

(the next question is asked in the middle of loud singing and crashing noises coming from the canteen, a soldier answers it laughing.) Is there a problem of discipline in the armed forces in Portugal to-day?

Traditional military discipline must be replaced by revolutionary discipline, which may look like indiscipline. This problem must be seen in a wider context - in the fact that we are operating in a situation where the revolutionary vanguards of the class are not yet formed. This means that there is an overall lack of political consciousness - an inability to see who is the principal enemy. Up till now, the revolutionary forces have made many errors; especially during the rural agit-prop campaign which contained too much revolutionary rhetoric and not enough action. The agricultural policy has not been good and the peasantry has been a fertile ground for the reaction who is now on the offensive. These errors of the revolutionaries have been used by the right-wing, who were the first to criticize the Communist Party (PCP). Many of their criticisms were correct. At the present time there is great need for a revolutionary self-criticism. The 'document of the 9' is supported by many soldiers and officers in the country who will not accept PCP control over the revolutionary process. It is, in fact, a counter-revolutionary document.

The only way forward is to develop the unity of the working-class with the armed forces - to fight for national independence and the building of popular power. We realize that at this moment it is not possible for this to happen all over the world. We of the military police would like workers all over the world to take what is theirs - everything.

What did you mean by political errors?

The biggest error was to allow the elections to take place. They were just an occasion for the parties to put forward abstract programmes and they gave the right-wing parties a position from which they could use political blackmail. The elections were a bourgeois imposition on a proletarian process. THERE CAN BE NO NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE WITHOUT POPULAR POWER. Either the government is an expression of popular power or it obeys imperialism. In our fight against imperialism, our revolutionary process needs and demands the support of the European working-class to which it is a solid encouragement.

(a soldier speaks on discipline) What we must do is to show how discipline is needed to help the working-class. It is in this way that spontaneism is being overcome in the factories. Once orders have been decided on they must be carried out immediately - but they must be democratically decided on. There must be complete democracy in the election of officers and sergeants. It is essential to remember that the overall political class-struggle is



'Soldiers are on the side of the people.'

the background to the class-struggle in the armed forces. Whether or not there is rank and file control over the officers depends on the strength of the working-class outside. In some regiments they have tried to get rid of the left-wing officers and sergeants, this has been stopped by the mobilization of other regiments and the working-class.

WE CANNOT CREATE A REVOLUTIONARY ARMY IN A BOURGEOIS SOCIETY. The structures are bourgeois. A bourgeois army cannot become a revolutionary army; our regiments are not soviets. This process can only be brought about by popular power - and it will involve the arming of the class.

Can you explain what is happening in the North?

At the center of the problem of the North is an economic problem. To solve it will require an economic programme that must include price controls and health. Now the peasants are having to pay much more to the multi-nationals for fertilizer, animal feed etc, and they are not getting anymore for their products - the government is buying wine from them at 5p a litre which does not cover their costs. They are also at the mercy of private transport companies to get their goods to market. The army must take over this transport to make sure that what happened in Chile does not happen here. In Chile, the economy was crippled by a strike of reactionary lorry owners. Now regiments in agricultural areas like Santarem and Calda da Reinha are involved in transport. The COPCON document proposes;

- the building of popular forms of organization
- no economic dependence on the EEC and EFTA
- links with the non-aligned countries

We must put agriculture in first place and so make Portugal more self-sufficient agriculturally- this will help the payments balance.

BECOME ANOTHER CHILE

This will involve a decentralization of the economy. We cannot force co-operatives on the peasants of the North - this is a bad mistake. They will only be won over by economic results. As part of an agricultural policy, we need control of the prices of chemicals and fertilizers: control of output: cheap loans for peasants. There is also the problem of unemployment, which also includes the refugees from Angola who must be given aid.

We will have to nationalize all housing to put an end to land speculation. But we must remember that tenants commissions are inter-classist organizations and in some areas are controlled by the forces of reaction. Also we must socialize all medicine - all these different brand names in competition will have to go. To deal with the problems of health we need para-medical services. Action must be taken against acts of sabotage. The media must be put at the service of the people; they must not be instruments of manipulation.

At a political level, there must be a coming together of the executive power, the MFA and the revolutionary organizations. We must work towards the creation of a national popular assembly. But this national assembly cannot come into existence unless the grass-root organs of popular power are working - their creation is the priority now.



Demonstration for Popular Power and the COPCON document. August 20th.

It is now becoming clearer that the form the class-struggle is taking inside the armed forces is of a struggle between soldiers and officers, with sergeants having to decide what side they are on.

On the 10th of September, 2000 soldiers from regiments all over the country marched through the streets of Porto under the banner 'SOLDIERS UNITED WILL WIN'. The officers in

command of their regiments had forbidden them leave to attend the demo - they had come all the same. The demo was stewarded by members of the tenants commissions of Porto who made sure that no photos were taken of the soldiers. Throughout the demo the soldiers sang the Internationale; amongst the slogans were 'DOWN WITH FABIAO!', 'DEATH TO CHARAIS, the APPRENTICE PINOCHET!' (the names of two reactionary commanders). At the end of the demo, an anonymous soldier spoke; 'DEMOS LIKE THIS ONE MUST HAPPEN ALL OVER THE COUNTRY TO SHOW TO THOSE IN POWER AND THE BOURGEOISIE THE STRENGTH OF SOLDIERS. TO-NIGHT WE HAVE TAKEN THE FIRST STEP IN THE AUTONOMOUS ORGANIZATION OF WORKERS IN UNIFORM. SOLDIERS ARE SONS OF THE PEOPLE. SHOULDER TO SHOULDER WITH THE PEOPLE ORGANIZED IN FACTORIES AND COMMUNITIES, WE WILL OVERCOME THE MANOEUVRES OF THE REACTIONARY OFFICERS'.

As the demo ended, everyone shouted together; 'PORTUGAL WILL NOT BE THE CHILE OF EUROPE'

After the demo, Matos Gomes gave the interview that follows. Matos Gomes was until recently in charge of the training of new recruits at the commando regiment at Amadora. He has asked for a new post where there is not 'authoritarian discipline, passive obedience and alienating training'. Matos Gomes is a long standing member of the MFA.

'We must know how to abandon our illusions before it is too late. An army cannot be transformed from the inside. The military hierarchy wants to re-establish militarism, a strict respect for bourgeois authority. But the soldiers, the sergeants, the left-wing officers will fight for their rights. They have a clear working-class perspective - they are fighting for the development of general assemblies in the barracks, the development of popular education brigades and to confront those in power who want to stop the revolutionary process. This will only be possible if our struggle is linked to the struggle of the commissions of the workers, the communities and the villages. Only an alliance between the grass-root organs of popular power and the soldiers organized in their regiments will change the structure of the army.....The MFA does not exist now. Divided by the same contradictions as civil society in Portugal, the MFA has split. The anti-fascist phase is over - the MFA has done its mission. There now remain two options. Either to halt the process and to accept a social-democrat neo-capitalism or to continue going forward towards socialism - there is no other choice.....The left-wing forces inside the armed forces are in a minority. We are strongest in the most industrialized regions - Lisbon, Setubal, the Alentajo and to a lesser extent around Porto - but now the most important thing is our unity. The revolutionary left is much more united inside the armed forces than it is in civil society. Our ideas are straight-forward, we defend popular power and national independence.....Our opposition to a military hierarchy that has betrayed the 25th of April is not indiscipline. It is a real discipline freely chosen by those members of the armed forces who, faithful to the programme of the movement, have sided with the workers and the peasants.'

LISNAVE : REVOLUTIONARY STRONGHOLD

Built a few years ago with international capital, the LISNAVE ship-yards in Lisbon are the largest in Europe. 8000 workers work there and since April 25th, they have been one of the vanguards of the Portuguese revolutionary process. Everyone gathered in Commerce Square before the August 20th 'popular power' demo was waiting for the Lisnave workers to arrive and lead the demo off. As they arrived, there was a tremendous cheer. On the demo the Lisnave and Setanave workers march in disciplined ranks, with their red helmets on. They gave to everyone else on the demo a sense of proletarian order - a sense of the determination that will be needed in the hard struggle with the forces of reaction.

The grass-roots organization of the Lisnave workers is called the Committee for the Defence of the Workers (the CDT). In this interview, Big Flame talks to a member of the CDT. The interview took place in a large office in the ship-yards that belongs to the CDT.

Who owns Lisnave? - who runs it?

The state has a 44% interest in Lisnave, the rest is foreign capital. A new management team has been appointed by the government. We have refused to participate in it, the role of the CDT is to defend the workers not to run the yard. But we are implementing workers control over the quality and quantity of production - in Portugal to-day, sabotage is often a tool of the forces of reaction.

We want to make the CDT more representative of the work-force, to enlarge it to 300 members. We already have general assemblies that everyone can attend.

Have wages and conditions changed since the state took (effective) control of the yards a few months ago?

The programme of the CDT is to reduce wage differentials; we are asking the government to implement a national minimum wage of £100 a month and a maximum of £210. Piece-rates

and bonuses were abolished after April 25th. We work a 42 hour week which is guaranteed.

What are the links between the CDT and other organs of popular power?

There are meetings which bring together representatives from all factories and offices in the Lisbon-Setubal area. We participate in the popular assembly of Almada, which is the suburb of Lisbon we are in. Also there are meetings between the CDTs of all the ship-yards to try and work towards a more rational sharing out of work; right now some yards have too much work, others like us and Setanave have too little. Soldiers and sailors come to the popular assembly; it has demanded of the state that it set up a building programme to build people's houses in Almada - we want the local unemployed to work on this project.

What does the building of popular power involve?

In this district, there are popular vigilance patrols that keep an armed watch over the district at night. In fact, Almada is a 'red' district and there is not much sign of the fascists. At a national level, it means for instance re-uniting the working-class. We were involved in the preparation meetings for the August 20th demo where slogans like 'an end to the misery of the peasants' were decided on. Lisnave workers go every week-end to the rural co-operatives in the South to help. Last week-end, I was with 300 other workers at Fentas Noves picking tomatoes. The CDT is investigating the possibility of converting some of our machinery to make agricultural implements - to break the international boycott. These are some of the concrete ways popular power is being built.

We read in the papers that Brazil had decided to cancel a contract with Lisnave because the yard had been nationalized.

That cancellation was good for us - it was a contract on which we were going to make a loss. Still the work situation at Lisnave is critical. No tankers are being sent to us for repair; we have the capacity to repair 22 a month, we are getting 6-8 in. We have links with Erikson, a Swedish yard. They tried to swindle us out of some work we had agreed to do for them, the Swedish workers helped us



Lisnave workers on anti-fascist demonstration.

in our fight to get compensation which we won. We are getting orders from the socialist countries - Bulgaria, Poland and the USSR; Japan is cancelling orders.

Because of the work situation in the yards, there are no vacancies - only a few for skilled workers. When vacancies come up we make sure that management gives priority to ex-Lisnave workers and the unemployed.

Is there a creche for the kids of the workers?

There is but it is small. It is being expanded to take 150 kids, but it will only be for the kids of women workers. The other women workers and myself take it in turn to work at the creche. Many of the Lisnave workers support the nearby Cova da Piedade clinic, but the CDT cannot support it officially.

What is the relationship between the CDT and the CRT and the political groups?

The CRT (mainly PRP militants) is small - we can work very well with them. The CRT's criticism of our programme was that it did not include the military defense by the workers of the ship-yards - we have now added that into our programme. The UDP are impossible to work

with, they do not seem interested in concrete problems. As yet there is no programme to train the workers to use arms - but the revolutionaries have the problem in mind.

Is the CDT doing anything about leisure etc,?

We have a very good programme of educational and political discussions. Since there is not much work, the workers want to take advantage of the extra free time. They also do social work at the creche, in the gardens.

On the ferry to Lisbon, we asked the comrade a last question. 'How is it that a people oppressed by 48 years of fascism have so fast got into the fight for total control over every aspect of their lives?'

Under fascism we were not allowed to say anything, not allowed to meet in public. What we did was to go home and secretly read the banned books - Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg, Che. These books were passed from one person to another. All of us developed a very high political consciousness, now we have an opportunity to change things.

(this interview took place on the 26th August - the day the United Revolutionary Front began.)

SUPPORT THE SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN WITH THE PORTUGUESE WORKING CLASS

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LONDON N.W.3

read the newsletter 'OUR COMMON STRUGGLE'

- NO ECONOMIC BOYCOTT
- BIG BUSINESS, NATO, CIA - HANDS OFF PORTUGAL
- PORTUGAL WILL NOT BECOME ANOTHER CHILE



PUBLIC WEEK OF ACTION

MEETINGS

LONDON

The Rugby Tavern,
Rugby St., off Lambs Conduit St.
Holborn, W.C.1
SATURDAY 20th Sep 7.30 pm

BIRMINGHAM

Wellington Pub
Bristol St.
WEDNESDAY 24th Sep 7.30 pm

MANCHESTER

Star and Garter
Fairfield St., near Pic Station
FRIDAY 26th Sep 8.00 pm
(plus revolutionary songs from Chile)

These meetings are part of a week of action (Sep 20-28th) of the European revolutionary left in support of the revolution in Portugal. The week of action is an initiative of Lotta Continua and is supported by groups in France, Germany and England. At a meeting held on Sep 7th in Lisbon, representatives from the Popular Assembly at Pontinha and the CDT of Lisnave gave their support to the week of action. During the week, there will be mass demonstrations in support of the Portuguese revolutionary movement in most European states.

The meetings will also celebrate the tenth birthday of the Chilean revolutionary organization, the M.I.R.

At all these meetings, there will be Speakers from Portugal (except Manchester)

A speaker from the PWCC

Slides of the revolution in Portugal

This Special is a supplement to the Big Flame pamphlet 'PORTUGAL - A Blaze of Free cm' available from; 'B.F. Publications
632 Bristol Rd,
Selly Oak, Birmingham'
and most good book-stores.

P. AND P. by BIG FLAME PUBLICATIONS

The conditions of work? Of the four thousand workers, a hundred and fifty have silicosis or other industrial disease. Their demand is for a forty hour week instead of the forty-four they are now doing. In the end they accept management's offer of forty-two. The list of demands also includes a demand that the spread of salaries be reduced. Before the 25 April the highest wage was four hundred times the lowest! The workers demand that it be only seventeen times the lowest. The workers succeed in getting the minimum wage raised from £80 a month to £100. They also demand a bonus-sharing scheme – before April these were illegal. Management agrees to an equal cash bonus for all grades, including staff.

The Purging Process

Above all, there is the question of the purges. In most factories this question was and remains the key one. It is all the more important as it has an anti-authoritarian content and that the 'getting healthy'³ process is taking time.

The cellulose factory of Velha de Rodao has been occupied by the workers: they insist that three of their directors be removed. The importance of this struggle of the workers – which has been going on for eight months – becomes apparent if one remembers the current scale of economic sabotage. The right is fighting back by sabotaging, by disorganising production. In the South they are letting the cattle starve to death and the crops rot. Elsewhere, machines are not looked after and rust away.

The problem of the purges is directly linked to the struggle against economic sabotage. It is also a question of power.

On 24 June, the workers of National Steel march to Lisbon to demand the removal of a manager with a fascist past. The same day, another manager is locked in. The workers make an ultimatum about their list of demands. For the first time, Champasimau shows up, before the just-sent telegrams. They negotiated and settled with the Minister of Work as referee.

Leaflets signed individually

By now the people talking to me want to discuss the December events. Someone goes to the cupboard and fishes out a pile of leaflets. One thing strikes me: all these leaflets are numbered, dated and also signed. The leaflets of the Commission are signed by its members. If there were only three present when a leaflet was decided on then it is signed with their three names. So no-one can hide behind the cover of 'the Workers Commission'. The original cause of the December movement were Christmas bonuses. The technical staff got between £150 and £1000; for a skilled worker it was only £30. Only one member of the technical staff had 'abdicated' his bonus – he was in the PCP.

Three days in December

A strike with occupation? It was not possible, since stopping production in the only steel mill in Portugal would have been a disaster. It would have also been sabotage. So the workers do not go on strike. They work as they think fit; they refuse to take any orders and advice from the technical

staff. They go into the offices to make sure that the technical staff don't lock themselves in. On the contrary, they are forced to circulate in the factory. This action begins on 17 December.

On the third day there remained the problem of the special steel mill. The computer operators had taken the computers' memory-banks. We got hold of a sympathetic computer programmer who worked somewhere else. He showed us how to get the computer going and how to programme it. We did all the calculations ourselves. At seven in the evening it was programmed and we could start production in the mill again. It had taken us seven hours, whereas it normally takes programmers ten hours.⁵

Negotiations were difficult with the Minister of Labour – Carvalho, the PCP guy – who is behind the fight for the trade union law.⁴ He came here and he told us: 'If I didn't know you lot, I could swear that some of you are being paid in dollars.'⁵

On telly

The technical staff were interviewed on the telly. They said that they were forfeiting their bonus because 'the economy was in danger' and because the workers 'were vandals'. The workers wanted to be interviewed by telly as well – television management refused. Finally, telly management agreed on the condition that the workers did not say that they had been refused access to the programme the first time. The telly bosses had been forced to give in because we were speaking a lot on Radio-Club and Radio-Renaissance. Technical staff also gave in – 'the total of their bonuses were given to a social centre controlled by the workers.' In the following days there was much bad feeling towards the technical staff – 'But it would have been wrong to prevent them from working. They had given up. They were no longer our masters. In fact they no longer talked in the same condescending manner.'

Unity – OK, but at the base

The Commission meets once a week with management. And once a week there is a general assembly of all the workers.

The workers do not know yet all the details of the law on the trade unions. But they are all for having only one trade union (unicity): 'We agree that there should be only one trade union, but it must be controlled by the workers. Unity, yes, but at the base'. In any case, if there are new elections for trade union delegates, the members of the Workers' Commission will be elected.

- 3 The fascists are parasites that have to be purged for health reasons.
- 4 Repressive trade union legislation passed by the Provisional Government in August. Even tighter than the British government's Industrial Relations Act. It has not been enforced often because of the strength of the revolutionary struggle. But it remains as a potential weapon against the working class.
- 5 Old Stalinist trick – to try and discredit someone you are struggling against by calling him/her a Nazi or Imperialist agent.

PEOPLE'S BANKS

The takeover by the state of the banks and insurance companies is part of the victory over the forces of reaction of the 11 March. It is part of the mobilisation of the people. On the telly there is an ad that asks for 'Unity, vigilance, work'. In recent months in Portugal there have been many examples of proletarian vigilance: on the walls in Lisbon people have been sticking posters giving the names of known fascists and the number-plates of their cars; bank workers have been checking the accounts of customers they suspect of being right-wing and were quick to inform COPCON of any illegal transfer of money they made; insurance company workers immediately occupied their offices after the 11 March, demanding of the state that they be nationalised. Since the 11 March, apartment buildings have been occupied; in a Lisbon suburb a bourgeois mansion has

been turned into a people's clinic; in the small town of Villa Real de Santo Antonio the anti-fascist action group has taken over the running of local government; many factories have been occupied and put under workers' control. The workers of the Pinto de Magalhaes Bank have sent a message of support to the Council of the Revolution in which they demanded that every day be marked by a revolutionary act. The Lisbon truck drivers, realising that 'through their control of transport the bosses have a thousand ways of sabotaging the national economy', have demanded that the transport industry be nationalised.*

The actions of the bank and insurance workers were a key part of this mobilisation of the people. It was their actions that forced the government to nationalise these sectors, which play a crucial part in the Portuguese economy. In

* An example of the class learning from Chile, where the strike of the truck owners in October 72 crippled the economy and split the Popular Unity government (see *Chile Si*).

Portugal, there was not the split between industrial and banking capital there is in most capitalist economies – in Portugal it was the same thirty families that controlled both sectors.

'The bank serves the people', 'people + MFA = nationalisation' – these are the banners that are spread out in front of the banks in Lisbon after the decision of the Council of the Revolution to nationalise the banks, the loan companies and all their branches abroad.

The twenty-two members of the Council have wasted no time in going ahead with the process of nationalisation. This decision was expected after the arrest of many Portuguese bankers, who are thought to be involved in the failed putsch of the 11 March. Workers are still occupying their offices, which will re-open at nine this morning (14 March). In the airports and frontier posts, pilots, stewardesses and passengers are methodically searched – no-one is missed. In this way, the soldiers show their determination to stop capital leaving the country: it is estimated that already four hundred thousand pounds has gone.



'Insurance Company – Nationalised for the good of the people'

Hit them where their money is

The speed with which the decision to takeover the banks was taken is explained by the general feeling in Lisbon. A bank worker tells me: 'We must act quickly and to begin with, hit them where their money is'. The uncertainty about who started the putsch – which civilians and which military were involved – give way to a feeling that this failed putsch was only a trial run.† There is a feeling that the right's offensive is not over and that the 'enemies of the people are still within our walls'.

Banks are not usually buildings of the people. Still, on Friday morning (14 March), they look as if they are part of a festival. They have become 'Banco do Povo' (Banks of the People). On a branch of the Portuguese Bank of the Atlantic, a giant inscription in red has been painted: 'Nosso', that is, 'Ours'. The palaces of money are in the hands of the people. And the immense plate-glass windows that are the pride of banks the world over have become the wall-newspapers of the Portuguese revolution – a revolution that is now coming to grips with the problems of the transition to a socialist society.

The speed with which the decision to nationalise was taken has political reasons. Although it is still uncertain which military regiments supported the spinolist offensive, there is no doubt that financial capital played a leading role in the acts of subversion that have gone on since 28 September. By this act of nationalisation, the Council of the Revolution wants to strangle this 'liberal' headquarters of subversion. Friday night, at a general assembly of Lisbon bank workers, union members began to draw up a list of charges against the most important directors of the banks.

Fascist links

During the fascist-regime, the directorships of the banks were

very close with the fascist state machinery. A worker in the (ex) Portuguese Bank of the Atlantic, an anti-fascist militant for many years, told me that one of the managers of this bank was State Secretary to the Economy in the first government of Caetano. After doing a stretch in government,* he went back to his position of director at the bank. And, the worker talking to me adds, 'he was one of the more enlightened'. After the 25 April, he is one of the founders of the CDS (Democratic and Social Centre) and is 'involved in the attempted coups of the 28 September and the 11 March'. The CDS will certainly be outlawed in the next few days, together with the PDC (Christian-Democrat Party) of Sanches Osorio. The company report of this bank that has just been nationalised is impressive. It states that the bank owned in 1972: 'Sixteen percent of all the deposits in commercial Portuguese banks; five insurance companies and many research and development companies; petrol refineries; cement factories; cellulose plants, breweries, glass factories, synthetic resin plants. It participated in real estate, tourism, film-making, cinemas, car-parks. It had subsidiaries in Angola and Mozambique, where it owned textile factories and a hydroelectric power-station.'

By nationalising the private banks, the Council of the Revolution killed two birds with one stone. It has attacked the political/economic organisation of capital and has nationalised over fifty percent of Portuguese industry. On Saturday (15 March), twenty-seven insurance companies became state property. The same will happen to the other key sections of the economy.

The generosity of Spirito Santo

It has been proved that the Spirito Santo Bank, most of whose business is in Angola and Mozambique, was financing the right-wing parties, the CDS and the PDC. The workers of the bank, in their search, have found that an account had been opened with ten escudos (20p) in it. A few days later it was credited with one million escudos (£20,000). There were many cheques that were not covered. In the Oporto branch, it was discovered that £15,000 had been paid out to right-wing militants to pay for the trucks and buses that took the 'silent majority' to Lisbon on the night of the 27–28 September. Also, the management of the bank had perfected a system to take capital out of Portugal. What led to the arrest of the majority of the directors of the bank was that the bank was borrowing abroad on credit provided by the (state-owned) Bank of Portugal, the central bank. To help small and medium firms that were in difficulty, the Bank of Portugal encouraged the merchant banks to provide the firms with loans that it backed. The investigation showed that this money made available by the Bank of Portugal was 'laundered' through accounts of the different Spirito Santo companies and by the mechanisms of international finance ended up abroad.

To avoid the embargo?

Though this nationalisation was drastic, it did not touch the foreign interests in three banks: Franco-Portuguese Credit, the Bank of London and South Africa (Bolsa) and the Bank of Brazil. The same goes for the insurance companies, where foreign capital has a majority interest (which is not the case for the banks). This political distinction is meant to avoid international 'backlash' from the nationalisation – which would be a total economic blockade, as with Cuba.

Who holds power?

In Lisbon, it is thought that very soon electricity, the petrochemical industry, the steel industry and the mines will be nationalised. Also profit margins on certain products will be once again controlled, and the national minimum wage could well be raised shortly.

So, the Portuguese state has become the largest boss in Portugal. It now seems that the question of power is the key question. In three days since the 11 March forty-five factories have been occupied and the majority of them are under workers' control.

† In Chile, the successful coup of September 73 was preceded by the 'Tancazo' of June 73. The right used the Tancazo to keep their arm in, to see who was and who wasn't loyal to the government

* The same goes for many members of Conservative governments in this country: Du Cann, Thorneycroft, Maudling, etc. – the members of Labour governments tend to go into directorships of industrial companies (George Brown, Lever, etc.).

FIFTEEN THOUSAND AT BEJA

On 13 April, fifteen thousand poor peasants, supported by the local union, the PCP and the MES, marched through the streets of Beja, in the Alentejo, demanding expropriation without compensation of the big landlords; the land to be given to committees of agricultural workers; financial and technical aid to be given by the government. One of the workers on the demo told me: 'In the Alentejo we still live in the middle ages. Four members of the Ortiz family, including the famous bullfighter, own a hundred and ten thousand acres in the province. What we need in Portugal is a government like in Cuba.' The officer, Brisses, civil governor of Beja, warns the peasants about the 'dubious' groups of the extreme left. He appeals to the 'common sense of the peasantry'. Lieutenant Coelho, of the Third Infantry Regiment, praised the March: he says that, 'It is clear proof of the maturity of the agricultural workers'. Both officers claimed in their speeches to be carrying out the programme of the MFA!

RED VOTES

We are in Beja in the Alentejo (literally, 'beyond the Tagus'). On the walls, at the political meetings, in the streets, everywhere, there is evidence of a permanent mobilisation and politicisation. A great tradition of class struggle is fully alive: that of the miners of Alustrel (thirty miles to the south-west), and that of face-to-face fighting against the masters of the land and the fascist repression. Throughout the Salazar period the PCP organised in this area. Here, on 25 April the votes will be red.

The big landowners are on the defensive and have had to make concessions. After the fall of Caetano they tried to resist the pressure of the people by refusing to cultivate land that had been left fallow and deliberately abandoning crops. They began a sabotage of production — getting wrong planting times; planning unemployment and, in some places, poisoning the cattle's drinking water. Today there are many rumours about the clandestine cells of the right wing ELP (Portuguese Army of Liberation), who are said to be getting arms from Spain.



The Posters — the PCP's — indicate it's the Alentejo, traditional centre of militancy and PCP support.

The workers are vigilant: the movements of the large owners are checked and noted down; estates are searched. Each move of the forces of reaction is met with an increase in the popular mobilisation: after 11 March there was not a road that was not blocked by armed militias of agricultural workers; not one 'doubtful' barracks that was not surrounded by agricultural workers demanding the 'unity of the people and the MFA'.

NO MORE UNEMPLOYMENT

The first priority for the workers of the Alentejo is the expropriation of the large owners and the immediate collectivisation of the land. In the region, there has been disastrous levels of unemployment, made worse by the growth of capital-intensive agriculture. To make sure there is work for everybody, the spontaneous occupation and use of agricultural land began very soon — 25 April. There were ten thousand unemployed in the region, now there are almost none. The large owners were forced to employ a number of 'those without work', depending on the size of their estate. One of them who refused was found dead. The workers have won control of the allocation of work. The control of production — of what is grown — has begun.

At Caixa, the peasants occupied the lands of the Duke of Lafões and turned them into a co-operative. Since no technical aid was forthcoming from the Agricultural Institute, they took some agricultural machines from a nearby penal colony. Then they uprooted the useless eucalyptus and planted cereals and vegetables. They now run the place. In many places the peasants have not waited for land reform before they acted.

Since 11 March here as throughout the country, there are occupations of houses that the owners refused to let. At Vila Vicosa the militants of LUAR helped set up a 'commission of the badly housed', that collectively examines individual cases before deciding on which squatted house to allocate to which family. At Castro Verde, a 'cultural and sports centre' has been set up in a squatted mansion. At Alcacer, women in the MDM have, against the instructions of their organisation, occupied a house to set up a kids' garden. Not a village, not a town, has escaped this wave of occupations. The government has quickly passed a law that legalised these occupation but forbids new ones.* But this law has little chance of being applied; no more so than the very unpopular anti-strike law of August which has remained 'on the shelf'. In all this the extreme left is very active; the people's desire for housing does the rest.

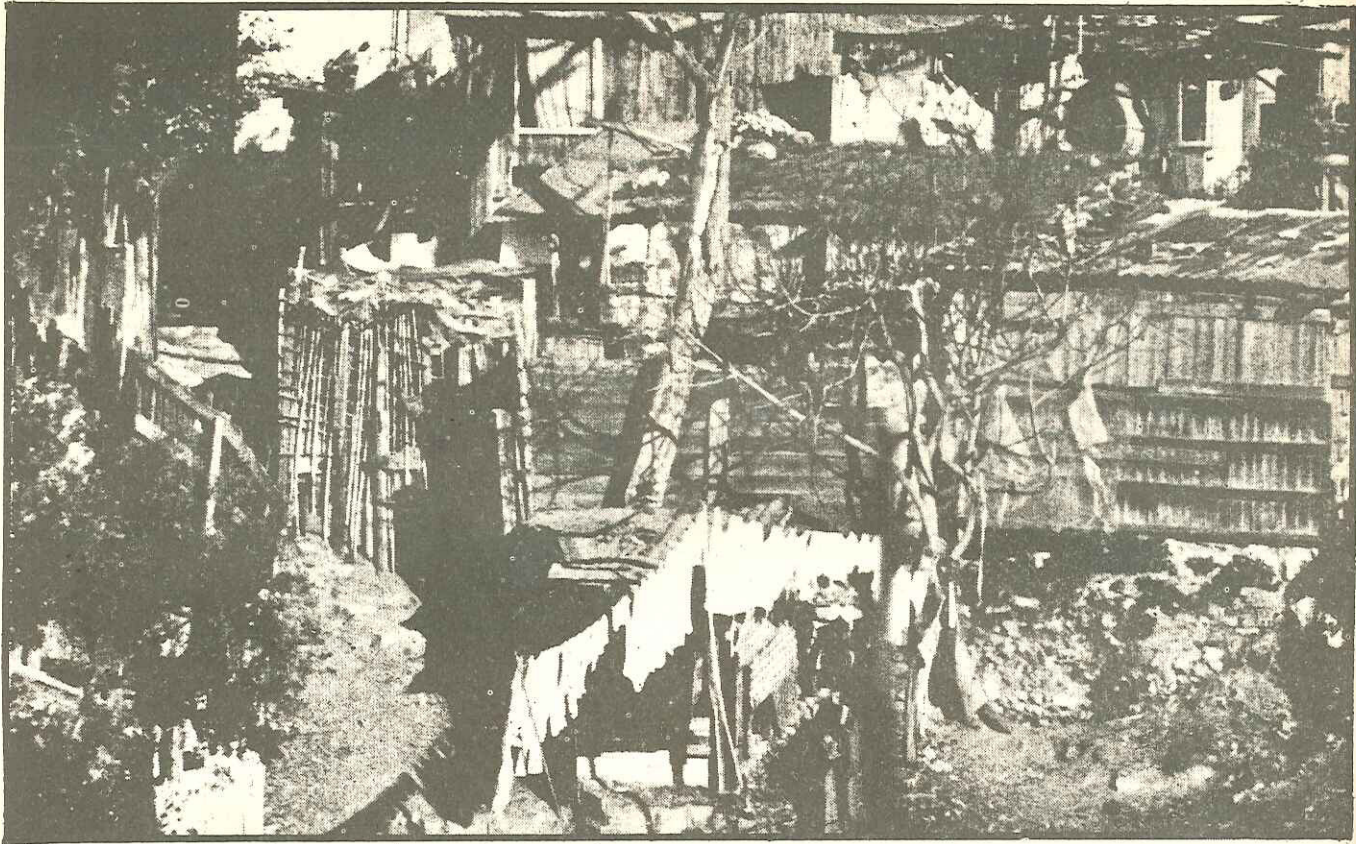
PROLETARIAN POWER

There are other amazing, isolated things happening. In Albernoa, ten miles from Beja, MES militants were instrumental in the setting up of a 'village committee'. This committee fills the vacuum of power that has existed at a local level since power was taken away from the reactionary GNR.

In the countryside, the class struggle is going on between the agricultural workers and the big landlords. What land reform there is will be the result of that struggle. There is also a Struggle going on between her rank and file agricultural workers and the PCP dominated union, which has failed to take up the question of land reform. A MES militant says: 'What is at stake is whether agricultural capitalism will be weakened. Whether the mechanism of financing and distribution will be re-organised under workers' control.' In the villages and on the occupied land, 'proletarian power' is becoming a mass movement. The implementation of land reform will unleash new social contradictions and new struggles for control.

* The government tried this in Lisbon last May. It did not work — people refused to accept that only occupations before 10 May were okay.

THE PEOPLE'S



A Lisbon shanty town: 30,000 live like this.

WELFARE STATE

Within days of the MFA coup on 25 April 1974, the first factory occupations were under way. But in the last few months the occupation movement has spread to the communities and the countryside. Where houses and land lie unused, the Portuguese working class is taking them over for its own needs.

The Provisional Government has announced a development programme for housing and for other social facilities, but the problems are too pressing to wait for official solutions. Workers, parents, housewives, students, are all taking the law into their own hands, with the support of the revolutionary organisations. Like the officers of the MFA, the main parties – the PS and PCP, are often forced to accept the occupations as a fact of life, especially when their own militants are involved.

Housing and health

The Portuguese government estimates that in the four main cities alone there's an immediate need for half a million dwellings. Half a century of fascism has left thirty thousand working class people just in Lisbon living in wooden and tin huts in the shanty towns that encircle the capital. Yet there are something like ten thousand empty flats in the city – kept that way by landlords who have 'disappeared' to avoid being forced to let them under new laws.

The chances of remedying the housing shortage through a crash building programme are slight. With inflation in the region of thirty-five percent, there's no money for one, and

the building industry – which has always catered for luxury housing and tourism – is in the doldrums, leaving thousands of construction workers jobless. So the empty houses are taken over – above all when they belong to people known to be involved in the two attempted right-wing coups.

Most of the occupations are for housing, but since there is no welfare state in Portugal, many buildings are being put to use as clinics, nurseries, schools, community centres, offices for the political organisations, and leisure centres for workers and their families.

In the countryside though, where social conditions are often as primitive as in Africa or Latin America, the need for social facilities and housing is even more acute. We include here a report written for the French revolutionary daily paper, Libération, about the occupation of a middle class children's school as a nursery in the village of Almerim.

A new people's nursery in the countryside

Almerim, a few miles south of the River Tagus, March 1975:

It's 5 pm. Fifteen or so LUAR militants from Almerim and Santarem; a handful of workers, and some women pile out of a convoy of cars in front of a massive three-storey building, the Institute of the Count of Sobral, the property of a man called Francisco Lobo de Vascon Conon.

The LUAR militants are armed with revolvers, but this is something that's only hinted at. One of them scales the gate and opens a door which the commando squad closes behind it. The LUARs put on their armbands, the women follow suit. Theirs is in the colours of the Portuguese Communist Party. A banner is slung between two windows - 'People's Nursery'. A rapid inventory is made of the house and the phones are checked.

One group leaves the building and starts giving out leaflets while another team gets down to decorating the wall outside: 'Popular Power' and 'Death to Capitalism'. It's now 6 pm - the time when the farm workers start coming back from the fields by truck and tractor. The cross-roads are soon congested. Some of the workers are reading the leaflet out loud. One of the LUAR militants is there to read it as well. So, like an echo, you can pick out the phrases: 'Down with the Reactionaries', 'Death to Capitalism', 'The People are with the MFA'.

The women range between fourteen and sixty. For all of them their working lives are just a series of memories of suffering, humiliation, physical breakdown, illiteracy, and the boss, above all. Here, traditionally, the only festival is the struggle. The Alentejo has a reputation as the bastion of the anti-fascist resistance. At the cost of many deaths and long years of prison.

A policeman of the GNR, standing impassively, is doing what he can to control the traffic. Three hundred yards up the road the trucks and tractors stop in the square outside the People's Centre, a kind of community centre. Close to five hundred people wait to enter the meeting hall. Its walls are covered in pictures of Catarina Eufemia, killed by the GNR in 1954 when they broke up a farm workers' meeting, and posters - the PCP's alternating with those of the other parties. But it's pretty clear that more than anything else, this town is Communist.

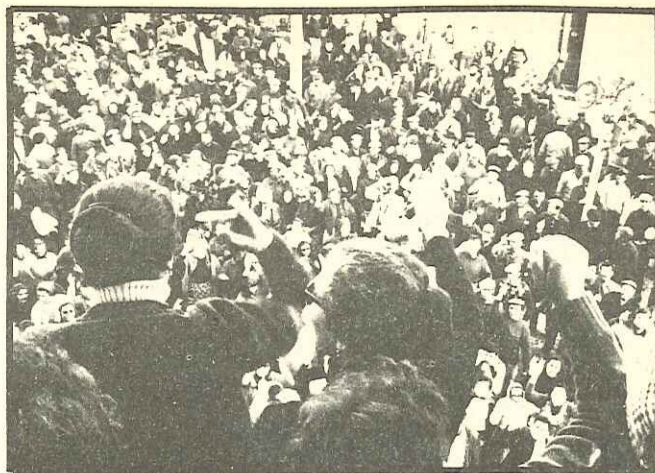
On the stage a 45-year-old farm worker, the president of their trade union in Almerim, explains why they occupied the Institute: 'These are decisive times for the future of the working class. And necessarily, people are waking up to the real problems; the ones everybody shares, especially the lack of facilities of any kind for the kids.' There are frequent interruptions as the men and women workers rise to their feet, their fists wielded like weapons, to underline his points - 'Down with Capitalism', 'Down with the Reactionaries', 'Power to the People'...

The five hundred gather outside and move off towards the Institute. The PCP women and the LUAR militants are standing on a balcony. They speak to the crowd, and then there's the scramble to get inside. Everybody tugging at each other's coats to get past through the door. They all badly want to find out what's inside the mysterious house in the town centre. A worker and his brother, both probably in their fifties, as if taken by a fit, hurl their caps to the ground shouting, 'Those robbers - down with the reactionaries!'

This enormous house of over thirty rooms, with its school desks and children's dormitory, its chapel, could cope with all the children in Almerim. Except that the owner, a big local landlord who lives in maybe Lisbon, or Castello Branco in the North, has always refused.

As the union president puts it: 'He's nothing but an exploiter, hiding behind his religion'. Some of the workers here work on his lands. 'It would be terrible to give up a place like this. It wasn't built just to be closed up', says a worker. A woman is crying. One of the LUAR militants tells me that she lost one of her children very young and that if this place had been open to the people then, she wouldn't have lost it. It wasn't unusual, just a few years ago, for parents to take their children out to the fields with them until they found someone to look after them.

I talk to a worker of about thirty, working in a wine store. Three years ago he came home after eight years in France. Now he's with the MDP-CDE which is considered close to the PCP.



Villagers decide to occupy.

He's one of a group of fifteen parents, including the trade union president, who set up a committee to look into the problem of the kids. Five times they wrote to the landowner asking him to make the house available to the whole town. That was before 11 March. But now, 'it's different'.

LUAR - an occupation force

About twenty miles away, on the other side of the Tagus, the revolutionary committee in Aveiras da Cima, helped again by LUAR, took over a kind of country villa to use as clinic and maternity hospital for the people. The Almerim parents' committee were persuaded by Aveiras da Cima; convinced by what they saw, they decided to carry out an occupation themselves too, also calling in the LUAR - 'Because', they say, 'Almerim is still really reactionary and we were a bit worried about things getting out of hand'. The MDP man explains to me that the committee called on all the parties for support. They refused. At the same time, he points out, the committee includes 'people from the PCP, the PS, the MDP. They decided to occupy, and then we asked LUAR for help.' The LUAR was a group involved in armed struggle against the dictatorship.

With the occupation over, a management committee of parents is set up, while the LUAR group gets ready to pull out. They had only come as midwives or, as one of their leaders puts it, 'an occupation force'.

Now it's 8 pm. All the farm workers are there when the civil governor of Santarem and the regional military commanders turn up. There's an immediate meeting in one of the rooms of the Institute between the parents, LUAR, and the 'authorities'.

The two senior officers have said nothing. But they are obviously pleased with what's happening, with their black hand-made riding crops and white gloves. They're cavalry. After 11 March they'd taken over from the officers supporting Spinoza.

One of them, lieutenant-colonel Alves Ribeiro, who took over command of the military academy in Santarem on the morning of 11 March, told me: 'We came here to find out if there was anything that could be done about the owner of this place. The people had to do this because there's nowhere for the kids. It might have been done differently, but the owner was adamant. There was no other way of solving the problem... It's been done with good intentions, even if it is somewhat unorthodox. But it's inevitable after forty-eight years of fascism... that's what the struggle against capitalism is like.'

Rural Portugal

Altogether just under one-third of the Portuguese work force gets its living from the land. But while this is one of the highest proportions in Europe, the agricultural economy is the most backward. The North's system of land tenure ensures that few farmers there can afford to mechanise, and besides the size of the holdings are too small to make it worthwhile. In the latifundia region, vast expanses of land are left uncultivated by absentee landlords - like the Duke

of Cadaval who lives in Paris & last visited his estates forty-two years ago. So in the South the net result is unemployment or seasonal underemployment for thousands of farm workers. For the country as a whole, an unnecessarily large bill for imported foodstuffs.

Encouraged by the factory occupations in the cities, the response to these conditions has been a wave of land occupations in the Alentejo, beginning early this year. A dozen ploughmen moved onto the Duke of Cadaval's estate and began ploughing it. The farmers' leaders, Jorge Relva and Antonio Grenho, were explaining to a government official that they represented a newly formed group called the League of Small Farmers, set up to run the new land they were liberating.

They had been planning the move for three months. Nineteen of them went to Lisbon to tell the Minister of Labour what they intended to do. They were received civilly but told that they should wait for a new agrarian law. The minister was unable to say when that would be, so the farmers gave him an ultimatum: if he could not produce the law by Saturday, 1 February, they would ride their tractors onto the estate and start ploughing. 'We also informed the local armed forces and the Duke's foreman'; they said. 'But

we heard nothing, so here we are.'

'That's fine', said the government official. He had heard that the Duke intended to abide by the agrarian law whenever it came out. 'But in the meantime', he added, 'we must be careful. We don't want to destroy one capitalist system just to build another.' The ploughman should not think that, because they had made the first move onto the land, they were the only ones entitled to cultivate it. 'But we don't think like that', said Jorge. 'We don't want to keep the land, neither do we want to squat on it. We are quite willing to pay rent.'

A few days later, on 9 February, thirty thousand farm workers met in nearby Evora to discuss their plans for agrarian reform. Their first demand was for the confiscation of all land belonging to landlords implicated in the attempted coup on 28 September 1974. But since then there has been a second attempt, on 11 March, which brought in its train a renewed movement for the purging of all the fascists in every walk of life, not least in the countryside. And the unity that came out of the swift and vigorous working class reply to the coup has strengthened the occupation wave. The farm workers are proposing their own solutions to the agrarian problem, and they're less willing to pay rent.

WOMEN RISE UP

On January 13th this year the MLM held a demonstration. Their leaflets said:

'Women's situation, exploited and oppressed in every country in the world, gives us little to celebrate. But in spite of the discriminatory attitude implicit in International Women's Year, we are going to take advantage of it to denounce publicly the different ways women are oppressed in Portugal.

'And we're starting with a bonfire. We're going to burn objects which symbolise our oppression.'

After newspapers had heralded the demonstration as a 'striptease', thousands of men turned up to observe, mock, and physically attack it. Women were beaten, stripped, insulted; the children they had with them were attacked. As the MLM pointed out in a letter to the government:

'Until yesterday, every demonstration has been peaceful, orderly and respected. We had no warning that all this would be changed by the simple fact that the demonstrators happened to be twenty women.'

BEFORE 25 APRIL

'I've worked at "Coats and Clarks" for nineteen years. All this time, I've suffered and seen a lot of my companions suffer. Some of them couldn't take any more, they left. Others had to put up with everything because they had a lot of difficulties at home and unsympathetic husbands. All us who've worked here for some time know which are the rotten ones in the factory. But everyone keeps quiet. Unfortunately, it's always been the same. And I know why: it's because they're afraid. They're afraid of being attacked; they're afraid of the men. And then there are the others, who cover up because they're in with the bosses, which means higher rates of pay. The ones who earn more keep quiet too. And it's a shame, because it should be all for one, and one for all!

'I've got three kids and plenty of problems - otherwise I would have left long ago. This is what I'm suggesting: let's form a womens' group which will stick together and defend each other, and if necessary give a good lesson to those pigs, because that's what they need.'

This letter to a left-wing paper from a woman worker in the North of Portugal brings up a whole range of the problems confronting women in Portugal: oppression at work and at home, fear of husbands and of bosses, the burdens of child care; barriers to getting together to fight. The fight that is beginning is on every front: against material exploitation in an underdeveloped but rapidly industrialising economy; against legal and political repression in a country only recently freed from fifty years of fascism, and against the

