

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article3254>



Portugal :

40 years of the Portuguese section of the Fourth International

- IV Online magazine - 2014 - IV468 - January 2014 -

Publication date: Sunday 26 January 2014

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

On Friday 20 December comrades in Portugal celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the foundation of the Portuguese section, which took place therefore only a few months before the Portuguese revolution of 25 April 1974. The Partido Socialista Revolucionário (PSR) [1] was an active force on the Portuguese left up to the creation of the Bloco de Esquerda in 1999, of which it was a founding member and today is part of the majority current within it. Among the contributions at the celebration was that of João-Carlos Louçã who retraced his experience as an activist of the Portuguese section.

The first image that comes to mind for me is that of a demonstration in Lisbon. In 1981, political prisoners in the north of Ireland went on hunger strike and died in Thatcher's prisons. With a group of dissidents from the UDP, the PSR called a solidarity demonstration, which was "to my eyes" gigantic. In a line of people wearing balaclavas, I was the second "S" in the phrase we carried on cardboard placards hung around the neck: "Somos Todos do IRA" (We are all in the IRA). It was João Cabral Fernandes [2] who led the man "uvre.

Some time afterwards, the British miners began their strike. Weeks, and then months on strike. Two leaders of the union toured here at the invitation of the Portuguese section of the Fourth International which was collecting money for the strikers. This second image remained for some years in the window of our office in Porto " that of the trade union tie offered on this occasion. That must be the only historic tie in the history of these 40 years!

At the same time in Poland workers organised outside of the single party, breaking with the Stalinist bureaucracy. Solidarnosc provided the occasion for us to organize solidarity in Portugal through an information committee. In the demonstrations of the CGTP, scuffles, insults, tumult. The bulletins of the information committee show that here, we were still far from the fall of the Berlin wall.

In 1984, there was the first Fourth International youth camp, in the Black Forest in Germany. Aged 17, I went in the spring to Amsterdam, all alone, to the Youth School in Willemsparksweg, a chic neighbourhood where the FI had its headquarters and where we prepared the project. With Ernest Mandel, Daniel Bensaïd, Miguel Romero and other leaders I sensed that the international organisation I had joined was radically egalitarian and void of paternalism. Despite the rain, during this first camp the striking memory was that of a thousand people in small groups learning the anthem of the Sandinistas and singing it together when the Nicaraguan delegation succeeding in crossing the border and came to the camp. Those who were there still know those words by heart today and we can still sing them. Isn't that right, Bolche [3]?

During much of the 1980s, the PSR held its congresses in a ground floor room on the rue da Palma. Meetings full of paper and texts to discuss, the international situation, the revolutionary strategy on an everyday basis. What to do? The revolution was not happening tomorrow and the counter revolution had more than set it. We resisted and we resist still the danger of the sect which would have buried itself around our certainties.

Some comrades from the Spanish State taught us, over these years, the urgency of anti-militarist work. Emblematic of a generation was the rock music form of intervention. The Tropa Não [4] had the Rue de Palma as its centre and the PSR as its motor. Without knowing it, we marked a generation of youth and determined the end of the general consent on compulsory military service. The smile of Zé da Messa is the image I like to retain of those times.

Others are the time when we confronted Le Pen in Portugal. First in Sesimbra, with Chico [5]. We demonstrated outside for a week. Luís Zuzarte [6], inside the hotel with Carmo, unfurled a banner in the chamber alongside the

40 years of the Portuguese section of the Fourth International

fascists. Then in Picoas, and then in Madeira, one car, four people, the banners of 3 different parties to spoil the party where Jardim [7] welcomed European Nazism.

With time images get mixed up and are manipulated by our memory, but the certainty that the FI has always been what has united us and allowed us to think about the world where we live, is not a vague image. In a time where Trotsky was more an example than an icon and Trotskyism one reference among others, “The Sexual Combat of Youth” was part of our baggage from the time of joining, in the same way as the “Transitional Programme” or “The Revolution Betrayed”. And I have also been lucky enough to be given “For Whom the Bell Tolls” and “Até Amanhã, Camaradas” [8] to read.

During the 1990s, the image is that of Manuel Graça [9], energetically smashing plastic clocks with hammer blows in São Bento [10]. With him hundreds of workers who protested thus against the obsession of the chronometer that capitalism imposes, limiting pauses, attacking the most elementary rights of those who work.

At the same time the student movement against registration fees was very influenced by the militants of the PSR. We did not yet know it, but the struggle we led in those years was a signal of what we experience today: the complete erosion of the state in its social functions. We lost the battle on registration fees but again we were at the centre of a struggle which marked a generation and still marks today the struggles for public education.

As we have also known how to be in all the essential struggles for dignity and emancipation. Without waiting for socialism and without relegating to the second level struggles which do not directly originate from the factories. Always in the campaigns for the right to abortion and contraception, the PSR was feminist before feminism found its full place inside the left. We have been for the right to happiness without frontiers of sexual orientation and the GTH [Gay Working Group] was precisely the first LGBT organisation to inaugurate a slow time of coming out of the closet and of social conquests, that of the 1990s.

On the occasion of this anniversary we cannot omit remembering those who are no longer with us: Zé da Messa, Luã-s Duarte, Carlos Prazeres Ferreira, António Gomes. And again those who, without ever having been members of this Portuguese section of the FI, would have certainly been there with pleasure: João Martins Pereira, Sérgio Mestre, João Mesquita, João Pinto, Carlos Brito Mendes. The black sheep which defied common sense and the official left, which campaigned by proudly affirming “the absolute minority”, it was made up of them also.

Today we can have different lives and even find ourselves in different spaces of political intervention. Thus the FI has been and can still be a space for meeting and reflection for revolutionaries in the world. It has been a basic element of this journey of 40 years, in victory and in defeat. It continues here. And us also.

[1] In 1973 the organisation was named Liga Comunista Internacionalista, it took the name PSR in 1978 at the fusion with the Partido Revolucionário dos Trabalhadores.

[2] Leader of the LCI, then the PSR.

[3] Nickname of PSR leader José Falcão.

[4] “Service No” (No to military service).

[5] Nickname of Francisco Louçã, a central leader of the PSR and then of Bloco de Esquerda.

40 years of the Portuguese section of the Fourth International

[6] A teacher and trade union leader of the PSR, who died young in an accident.

[7] Alberto João Jardim, PSD leader in Madeira.

[8] A novel by Manuel Tiago, the pen name of PCP leader Alvaro Cunhal, which has just been made into a film.

[9] A trade union leader and PSR activist.

[10] Site of the national parliament in Lisbon.