

No Socialism in Portugal

According to the new constitution adopted in April, Portugal is supposed to be a democracy in transition to Socialism. This of course is not true. Portugal is progressing not towards Socialism, but towards a more modern type of capitalism.

The word "socialism" in the context of present-day Portugal refers to social reforms and state ownership and control of the economy; in other words, to what is more properly called "state capitalism" in contrast to the classless, wageless, moneyless society the word originally meant.

State capitalism not only is not Socialism, but it has nothing to offer the working class either. Certainly, the working class obtained the freedom to organize and to discuss out of the overthrow by the armed forces in April 1974 of the one-party fascist regime which had governed Portugal for nearly fifty years. On the surface they were enabled not only to defend their living standards and working conditions under capitalism but also to openly advocate Socialism. But in fact Socialists in Portugal will find themselves coming into conflict with all existing political factions.

First they will come up against those who currently hold power — the newly elected President Eanes and his Prime Minister Soares (leader of the so-called "Socialist" Party) — who want to see established in Portugal a Western-style parliamentary regime. According to the results of both the April general election and the June presidential election, this proposition is supported by the majority of workers and peasants in Portugal. This is not to say, however, that its implementation would be in their interests. For the proposed parliamentary regime is merely a way of administering capitalism.

It can be argued that a stable parliamentary system is the ideal political form for capitalism. It prevents one group having a monopoly of political power and using it to acquire privileges at the expense of the rest of the ruling class, and it allows changes to be made as changing economic conditions and the changing balance of power between sections of the ruling class demand. But capitalism can never be made to work in the interest of the working class. It is a profit-making system based on the exploitation of wage-labour and can only function as such, a fact which must be recognized and consciously applied by any government of capitalism, however democratically elected and however sincere might be their wish to improve the lot of the working class.

Since the overthrow of the fascist regime in April 1974 the economic situation in Portugal has been chaotic. Investment has slumped; unemployment has grown; inflation has raged. In order to re-launch the Portuguese economy the working class will have to be disciplined to work harder and to accept wage restraint in a period of rising prices, i.e. to accept a cut in real living standards. To impose such a cut will be the main task of the new president and his government.

The danger is that the workers might be tempted to turn to those who, again in the name of "socialism", want a thorough-going state capitalist regime for Portugal. This would be a serious error which would almost certainly nullify the effects of the overthrow of the fascist regime. Experience shows that state capitalist regimes such as exist in Russia, China, Cuba and many Afro-Asian countries are quite ruthless in brutally suppressing all attempts at independent working-class activity within their borders.

In Portugal today it is not only the so-called "Communist" Party and the Maoists, Trotskyists and other leftists who stand for a state-capitalist dictatorship. There is, or rather was until the purge which followed the mutiny of 25th November last year, a section of the armed forces which held the same view. Typified by Major (ex-General) Carvalho, former head of Copcon, the armed forces security service, who came second in the recent presidential elections polling about a sixth of the votes, this section felt that the organization best fitted to lead the Portuguese people to "socialism" (i.e. state capitalism) was not some vanguard party but the armed forces themselves. Had they

come to power last November they would have probably established a leftist military regime similar to that existing in, say, Peru.

In any event a state-capitalist regime — with its widespread State ownership, state planning, state control of foreign trade, etc.— would not change the fact that Portugal is a poor country completely dependent on world-market conditions. A state-capitalist regime, whether run by the armed forces or the CP or by some other group, would not be able to free Portugal from these conditions and the pressures they exert on working-class living standards. Indeed these pressures would be felt even more strongly through being channelled directly through the state, class society's organ of coercion. A state-capitalist Portugal would remain economically dependent on world capitalism and politically would only have a choice as to which imperialism — American, Russian or perhaps Chinese — to be a satellite of.

The future without socialist understanding is bleak for the working class in Portugal. They are doomed to suffer capitalism in one form or another. In view of Portugal's drastic economic situation whichever of the factions competing for power emerged as the government would have to rediscipline the working-class. So, in their own interests, the workers should oppose them all — the old Caetano gang, Spínola, the parliamentarists, the CP, Carvalho and the army leftists — for none of them can have anything to offer but hard work, poverty and suffering. The only way out for the Portuguese workers is to unite with their fellow workers in other parts of the world with a view to establishing world Socialism.

L. B.

Sunday, 1 August 1976

Source URL: <http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/socialist-standard/1970s/1976/no-864-august-1976/no-socialism-portugal>