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[extract] November 25: How the Left Was Trapped [\(1\)](#)

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November 25th was, in its own way, as original as April 25th. If the "Carnation Revolution" had distinguished itself by overthrowing fascism without fighting and without casualties, the military coup that ended it did not seem to want to lag behind it in chivalry. The repression, restricted to the military area, was relatively mild, the Revolutionary Council remained in office, democratic legality was promptly restored, the PCP, accused of attempting an insurrection, remained in government. Five months after the coup, the country was endowed with an advanced constitution, "on its way to classless society" ... Everything worked as if a half revolution should correspond to a half counter-revolution, a comedy, another comedy.



This uniqueness is not, of course, explained by the "peaceful nature" of the Portuguese. African people can attest to it. They have to do with the original balance between the classes created during the revolutionary crisis, which gave rise, in Boaventura Sousa Santos' suggestive expression, to a duality of powerlessness rather than a duality of powers [\(2\)](#). November 25 was mild because the counterrevolution did not have much energy, but also because there was not much revolution to destroy.

For long months the popular movement, driven by the working class and the rural proletariat, and the conservative movement of the bourgeoisie had been exhausted in uncertain skirmishes, unable to tip the balance decisively to one side. If at the height of the "hot summer" the revolution seemed about to win the game, the advantage was illusory because the state apparatus, though paralyzed, remained intact and the masses lacked the strength to assault it.

The final three months of the crisis, between Tancos's pronouncement and 25 November, were precisely against the backdrop of the popular current's troop dispute. But even in this classic phase of the unraveling of all revolutionary crises, impotence was the striking feature on both sides. Until the bourgeoisie, framed by the PS, PPD, CDS and ELP, and stimulated by the Americans and Germans, joined forces to end the confrontation.

What was the impotence of the "left" in the autumn of 75? This is perhaps the most important question that Portuguese Marxists have to answer. As for us, it was born of the division that tore the popular revolutionary current. The proletariat, the real engine of events, was so closely intertwined with the democratic petty bourgeoisie that it could not disentangle itself from its political leadership. But the interests of both were openly antagonistic at the time. The proletariat needed, in order to achieve its objectives, to launch itself into the armed dispute of power; the petty bourgeoisie of the "left" offered her, in the name of evolution, a great variety of tactics, all of which had a common trait: keeping power out of reach. Hence the impotence.

That this is not a Marxist "dogmatic" thesis shows the play of conflicts and alliances in these three months of PREC agony between the protagonists of the left: the PCP, the "Gonçalvistas", the COPCON group, the far left.

PCP and "Gonçalvismo"

The fall of the Fifth Government, first doubled by the revolution, highlighted the tactical differences between the PCP and "Gonçalvism", differences that the PS and the right persist in ignoring for convenience and the "Marxist-Leninist" left for myopia. .

It was the task of the Fifth Government, according to the unsuspected testimony of one of its members, to take emergency economic measures, which "entailing sacrifices for the workers themselves would necessarily become unpopular. Only one Government, therefore, that deserved the trust workers could get them to accept them without strong reaction. " ⁽³⁾ The discontent of the

bourgeoisie was to be attenuated at the expense of the workers, and in this respect there were no differences between V. Gonçalves and the PCP.

The calculation was however hampered at the outset by the sudden appearance of the Document of the Nine. From that moment onwards, a discreet but increasingly deep disagreement began to develop between V. Gonçalves and Cunhal. The former believed, with its somewhat obtuse impulsiveness, to be able to meet the challenge of Melo Antunes and to advance with the "revolutionary power". But the general secretary of the PCP, for whom the unity of the "Democratic military" was a matter of faith, understood from the outset that the trench had to be abandoned.

Thus, while V. Gonçalves obtained from the Revolutionary Council the suspension of the nine "rebels", the PCP CC vowed for "recompositions, readjustments, or reconsiderations that could increase government efficiency and broaden the social and political support base of power. . ." ⁽⁴⁾

The PCP's warm and "unwavering" adhesion to the government during the turbulent August was partly forced - the party's proletarian base would understand no other attitude - and partly calculated - with that support the party was better placed to haggle. a platform with the Nine.

The PCP's motivations at this juncture were frankly expressed only a year later, in the CC report to the VIII Congress: "The PCP has repeatedly pointed to the dangers of forming such a Government without resolving the situation in the MFA."

Having formed this, the PCP insisted on the need for a "turn in the attitude of the military Left [ie the" Gonçalvistas "] towards the rapprochement and understanding of the various sectors of the MFA, particularly the Left and the Nine." ⁽⁵⁾

Finally, on 28 August, faced with the imminence of a disaster that V. Gonçalves was stubbornly refusing to admit, the PCP decided to disallow it by reneging to the FUR and launching a public negotiation proposal to the PS and the Nine. The proposal - [Cunhal](#) is still saying - "was not well received. The military Left, then worried about approaching the leftists, found it wrong to admit to talks with the Nine and the PS, which the leftists accused of fascists." ⁽⁶⁾

With this offer of capitulation was drawn the fate of the Assembly of Tancos, where V. Gonçalves left days later, embittered by the defeat but above all by the betrayal of the ally.

How did [Vasco Gonçalves](#) get to the left of the PCP? What is curious about his political thinking and what separates him from [Cunhal](#) is that he took the myth of the "transition to socialism" very seriously in the summer of 75. His head warmed by poorly digested revisionist readings, "Comrade Vasco" "I strongly believed that if the People / MFA alliance remained firmly on its way, it would be able to overcome all opposition, pedagogically winning the bourgeoisie to its side.

As he had exposed with pathetic ingenuity in Almada's speech, "the small and sectors of the bourgeois middle" were open to the prospect of "progressively ascending to a classless society, in which they would enjoy exactly the same rights as the rest of the population. . ." (...) "So you want to understand. ⁽⁷⁾Ascend to society without classes! - There was no better way to put the bosses, the owners and the cadres on the warpath. [Cunhal](#) did not have this naivete. The paths of the PCP and the "Military Left" may have seemed identical in this feverish fall of demonstrations and proclamations. But they corresponded to two disputed tactics: that of an inexperienced petty-bourgeois faction, which sought to impose "military socialism" against all sectors of the bourgeoisie; and that of a petty-bourgeois body matured in broad political battles, considering itself the natural conductor of the working class and willing to pursue a more prudent course.

Naturally, for both of them the aim was to divert the course of events from the two extreme outcomes that lurked at them: fascism or proletarian revolution. For this reason, the PCP and the "Gonçalvistas" were united, despite their differences, in the fight against the right and the fight against the left.

PCP and "Leftism"

It could not have been more overwhelming [Cunhal's](#) judgment of "leftism" at his party's eighth congress. "Complementary force and effective ally of reaction", "always sought to sharpen conflicts, provoke the armed and militarized forces to turn against the people", sought to "divert the masses from their objectives and lead them to adopt extreme forms of struggle leading to dead ends, "" monumental provocation of the UDP and other leftist forces "in the assault on the Spanish embassy," great provocation before the Patriarchate ", " sinister contribution to the political and military weakening of the MFA ", etc. ⁽⁸⁾

This list of accusations draws better the contours of the "Democratic and National Revolution" than all the PCP's programmatic texts. From [Cunhal's](#) perspective, there was no way forward - so anything to intensify conflict was provocative. It is with this kind of reasoning that the

peacetime progressive becomes a capitulator and even a reactionary in times of revolutionary crisis.

In 40 years of selfless struggle for democracy, [Álvaro Cunhal](#) had dreamed of a great legal PCP, represented in parliament and government, respected for his strength in the unions, the chambers, the intellectuals. But by the time all of this had been achieved, even beyond its best expectations, the world seemed to crumble, and an unforeseen, powerful, and uncontrollable upheaval called into question. Unbelievable slogans were cheered at rallies and plenary sessions - socialist revolution, workers' control, soldiers by the people, popular courts, militias! [Mario Soares](#) He was raved about as a fascist, Democratic officers were undone, everything was subverted. This subversion seemed to him the product of the evil action of the "leftists". He refused to recognize in her a creation of the labor movement, laboriously climbing one by one the steps that would lead him to confront the bourgeoisie. Therefore, I saw as the only possible policy in September-October to try at all costs to return to an outdated phase of the movement, paving the way between the extreme trends of revolution and counterrevolution: disengaging the Nine from the right, even at the expense of compromise. , turn off the leftist Gonçalves and re-paste the two halves into which the democratic MFA had broken.

But precisely because it was a retreat, this position was not easy to defend in the autumn of 75. The working masses were moving against the "left" slogans, which seeped through a thousand channels into the ranks of the PCP. The whole dynamics of the struggle pushed the proletarian party base to approach the far left so that it could fight on the right. These "leftists" whom no one had taken seriously had guessed that the MFA was unreliable, that the democratic bourgeoisie would move to the other side of the barricade, which needed to consider seizing power.

The PCP was shaken by a "sectarian" wave, as [Cunhal](#) would later confess: "There was at times and in certain sectors a great sectarianism and a yield to leftist pressure," "there were slogans and forms of struggle that were not corresponded to the existing conditions ", " workerism ", " triumphalism ", " the leftist influence was felt in the siege of the VI Government by the disabled of the Armed Forces and by the construction workers ", etc. ⁽⁹⁾

The duplicity that the PCP was accused in those months of remaining in the 6th Government appealing to concord while "deciding to make an alliance with the far left" for the seizure of power ⁽¹⁰⁾ He had a sign contrary to his claim: [Cunhal](#) was forced to fight on two fronts, negotiating with the PS and the

Nine to avoid a confrontation, but being tough enough not to let the workers go into the arms of the "leftists."

Until the last moment, the PCP's management continued to play with the two-pronged stick. In order not to lose touch with the movement, it had to fade criticism of "leftism" and it was radicalizing the watchwords: leaving the PPD from the government, strengthening the representation of the left in civil and military power ⁽¹¹⁾and, finally, "formation of a government to defend the Revolution" (PCP manifesto on 22 November). But his strategy remained unchanged - preventing the masses from taking the solution of the confrontation (this was what aimed at the dramatic "no civil war") and using the demonstrations as pressure on the CoR and PR to achieve "reunification". MFA ". The street at the service of the institutions.

Far left and the COPCON

In those days, the left-wing chain said many things right and took initiatives no less right. Break down the army hierarchy, set up the SUV ("United Soldiers Will Win") and bring them to the street, maintain mass mobilization and surveillance through successive demonstrations, gather weapons, rob the Spanish embassy, keep Radio Renaissance running to surround the government in St. Benedict, to denounce the CoR as the "Council of the counterrevolution" - all of this was arguably correct - and it must be reaffirmed today - because it served the accumulation of revolutionary forces by the proletariat. The problem with this agitation was not that it was "excessive" or "provocative," as the PCP accused in the wake of the field of order. It was just the opposite - she was insufficient.

For the revolutionary initiative of the masses to become overwhelming, the proletarian base of the PCP had to be detached from its ruling apparatus. The far left tactic was incapable of this because it did not realize the imminence of an internal rupture in the PCP.

In the FUR, intertwined with the COPCON group, an image of the PCP prevailed as "the potentially revolutionary party" because it brought together the bulk of the labor movement. It was hoped that left-wing pressure would eventually lead the grassroots to demand a political turn from the summit. It was not understood that a regrouping of the working class in decidedly revolutionary positions passed through the breakdown of the PCP.

The other branch of the left (the "Marxist-Leninist" current) made a big deal out of its "definite" cut with revisionism but was equally unable to pull its direction from the movement. His denunciation of the "thirst for power of the

Cunhalists at the service of Russian social-imperialism" was confused with social-democratic criticism. His indiscriminate attacks on PCP militants as "chiefs" favored cohesion rather than disintegration.

It would be necessary, with proposals for common workers' action, to force Cunhal to reveal his reformism before the class; show the workers that the unitary stabilization that Cunhal fought for was impracticable and only gave the reaction trump cards; to criticize the PCP, not as "social-fascist" but as the quintessential reformist party, which confiscated the revolutionary aspirations of the workers and reverted them, under the banner of communism, to the benefit of petty bourgeois democracy.

Proletariat and petty bourgeoisie

The far left could not exploit the latent conflict between the proletariat and petty bourgeoisie in the ranks of the PCP because it was afraid to face the great battle between the proletariat and petty bourgeoisie that was going on in the "left" and in the country. He did not see that the social support for the machinations of the Nine, the attacks of the PLA and the intolerable provocations of the 6th Government were given by the massive adhesion of an exasperated petty bourgeoisie who rushed to the rallies and demonstrations of the PS, PPD and CDS, calling for the restoration of the order.

Step by step, the struggle had reached the point of clarification - on the one hand, the proletariat, the great wage masses, the poor peasants, who needed to expropriate the bourgeoisie and to dismantle the state; on the other side, the bourgeoisie, throwing the petty bourgeoisie forward in defense of the army's property, order and integrity; in the middle, to serve as a buffer, fighting retardation, the workers' / petty-bourgeois "stew" of the PCP, the "Gonçalvistas", the MDP, etc.

The extreme left recoiled at the sharpness of this class struggle. The UDP sailed between two waters. From October onwards, it reclaimed from the PCP the slogan "no to civil war", claiming that it was essential to gain time to catch up with the left. Now, at the point where the class struggle had come, the only way to gain time was not with the demobilizing bogey of the civil war but more boldly impelling the struggle of the workers, soldiers, and wage earners to disrupt and delay the reactionary coup in preparation. With its "no to civil war" capitulator, seasoned with mischief against the PCP, the UDP was only able to demobilize its own adherents. [\(12\)](#)

The FUR groups, for their part, lived the insurrectionist vertigo, which was the other face of the same revolutionary incapacity. The MES hid under the slogan "unify and arm popular power" the hope that the revolutionary barracks would lead the popular commissions in the overthrow of the VI Government and the formation of a "government of revolutionary unity". The PRP overcame it with the call for armed insurrection, which was no more than the call for the leftist military coup.

The best revealer of the far left's indecisions was his attitude to the party issue. Without its own party, the working-class vanguard was at a permanent disadvantage to the various factions of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, all organized into strong parties. It had to be organized in a race against time.

Apparently the "ml" groups were more advanced than the others on this issue and placed "reconstruction of the true Communist Party" on the agenda. But which party were they preparing that came too late, weeks after November 25? It was a party inspired by a "popular" misrepresentation of Marxism, which eluded the revolutionary tasks of the proletariat after an alleged prior stage: the "democratic and popular revolution", led by a popular embryo front, the UDP, under the slogans of "unity of the people". Where a Bolshevik, Leninist-type party was needed, a centrist party of "revolutionary" class collaboration was grafted. Even if it had been born in time, the PCP (R) would not have changed the course of events.

The semi-anarchist wing grouped in the FUR proclaimed the need for the socialist revolution, but opposed the creation of the political staff for that revolution. He viewed the party as a threat to the grassroots commissions, to which he attributed the miraculous value of "parcels of power" and the only genuine representatives of the will of the masses. He did not see that, in the absence of the party, the proletarian vanguard could not make a coherent political line for the commissions and that, with all their "autonomy", became the tricks of a precise policy - that of the radical petty bourgeoisie and its inevitable desperate blow.

The blow

On November 20, the government suspended office in a clear invitation to the army to assume full power. The crowd that rushed to Bethlehem that day demanding a revolutionary government and shouting "no one can stand" received the cold shower of another contemporary speech by Costa Gomes. The secretariat of the industrial belt in Lisbon was the first to give orders to return home.

It would have been the last opportunity to make decisions to block the right-wing coup: to proclaim the general strike, to set up a fighting direction, to put the companies under the control of the TCs. But the PCP didn't even want to hear about such challenges and the left had no strength to do so.

And, of course, the battle that was hidden in the mass political terrain was transferred in caricature to the barracks plot. The COPCON and FUR officers, allied on the occasion of the "Gonçalvistas" and the military sector of the PCP ⁽¹³⁾decided to wage "decisive combat" in their own way.

"The time has come for a decisive breakthrough for socialism," the COPCON officers' manifesto proclaimed. "The power of the workers has to be armed." The aim was to gain popular support for a statement that would prevent Othello from being ousted and dismiss the right-wing chiefs of the Air Force. The insubordination of paratroopers and mini *put sch* leftist were the sad denouement to which reduced the great revolutionary movement of 74/75, the largest in modern Portuguese history. The workers who on 25 November gathered near the barracks asking for weapons were already defeated. The CFP chiefs sent us home with "confidence in the future." The long-matched military coup of social democracy was to usher in a new era of stability.welcomed as a hostage subject to the protection of Melo Antunes. It had all ended well: neither fascism nor revolution.

Footnotes:

(1) This text reproduces an article published in 1985 in the magazine *Política Operária*, nº 2.

(2) Bonaventure Souza Santos, *ibid .*, P. 21.

(3) JJ Teixeira Ribeiro, Introduction to *Speeches, Conferences, Interviews* by Vasco Gonçalves. Ed. Seara Nova, 1977, p. 10.

(4) *PCP CC Political Documents* , 3rd vol. Ed. Avante, 1976, p. 71

(5) Álvaro Cunhal, *The Portuguese Revolution - The Past and the Future*, Ed. Avante, 1976, p. 165.

(6) *id.*, P. 161.

(7) Vasco Gonçalves, cited work, p.367.

(8) Álvaro Cunhal, ob. cit., pp. 171-176.

(9) Álvaro Cunhal, ob. cit., pp. 168 and 383-384. See also *PCP CC Political Documents*, 3rd vol, pp. 302-303.

(10) Melo Antunes, in an interview with *Nouvel Observateur*, 24 November 1975.

(11) A. Cunhal Interview with *the People's Daily*, 11/11/75

(12) "The adventure of Cunhal and all reactionaries and fascists," the UDP said in a statement a week before the coup, "could be prevented by the union of all the people of the North and South against the civil war." .

(13) In 1975, the PCP's military officer Jaime Serra was to be severely criticized for giving "green light" to support the paratroopers.