there is short time working for lack of accessories from Britain. The cause is the financial boycott of Portugal by ITT management (one should remember the same policy was used by ITT to overthrow the Allende government in Chile and to bring fascism to power.)

Another example. Thousands of Leyland workers in Britain are being sacked, while at the same time the Lisbon busmen find it impossible to get hold of accessories for their Leyland buses, and are forced to cannibalise the buses. It is necessary to organise delegates from ITT in Britain to meet ITT workers in Portugal. The same in Leyland, Massey Ferguson, etc. The fight against the economic blockade of Portugal is in the interests of Portuguese and British workers alike.

It is necessary to organise a campaign against the CIA, NATO and EEC intervention in Portugal.

Last, but not least, the greatest help British revolutionaries can give to the revolution in Portugal is by making revolution in Britain itself, by fighting for the dictatorship of the proletariat in Britain itself.

Down with the ELP, CDS, PPD and their aider and abetter Mario Soares!

Death to world imperialism, NATO, CIA and EEC!

Victory to the Portuguese revolution!

Victory to world revolution!