



Nahuel Moreno

**Angola:
The Black Revolution
Underway**

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1977

First Spanish Edition: Editorial Pluma, Bogota, 1977

English translation: Daniel Iglesias

Cover and interior design: Daniel Iglesias

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www.uit-ci.org

www.izquierdasocialista.org.ar

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Buenos Aires, 2017
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Angola: the Black Revolution Underway

Well, it's like this:

we others

negroes

filthy negroes

we won't take anymore

that's right

we're through

being in Africa

in America

your negroes

your niggers

your filthy negroes

we won't take anymore

that surprises you

to say: yessuh

while polishing your boots

oui mon pe

to the white missionaries

or master

while harvesting your

sugar cane

coffee

cotton

peanuts

in Africa

in America

poor negroes

filthy negroes

that we were

that we won't be anymore

Jacques Roumain, "Filthy Negroes"

Preface

The left-wing movement around the whole world has split in the face of the Angolan civil war. On the one hand, the USSR, Cuba, the official communist parties, and many European ultra-leftist and centrist groups militarily and politically supported the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). On the other hand, the Maoist parties initially supported the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and then retracted themselves on the grounds they should keep themselves apart from a war between agents of imperialism that did not lead to anything positive.

The Trotskyist movement was no exception; it divided around the same problem and the same political outcomes that, roughly, emerged within the left movement. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the old Trotskyist party in the United States, was against militarily supporting the MPLA. However, most of the leadership of the Fourth International was in favour, from the beginning of the civil war, of this support. Finally, several Trotskyist organisations and leaders — including ourselves — criticised the support to any of the parties involved in the civil war as long as the occupier, the Portuguese army, did not abandon its positions since the three nationalist movements opposed this colonialist attitude. Later, when the South African army allied to FNLA-UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) invaded Angola, we immediately and radically changed our position and called for unconditional military support to the MPLA, in order to combat the South African –FNLA-UNITA military “bloc”.

The agreement emerged between some of the Trotskyist tendencies with the front headed by Stalinism in favour of the MPLA (or the other position led by the Maoists in opposition to the “fratricidal war” at the end of the same) did not mean at any time that the different tendencies of the Fourth International have capitulated to those leaderships or conceptions, abandoning the Trotskyist principles.

We must acknowledge that the SWP maintained a dignified attitude in totally opposing the intervention supported by the USA government itself and by its South African ally in Angola. We have always been characterised by an uncompromising policy in relation to the MPLA, despite the military support given in the last months of 1975 and the early months of 1976. It is necessary not to confuse military support with the political support given to a current as the MPLA, a movement of clear neo-colonial and reformist characteristics. The profound difference between the SWP and us is evident and undeniable, a difference which is of an extremely serious nature. So serious that, had there been Trotskyist militants from both positions in Angola, they would have been in diametrically opposed places during the civil war — those with the position of the SWP in the attitude of spectators and commentators, while those with our position, at the front of the MPLA and the Cubans column, facing the “column” of the South Africans–FNLA-UNITA.

We would never have suspected that the party of Cannon, Farrel Dobbs, Tom Kerry, Joseph Hansen and George Novack would fall so low, defending not only a policy diametrically opposed to that of Trotsky but also forgetting their own past, which provided so many teachings to generations of revolutionaries, including us. For this reason, the present work establishes an open polemic with

the leadership of the SWP, but it also wants to find, on their part, a positive response, proper of such a glorious party.

CHAPTER 1

The SWP does not defend either the MPLA or Angola from the South African racist attack

January 4, 1976, is a date that will pass into the history of the Fourth International and the Trotskyist movement. That day, in New York, the meeting of the National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party of the United States ended with the approval of the report entitled *Behind the Civil War in Angola*,¹ in which the conflict was analysed and a policy for it was delivered. In an unusual attitude, the National Committee of the SWP decided that the Trotskyists should not support any side in the conflict in Angola since they were dealing with a “*fratricidal*” and “*factional*” war. The approved report states that “*our attitude is opposed to the factional war*”.² To understand the gravity of this resolution, let us see what the concrete situation of the war in Angola was.

The progress of the civil war according to information of the own SWP

The entire world revolutionary movement knows the close link between *Intercontinental Press* [IP] and the SWP leadership (Joseph Hansen, the SWP’s main theoretician, is the director of IP). Well, this publication provided a series of information from its commentators and correspondents regarding the war, which we will detail below. At the end of November Ernest Harsch stated that “There have been several reports that *South African troops are actively involved* in the Angola fighting.” (IP, Vol. 13, No 42, 24 November 1975, p. 1625.)

On 1 December, Harsch reported: “*The [South African] military column swept hundreds of miles through Angola*, taking in rapid succession the cities of Sa da Bandeira, Mocámedes, Benguela, Lobito, Novo Redondo and Porto Amboim. The column was then reported to have divided into two parts, one headed toward Dondo, the site of the Cambembe power station that supplies electricity to Luanda, and the other toward Malange, another major city still under MPLA control” (IP, Vol. 13, No. 43, 1 December 1975, p. 1672.)

A week later, the correspondent for *Intercontinental Press* in Angola, Tony Hodges, reported: “*A joint column of South African, UNITA and FNLA troops marched on November 5 into Benguela and Lobito*, Angola’s largest port, 20 miles north of Benguela. [...] The South African-UNITA-FNLA column, reportedly well-equipped with armoured cars, has now captured Novo Redondo too. [...] Unmarked transport planes are also landing tons of heavy weapons at Benguela airport, apparently *the main supply point for the advancing South African-FNLA-UNITA force* on the coast.” (IP, Vol. 13, No. 44, 8 December 1975, p. 1705.)

Intercontinental Press on its 22 December issue publishes two articles by Harsch widely certifying the participation of the “*South African forces fighting in Angola against the MPLA*”. Quoting *Die Burger*, the unofficial organ of the government party of the Republic of South Africa, Harsch

1 Tony Thomas, “*Behind the Civil War in Angola*”, report approved by the National Committee of the SWP, reproduced in *Intercontinental Press*, Vol 14, No 3, 26 January 1976, pages 90-96. All quotes of this document come from this publication. [Editor]

2 Unless otherwise noted, all emphases are ours. (NM)

reported that “*Die Burger* admitted that *South African troops were effectively in ‘occupation’ of part of Angola*”. And a little later he said that “*South African incursions into Southern Angola are also directed against the civilian population*”. And he insists: “*the intervention of South African troops in the civil war*”; “Many of the drivers of the armored cars in the military column fighting against the MPLA in central Angola were members of the South African army”. And let’s end with this last statement from the tireless Harsch: “U.S. intelligence sources, cited by Binder [*New York Times* reporter], estimate that about 1,000 South African troops are in Angola. However, *Washington Post* reporter David B. Ottaway said in the November 30 issue that sources in Lusaka placed the number at between 2,500 and 6,000 troops and officers fighting simultaneously against the MPLA and the Namibian independence forces based in southern Angola” (*IP*, Vol. 13, No. 46, 22 December 1975, pp. 1796–1799.)

But not only did *Intercontinental Press* provide careful information. The rapporteur at the National Committee meeting held from 2 to 4 January was a prominent black leader of the SWP, comrade Tony Thomas. In his report, Thomas recognised, and I quote, that one of the “fields of operations” of the South African Army is the “military thrusts against the MPLA” and the formation of a “military bloc of the South Africans with UNITA and FNLA”, implying that the invasion of Angola, among other reasons, is done to “tip the balance in the civil war toward the UNITA and the FNLA” and “to facilitate the counterrevolutionary designs of the State Department”.

The *Intercontinental Press* reports and the official report by Tony Thomas posed a series of questions never explained by the National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party: On which side do we, the Trotskyists, fight? Do we defend the black MPLA militarily from racist “military thrusts”? Do we militarily back the MPLA from the attack of “the advancing South African-FNLA-UNITA force on the coast”, the “joint column of South African, UNITA and FNLA troops”, which “marched on November 5 into Benguela and Lobito”, and the “South African-UNITA-FNLA column, reportedly well-equipped with armoured cars” that “has now captured Novo Redondo too”?

As Trotskyists and old disciples of the SWP, we bow our faces in shame! Neither *The Militant*, nor *Intercontinental Press*, nor Tony Thomas, nor the NC of the SWP, nor, as far as we know, any Black, Chicano or Puerto Rican leader of that party, remembered to raise the banner and the most elemental Trotskyist program: when the racists attack a black movement, even if they have as allies other black movements, we, the Trotskyists, are unconditionally for the defence of the attacked against the rest, whatever the leadership and program of the black movement attacked. In addition, the facts are more aggravating: both the battle for Lobito and the South African “military thrusts”, quoted by Tony Thomas, were part of a repudiable political event — South Africa had invaded Angola. They went 900 kilometres into its territory and the FNLA-UNITA collaborated with the invasion. Meanwhile, the MPLA, with Cuban and Soviet aid, fought militarily against it.

The SWP distorted all the facts mentioned under a lake of ink, in order to justify its refusal to support the MPLA militarily. It recalled the collaboration of this movement with the Portuguese army and its contracts with Gulf Oil. It unearthed documents from the Fourth International, more than ten years old, in which Livio Maitan pondered the FNLA, granting it a character of mass movement opposed to Portuguese imperialism. It took care of investigating which tribes constituted the territorial and ethnic basis of each group and finally crowned its argument with a supreme sentence — historically and programmatically, the three movements were equal and had the same policy against imperialism. Of course, behind that dark inkblot it tried to conceal the fundamentals: on 4 January 1976, on the very day the NC of the SWP issued a solemn approval of the report, the MPLA fought militarily against the South African-Yankee invasion, while the FNLA-UNITA collaborated with the invaders. This is obviously the decisive factor. And every revolutionary, not to mention a Trotskyist, should base his policy on that fact. The SWP, in fact, did not.

It is necessary to demand accountability. The Black movements and the militants of the Fourth International are obliged to demand from Tony Thomas and the SWP a certain explanation of why the black leader disowned his race and, secondly, why he completely forgot Trotskyism, by refusing to defend the black MPLA from the “military thrusts” of the racist army.

CHAPTER 2

A false characterisation of the war

Every political error has, generally, a theoretical reason. Consequently, the mistake made by the SWP is no exception to the rule. Its false line arises from a mistaken characterisation of the war as “fratricidal” and “factional”.

At the aforementioned meeting of the National Committee of the SWP, the statement “*United States out of Angola!*” [IP, Vol. 14, No 2, 19 January 1976, p. 57] was also approved. Although with obvious limitations, it denounces the intervention of Yankee imperialism and calls to form, within the United States, a great mass movement similar to that faced by the Vietnamese war. This call, curiously, gives a definition opposite to that presented by Tony Thomas. Indeed, the statement states that “*Ford is involving the United States in a new colonial war*”, similar to Vietnam. It is regrettable that the leadership of the SWP has not bothered to analyse and develop this characterisation of the Angolan conflict. If the war was colonial, as it affirmed, there had to exist, on the one hand, a colonising army and, on the other, an anticolonial army to face it. So, in the “new colonial war” of Angola, which was the colonising army and which was the anticolonial army? The question was evident, but the SWP did not see it and left it unanswered. It would be useless to deny that it is possible to find a close link between a colonial war and a fratricidal war. But, to achieve a characterisation that allows us to formulate a correct policy, it is necessary to point out with absolute clarity the nature of the linkage and what is its dominant feature (fratricidal or colonial?). None of this did the NC of the SWP. Its policy for Angola was based on the characterisation given in the report (its “fratricidal” character was taken for granted), and its predominant “colonial” element was ignored.

The MPLA “could not win the war” but... it did!

Tony Thomas, convinced of his capacity for analysis and at the same time of the wisdom of his party’s leadership, in his fateful report, asserted: “In fact, I do not think that any of these groups can ‘win’ the struggle...” A few weeks later, the MPLA “fully won” the war. But, trying to cover his back as best as possible, Thomas “opened the umbrella” with the purpose of avoiding surprises and, consequently, said: “If one of them does gain a decisive victory over the others... the real winner would be imperialism”. Well, since the MPLA “won a decisive victory” against the other nationalist movements, does the SWP continue to believe that the MPLA’s “decisive victory” meant that the “real winner was imperialism”? Let us ask the same question in other ways for SWP militants to understand us. After the triumph of the MPLA, the South African army, which had managed to invade almost half of the Angolan territory, had to withdraw. What is the cause of the racist-imperialist military defeat? Does this mean that during the civil war “the real winner” was “imperialism”? Or, on the contrary, that this one also stumbled as a result of the triumph of the MPLA?

In its other resolution, as we have already seen, the SWP denounced the war as colonial. Such a statement immediately leads us to another key question: Was the victory of the MPLA a victory

for colonial forces, as the SWP predicted, or of anti-colonialism, as we said and say? The SWP commentators are trying to evade the answer to this simple question with the correct argument that, after their victory, the MPLA has continued to sell the country economically to imperialism, according to the custom of any reformist movement. We cannot accept a confusion of times. It is not about the current or future economic submission to imperialism, but about the colonial war that took place in January of this year, when the SWP made a statement on this confrontation. That is why we insist: Who won the Angolan war in January this year? South Africa and its military allies, or Angola?

In view of its mistakes, the SWP adopted a curious policy. We have already seen how they had predicted that if the triumph belonged to the MPLA, “the real winner would be imperialism”; but after the resounding success of this movement, which for the SWP would have meant the triumph of the counterrevolution, they do not raise slogans to defend a newly colonised Angola, but offensive slogans as if the mass movement had won and not the counterrevolution, slogans that denounce the capitulations of the MPLA and against the economic colonisation.

One of two, either the SWP was wrong in its prediction, or it has a policy of non-confrontation and non-denunciation of the counterrevolutionary triumph. Of course, we are convinced of their error and, as is the case with any new leadership emerging from the student camp, the leadership of the SWP is zealous of its prestige and has resolved to defend it, throwing a mantle of oblivion on its own predictions. However, reality is hard and always imposes itself; because of this, the SWP has resolved to accept it in silence, without any self-criticism. Instead, giving itself a program in line with it, it points to the military defeat of imperialism and the need to continue to push the triumphant revolution throughout southern Africa, to prevent the MPLA reformists from diverting it and giving it back to imperialism.

Chilling predictions that help white racism

The leadership of the SWP had no respite in their eagerness to discredit an MPLA that was waging a just war against the South African army and its military allies of the FNLA-UNITA. In the famous resolution, so often quoted, *Behind the civil war in Angola*, they gave a chilling prediction about the future of the tribes supporting the FNLA-UNITA if for some reason the MPLA triumphed: “We have to anticipate that the victory of either side in this civil war may mean pogroms, with victims running into the tens of thousands. Already leaders of the MPLA have talked about turning the Bakongo areas held by the FNLA into ‘another Biafra’. In Africa, the word ‘Biafra’ is synonymous with the civil war in Nigeria and the immense slaughter that occurred over the so-called tribal issue. A similar perspective is involved in Angola.”

The triumph of the MPLA is already a reality; however, *The Militant* and *Intercontinental Press* are not embarked on a worldwide campaign to avoid the extermination of the Bakongos at the hands of the MPLA. They do not even denounce it. Amnesia? Blindness? Or is it perhaps that these “tens of thousands of victims” have existed only in the imagination of the leadership of the SWP?

The three predictions of the SWP were not only utterly wrong but also had an unhealthy unity as they served imperialism and racism. If, as the facts have conclusively demonstrated, the military triumph of the MPLA has meant a colossal anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and mainly anti-racist triumph, it is time to ask ourselves: What role did the SWP’s predictions play in this anticolonial war? As Marxists, we must know that in a colonial or social war, the slogans, analyses and forecasts form part of it and aid one or the other side. What else could the racist Vorster,¹ who occupied Angola, ask from the glorious SWP? Not that they publicly endorse Vorster, of course. That would not have served them. Everyone would have claimed that the SWP had placed itself on the enemy side. However, the best way to help Vorster and Yankee imperialism was to say what the SWP said from the left: the MPLA cannot succeed, if it wins who truly wins is imperialism and if it defeats the

¹ Balthazar Johannes Vorster, better known as John Vorster, was the Prime Minister of South Africa at the time of these events. [Editor.]

other nationalist movements, it will massacre the entire black anti-MPLA population, of an absolute majority in Angola. That is why the role played by the SWP served the interests of imperialism and, at the same time, demoralised the MPLA, which had emerged as its only opponent in the colonial war. We believe that the SWP's predictions emerged unconsciously as a result of strong petty-bourgeois pressures but undoubtedly served the enemy, reverberating as a demoralising factor and infusing enthusiasm to the other two nationalist movements that, in service of and in complicity with the racists, attempted to colonise Angola. That is to say, there was an unconscious division of tasks: on the one hand, Vorster and imperialism denounced the Russian and Cuban intervention; on the other, the SWP denigrated the MPLA's just anticolonial war with all sorts of defeatist and pessimistic analyses and prognoses if the MPLA won the war.

An unanswered question: Why did the MPLA triumph?

The leadership of the SWP, by pretending to “forget” their predictions, avoids answering two unsettling questions: Why did the MPLA triumph? What was the reason for launching such a wrong forecast, asserting, eight weeks before its full victory, that the MPLA could not achieve it?

Posing these questions spares us from arriving at false conclusions, such as thinking that the triumph can be attributed to the Soviet weapons or the lack of USA aid to the FNLA-UNITA since according to the report by Tony Thomas, neither of the two powers wanted a beneficial result for either side. On the other hand, the same informant, with a luxury of details, showed us that the MPLA had much less support in the Angolan population than its adversaries (around one million and a half versus three million). In spite of everything, the MPLA won unmitigated.

How did this victory happen? In the way it is said, the SWP's explanation is in line with the arguments of imperialism, that is, that the victory has its reason for being in the military superiority of the MPLA and in the Cuban aid. Our point of view differs in high degree. We do not participate in the conception that gives priority, in a civil war, to military reasons, either for the aid received in armaments or soldiers, but we decide for political and moral reasons. For us, the ultimate explanation for such a fulminating triumph lies in two complementary reasons: the black FNLA-UNITA combatants became demoralised by having to fight alongside the mercenaries paid by the CIA and Vorster's racist soldiers who aided imperialism in the colonisation of Angola, and having to defeat a black movement like the MPLA (this is precisely what the most lucid commentators of imperialism have said). On the other hand, the opposite occurred in our view: the unequal confrontation with imperialism and the racist soldiers who tried to invade their cities and territories considerably elevated the victorious morale of the MPLA fighters, as well as the collaboration of the Cubans strengthened the possibility of triumph. Just as in every revolutionary victory, the secret of the triumph was in the demoralisation of the counterrevolutionary army and in the overwhelming enthusiasm of the revolutionary front.

A notary's “objectivity”

Since the resounding triumph of the MPLA, the analysis and politics of the SWP are accompanied by a strange sour taste, which does not allow them to recognise victory and bares a clear resentment that becomes, in few words, in “objective” comments of a journalistic type. Let us look at the tone of its articles: “Following the failure of the American and South African intervention in the Angolan civil war...” “Although the failure of the direct U.S. intervention in Angola was a political setback for Washington...” (*IP*, Vol. 14, No 8, 1 March 1976, p. 292 and 293.) “...the failure of the American and South African intervention in the Angolan civil war...” “The impact of the setback in Angola...” “The failure of the imperialist intervention in Angola...” “Washington's failure in Angola...” (*IP*, Vol. 14, No 9, 8 March 1976, p. 340 and 342). Nothing else. With the same coldness of a journalist on the payroll of the bourgeois press.

A revolutionary, not a notary, would have exclaimed: Long live the triumph of the MPLA! Long live the “failure of imperialist intervention in Angola” because of the heroic struggle of the MPLA and its allies, the Cubans!

A serious mistake: the support to the MPLA during the Portuguese occupation

Our criticism of the SWP for not having militarily defended the MPLA of the South African-imperialist attack does not mean that we should have always supported this nationalist organisation militarily. On the contrary, we believe that some leaders and groups of the IMT (International Majority Tendency) that supported it from the beginning of the civil war and under the Portuguese occupation committed a serious mistake.

For those who gave their support, the MPLA reflected the interests of the rising masses of workers, while the FNLA-UNITA was a conveyor belt of the bourgeoisie and imperialism. They estimated that in Angola there were two clearly defined camps: the counterrevolutionary camp of FNLA-UNITA and the progressive, even for some revolutionary, camp of the MPLA, despite its reformist leadership. It was the same division as they were outlining for Portugal: on the one hand, Costa Gomes, the Socialist Party and the bourgeois parties; on the other hand, the “progressive” military of the MFA, the Communist Party and the ultra-left.

According to the IMT, the fundamental aspect was the civil war, around which they turned all their politics, supporting a side and without considering how to continue the anticolonial war. Thus, for example, Comrade Gabriel, an important spokesperson for the IMT, did not accept the united front proposed at the time by the FNLA-UNITA against the colonialists; on the contrary, the IMT demanded the immediate withdrawal of Portuguese troops and that they leave “all arms and equipment to the MPLA and to the militias” (see: *Angola — masks fall*). If the IMT actually considered that the MPLA had enough strength to expel the Portuguese from Angola, this was precisely what had to be done and they put it all together, saying: “For the victory of the MPLA over the Portuguese army, that the MPLA expel the Portuguese army from Angola and take possession of its weapons”.

We must not deceive ourselves — the proposal by Comrade Gabriel conceals, in a well-disguised way, a call to the Portuguese “progressive” front MFA–CP–ultra-left to indirectly support the MPLA, leaving it the weapons. This position of Comrade Gabriel was pro-imperialist and deeply undemocratic. Pro-imperialist because it did not have as the essential axis of its policy the fight against the Portuguese occupant and did not call to an anti-imperialist front to the other nationalist movements. Antidemocratic because instead of proposing that the Angolan people resolve democratically through a Constituent Assembly how and who should govern them, it took sides with one of the nationalist factions — the MPLA.

Comrade Gabriel’s political obsession was not to expel the Portuguese army, with all its “wings”, but to help the MPLA victory over the other two nationalist movements in the civil war. He preferred to ally himself with the “progressive” wing of the Portuguese army and not with the nationalist movements opposed to the MPLA.

The SWP and the LTF (Leninist Trotskyist Faction), which we were still part of, we categorically pronounced ourselves against the policy of military support, at that moment, to the MPLA. At that time, Portugal still maintained the domination and occupation of Angola. As long as this happened, Portuguese imperialism — despite its growing weakness — continued to be the main enemy of the Angolan masses. All the factions of imperialism and its MFA government, and all its tendencies, from Pinheiro de Azevedo and Ramalho Eanes to Rosa Coutinho and Saraiva de Carvalho, were colonialists. Therefore, the aim of supporting a nationalist movement against others, as Comrade Gabriel did, seeking the support of a sector of the Portuguese government of the MFA, as the CP and the ultra-left did, only served to distract the attention from the main enemy, and to abandon the great anti-imperialist slogans: For a united front of all nationalist movements to expel the

Portuguese army from Angola! Down with the fratricidal war between the Angolan nationalisms that divide us against Portuguese imperialism!

CHAPTER 3

Fratricide war or colonial war?

The SWP coined the happy expression of “fratricidal war” in the context of the controversy against the Portuguese and world ultra-left and also against the IMT. It thus refined the nationalist of masses character of the FNLA-UNITA, although reformist; it was highlighted how these organisations continued fighting against the Portuguese occupant; it was emphasised that between them and the MPLA there were no substantive differences that justified giving their support. On the contrary, the MPLA had a clear collaborationist tendency with the occupant and also tried to turn the Portuguese army in their favour against the other two organisations, and on several occasions entered into dealings and negotiations.

Why, in those moments, the characterisation of “fratricidal war”, the war between brothers, was widely justified? Let us try to clarify it. Every relationship has a precise content. Thus, we are blood brothers when we have common parents; class brothers when we belong to the same social class; brothers of struggle, if we fight against the same enemy and for common goals. The latter identified the three nationalist movements: for more than a decade, they had been in a brotherhood in the struggle against Portuguese imperialism, for the independence of Angola. All three, to a greater or lesser extent, with more or less consequence, had participated — and participate — in the struggle against the old Lusitanian imperialism. Such was the content of their “brotherhood”.

The terrible civil war unleashed in the months leading up to the Lusitanian defeat served only to strengthen the Portuguese and delay their withdrawal, endangering the possibility of independence. Portuguese imperialism appealed to the old formula of “divide to reign”, inciting the fratricidal civil war. It even seemed, at some point, to be determined to agree with the MPLA, in order to crush the other two movements. This did not become reality due to the extreme Portuguese weakness and not to an alleged refusal by the MPLA leadership (who welcomed this perspective). Beleaguered by the Portuguese worker’s movement, facing the rebellion of the troops against embarking for Africa, surrounded by the nationalist movements, by the black states that surround Angola, and finally, by the other imperialist powers, Portuguese colonialism had to withdraw. Thus Angola achieved its independence in the midst of the “fratricidal war” between the nationalist movements.

A decisive turning point: the South African-Yankee military invasion

As Portuguese imperialism weakened, another fact of great transcendence happened: the South African invasion with United States support. Obviously, for the Angolan people, the main enemy was changing, because the independence that was being achieved against Portugal had to be defended against the new colonisers, who not only came to reinforce but to replace the old imperialism on the verge of dying.

Tony Thomas himself corroborates our claims. “The first incursions”, he says in his report, under the heading “The South African Intervention”, “started in June or July. Its immediate objective

was to persecute the SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization) guerrillas, who had passed to Angola from Namibia. [...] In August, the persecution of the SWAPO guerrillas was followed by the capture of the Cunene dam and the military occupation of the area." And he immediately says: "It is important to note that the FNLA and the UNITA did not serve as South African puppets in this imperialist invasion. On the other hand, UNITA and FNLA were at the head of the fighting against South Africa in June, July and August, along with the MPLA."

From October onwards, there is a complete reversal of the situation: FNLA-UNITA stops fighting the South African invasion to become their military allies. Tony Thomas, consistent to the end with himself, notes the fact without realising its enormous political implications: "In October appeared the first reports that there were South African troops participating in an advance of the forces of FNLA and UNITA by the coast from the south." As we have already mentioned, the rapporteur also acknowledges that the South Africans are determined to "attack the MPLA militarily" and, for this purpose, they have formed a "military bloc with UNITA and FNLA", also deciding to invade Angola, among others reasons, to "tip the balance of civil war in favor" of its new allies and "facilitate the counterrevolutionary plans of the State Department".

The "fratricidal" war becomes "colonial" war

We have compiled much more information, published in the international press, but the facts listed above seem sufficient. However, in spite of these reports and their own comments, the NC of the SWP did not reach the simple and clear-cut conclusions that such significant and telling facts demanded.

On the contrary, after publishing the mass of data we have mentioned and pointing out many of them in the report to the NC, it is curious and surprising to observe the indifference, including the silence of the SWP to the Yankee-South African military support to the FNLA-UNITA. For example, the declaration *United States out of Angola!* does not allude to it and places the Yankee intervention in the stratosphere, since it does not clarify how it is embodied. Omitting that the presence of South Africa and the United States directly favours the FNLA-UNITA, not clearly specifying for and against whom imperialism participates is a complicit silence that the SWP breaks sporadically to comment on the facts. On the other hand, these comments are openly manipulated for the purpose of maintaining their characterisation of the civil war as "fratricidal" and preventing it from collapsing. In the face of new events, they do not transform their position but try, in a desperate attempt, to force them into the old schema of factional war.

The SWP got into this dead end for refusing to recognise that shortly before the withdrawal of the Portuguese it was no longer possible to continue defining the war as fratricidal. Imperialism, thanks to its colossal power and wealth, by winning one side as an ally, changed the rules of the game, breaking the brotherhood of the three groups on the face of the new coloniser. This was precisely the case. In January 1976, when the SWP approved the report quoted, the MPLA, FNLA and UNITA had ceased to be siblings fighting each other; the last two allied themselves with the invader, while the MPLA opposed such invasion with arms in hand. This anti-imperialist attitude of the MPLA was a conclusive fact, regardless of what the content of its program or the ultimate intentions of its leadership.

The terms were no longer the same. The fratricidal war between three movements that fought for independence, transformed itself into a contest between two nationalist movements of masses allied to the new colonisation and another one that hindered it by fighting it militarily. That said, the fundamental aspect was undoubtedly this one, even if the MPLA had had a thousand capitulations to the "left wing" of the Portuguese army or if it had signed ten thousand agreements with Gulf Oil. Neither will this fundamental fact change, of course, whether in the future, near or far, the reformist MPLA economically hands over the country to imperialism again, since there is not much we can expect from a collaborationist movement. However, the situation had changed radically because of the South African-Yankee invasion, a phenomenon that the SWP refused to

accept and therefore did not take up a conscious defence of the black MPLA from the racist attack. The new leadership of the SWP forgot about the old teaching of Novack: any truth that transcends its limits becomes a falsehood; therefore, the definition of fratricidal war had been correct until the Portuguese occupation, from then on, after the South African invasion, it ceased to be so.

Hansen reflects this contradiction well in his article *Angola — the parallel with Vietnam* (IP, Vol. 13, No 46, 22 December 1975, pp. 1794-1795). With lucidity, he recognises that the main enemy has become USA imperialism and, at the same time, he advises not to interfere in the factional struggles of the three nationalist movements. In past occasions, this old recommendation was always taken into account. But, is the “military attack” of the South African army — allied to the FNLA-UNITA — against the MPLA a factional fact, internal to the whole Black Nationalist movement? Or perhaps it will be the fact that the MPLA was fighting the racists and their Angolan allies? In short, can we oppose imperialism without defending ourselves from its military allies or can we attack the South African soldiers, enlisted in the ranks of UNITA, without attacking the latter’s troops? Here we find a number of issues that need to be thoroughly analysed.

Imperialism evaporates like a ghost

For the leadership of the SWP, war “fundamentally involves three unprincipled nationalist factions...”. What role, then, do the United States and South Africa play? Is it an essential role or, on the contrary, is their intervention just another element, that is, secondary? Tony Thomas answers it is the second: “*Another element* in the situation”, he says, “is the imperialist support received by FNLA and UNITA, which includes the use of South African troops”.

To such a degree, USA and South African imperialism are, for Thomas, ancillary and external to the war (“another element”), whose policy towards each one of the side is basically identical, that at the end of the report, when “summarising” in three points the “position regarding the civil war”, he does not even bother to mention the United States and South Africa. Incredible, but true! In none of them does he mention, not even in passing, their attempts, in those days, to occupy and recolonise Angola. The only time he speaks of imperialism, it is only to insist on the egalitarian relationship that all movements have towards it (“the three groups”, he says, “are in favour of collaborating with imperialism”).

To sum up, the confrontation was not between two military blocs, one at the service of imperialist colonisation and another opposed to it, but between three nationalist movements which, for the United States, were essentially the same. The South African invasion is an “ominous” event and the United States from the outside, simultaneously or alternatively, supports the three sides, without a special interest in the victory of any of them, but with the purpose of making them equally weak.

In their eagerness to demonstrate that the war was still “fratricidal”, they were forced to do away, like a real ghost, with Yankee imperialism and South Africa as a prime factor. This nonsense was approved by the NC of the SWP on 4 January; two months after the South African army occupied Lobito and advanced 900 kilometres inside Angolan territory!

Didn’t the USA want the victory of the FNLA-UNITA?

Tony Thomas does not limit himself to put imperialism in the background in order to demonstrate the “fratricidal” character of the war, but, as a circus juggler, he tries to carry out a new theoretical pirouette: he throws the hypothesis of an imperialism without interest in the victory of FNLA-UNITA and in the defeat of the MPLA: “It is possible that *the main strategy of the State Department in this conflict is not to tip the balance decisively in favor of either side* [...] In reality, like Washington, Moscow does not seem to seek a total victory of its side.”

To say that the imperialists and racists did not want the defeat of the MPLA or the victory of FNLA-UNITA is to say that they did not want their own victory. Such a preposterous and paradoxical statement should be based on an exhaustive demonstration. Thomas does not bother to give it to us; he merely assures us that the proof of such a hypothesis is this: if imperialism had been interested in the victory of FNLA-UNITA, it could have done so “by sending more aid to UNITA and FNLA, or provoking further intervention by South African troops”. It is not necessary for the reader here to scrub his eyes, because indeed he has read well — for Tony Thomas and the SWP, imperialism could do in the Angolan conflict whatever it wanted, push the scales to one side or the other, or leave it in equilibrium. What to do, then, with the mass movement? Did the national and world class struggle have nothing to do with the Angolan conflict? As in a children’s fable, according to the SWP, imperialism had the power to solve everything as it wished and “easily”, developing a monologue on Angolan politics since it did not have as a polemicist the mass movement.

It seems incredible to us that such a statement comes from the SWP, which has to its credit an extraordinary role played in the demonstrations against the Vietnam War. We believe, in fact, the opposite. If USA and South African imperialism did not turn to their great power in support of their nationalist military allies to achieve victory, it was due to the fear of a gigantic mass movement throughout the world, from the United States to Africa. Yankee imperialism did not participate fully, as it intended, because recently the Indochinese masses, aided by the American and world masses, had just given it the most colossal beating in its history. This had left Washington badly battered, hence its cautious attitude to the risk of embarking on “new colonial wars”; its precaution was logical, it could not be exposed to a new defeat by part of the masses, of its own country as well as of those that were subject to the colonial imposition.

The “black hands” of South Africa on the scale

Unlike most sectarians, Comrade Thomas and the SWP have a good habit of scrupulously pointing out the facts and, occasionally, making some pertinent comments. This is how their characterisations often come into direct contradiction with the facts they list and comment on. Sometimes, even, quite comical situations occur.

As we have already seen, in a part of the report-resolution it is stated: “It is possible that the main strategy of the State Department in this conflict is *not to tip the balance decisively in favor of either side*”. Contradictorily, a little further down, he comments: “The South Africans have intervened for four obvious reasons...”. The third reason is: “to tip the scales of civil war in favor of the UNITA and FNLA...”. And the fourth reason is: “*to facilitate the counterrevolutionary plans of the Department of State*”. It is curious that South Africa wants to “facilitate” the “State Department” plans, doing exactly something that runs counter to the “main strategy” of the latter. But such absurdity is not the most important thing. The central aspect is the one that undermines all the sophistry that Tony Thomas built to continue holding that the civil war was fratricidal, among them, the one which refers to the true plans of imperialism.

It is “obvious”, says Tony Thomas, that the South African intervention’s goal is “to facilitate the counterrevolutionary plans of the State Department”, trying to “tip the scales of civil war in favor of UNITA and FNLA”.

Indeed, comrade Thomas, it was “obvious” that USA imperialism and South Africa intervened, using the maximum capacity left to them by the world mass movement, so that their allies would triumph and their enemy, the MPLA — which, with Cuban troops and Soviet arms, were opposed militarily to “facilitating” their counterrevolutionary plans — be defeated. It was also “obvious” that we had to fight militarily on the “side” of the MPLA to avoid, together with it, the triumph of imperialism and South Africa. But, precisely, this was the “obvious” conclusion that the SWP refused to deduce.

Trotsky had taught us how to take sides

In order to better illustrate the criticism that we have been making to the SWP, on the face of it and especially of our Latin American readers, we will allow ourselves to use a method sometimes used by Trotsky (for example, when he posed what would be our position if “democratic” England waged war on “totalitarian” Brazil). That is to say, the method of giving a hypothetical example.

Imagine, then, that Canada invades Peru: the Canadian army (supported by the USA through arms, mercenaries, dollars, an airlift with a centre in Panama, etc.), in a few weeks it occupies almost half the territory of that Latin American country. Let us suppose that it does so by taking advantage of a previous situation of civil war, “fratricide”, between Quechuas and Aymaras. The Canadians who enter Peru do so to support the Aymaras with seat in Lima and to defeat the Quechuas, with seat in Cuzco.

Making an extrapolation of their document on Angola, we would find that the SWP would probably describe this as “very ominous”, but would devote most of its analysis to remembering the treacherous policy of all the bourgeois or petty bourgeois leaders who lead the Aymaras and Quechuas, without turning their analysis around the primordial fact: the Canadian invasion.

If the report on the Peruvian case had been entrusted to the famous anthropologist Johnny Jonas, he would give us a master class on Peruvian ethnography, culture, languages, and so on. We would know that while the Aymaras, with their respective peasant federation, support the “Peruvian” military, those of Cuzco do the same with APRA-Belaunde. And we could not forget that these messes come from afar, from the time of Huáscar and Atahualpa. In addition, the informant would find that both the APRA and the “Peruvianist” military are real national movements with strength in the masses. Not only the Indians are divided, but also the unions; the CGT supports the APRA-Belaunde and the CGTP supports the military.

Of course, later on, he will arrive at the wise conclusion of not military supporting the APRA-Belaunde, supported by the Quechuas, or the military backed by the Aymara, because the two groups have undoubtedly persecuted the workers’ and peasants’ movement (Belaunde imprisoned Hugo Blanco, the military deported him), and have negotiated all kinds of deals with imperialism. In addition, Johnny Jonas has examined under the microscope the programs of both blocs and has shown they are the same: none of them raises socialism; both are in favour of foreign investment and against the workers’ movement. Therefore, the two blocs are equal in the face of imperialism.

His political conclusions would be “correct” generalities such as “we are in favour of the socialist program”, “we oppose the program and practices of each of the national fronts”, “we are for a class policy for the masses”, and so on and so forth. But, although “correct”, these ambiguities would be a true political crime. Through a mountain of historical “data” and programmatic generalities, the decisive and fundamental political fact would be dissolved: Canada militarily invaded Peru. And from that moment on, politics, the bourgeois fronts, the parties, the unions, the Indians, the students, the workers union federations, like everything else in Peru, must be divided into two camps: those with the Canadian-Yankee invasion, and those who fight against it. Naturally, the correct policy is one: to fortify the camp that fights against the military invasion.

We have expanded on this hypothetical example, but it is worth it because the SWP resolution on Angola merely repeats anthropologist Jonas’s error about Peru.

CHAPTER 4

Neither anti-imperialist slogan nor anti-imperialist fight

Although it may seem unwonted, Tony Thomas did not give in his report a single slogan or specific anti-imperialist task to mobilise the Angolan masses. However, we must recognise him some coherence. Within his reasoning, imperialism played a role of secondary importance, the war had a fratricidal and non-colonial character and, of course, it was unnecessary to confuse our policy by raising slogans against an enemy who, at that moment, was not the main one. It is quite possible that the new SWP leadership will try to cover itself with sophistry arguments. Perhaps they will tell us that they promoted two anti-imperialist slogans to be carried out by the workers of Angola: “United States out of Angola!” and “South Africa out of Angola!” Nothing more false. We urge the reader to review the report again and again, as we have done, to try to discover, even with a magnifying glass, a single precise anti-imperialist slogan raised to the Angolan masses.

Let’s see; the report consists of four political parts that formulate slogans and tasks for different countries and regions, as follows:

- The second and fourth allude to the tasks in Angola, without mentioning the anti-imperialist struggle;

- The first and third are about the United States and South Africa, respectively, and there the two slogans quoted are posed, calling the masses of the United States in one case and of South Africa in the other; both of them without taking into account the Angolan masses. So much so that the slogans are separated throughout the resolution; in the initial part, the tasks to be carried out in the USA are identified and in the conclusion, those that have to do with South Africa. This shows that the informant did not consider the colonisation by South Africa and by the United States as a same phenomenon and danger, which had to be repelled by the Angolan masses.

In the first part, at the beginning of the report, they tell us about the tactics to be followed by the SWP in the USA: “We propose a response equal to that given during the Indochinese war: an extensive campaign of mobilization and propaganda centered on the slogan *USA out of Angola!*” (emphasis in the original).

In the third part, at the end of the resolution, under the header “The Civil War goes deeper” the resolution sets out the actions that must be deployed by the Trotskyists against the racist Vorster government in South Africa. In this paragraph, we find a parallel with the United States and the Gerald Ford government in the following terms: “As for Vorster’s government in South Africa, it must be strongly censored, together with the Ford government, for intervening in the Angolan civil war. Vorster uses South African troops to pave the way for the intervention of troops of other imperialist powers”. We cannot fail to point out that the SWP has fallen into propagandism and pacifism. This is a military invasion and we are told that the Vorster government must be “strongly censored”. Since when is it a Trotskyist policy to repel a racist military invasion with “strong censorship”? And, finally, who should do that “strong censorship”? A true mystery that is not solved, as in certain detective novels.

Let us also assume that we were wrong and that this last slogan did not refer to the South African workers, but to the Angolans. Why then did they not call the nationalist movements to join in the struggle against the South Africans? They did not even make an appeal for the Angolan people to confront this task united. Why? No matter how much we spin it, the conclusion is one. During the civil war, the SWP did not raise any specific anti-imperialist unitary slogan for the action of the Angolan masses. Nothing proves this better than the specific program they give for Angola in the second and fourth parts of the report.

Sectarianism “blinds” Thomas

Under the heading “Right to Self-Determination”, in the second part of his report, Thomas proposed to us, as a task for Angola, to support the right to self-determination, which includes the right to autonomy and even secession for tribes–nationalities. Curiously, this right to self-determination of the tribes is forgotten in the final political synthesis. In this last part, they summarised the policy for Angola and the USA under the heading “What should be the position of revolutionists?” Let us see, then, according to the NC of the SWP, what a revolutionist should do and raise in Angola in January 1976. That is, in the midst of war and with more than half of the country occupied by South African troops and European and Yankee mercenaries paid by the CIA, who fought under the banners of the FNLA-UNITA.

“We believe that no political support should be given to any of the three groups. Victory of any of the three offers no guarantee that the Angolan masses will advance towards socialism. Imposing the domination of one nationality over the other two would not offer a stable solution to Angola’s problems and would only facilitate imperialism’s plans for the country.” And, finally, they conclude: “Our attitude is opposed to factional war. *We are in favor of the socialist program — for the struggles of the workers, the youth and the peasants who aim at a socialist society.* We oppose the program and practice of each of the nationalist groups. *We are in favor of a class policy for the masses.*”

With this formulation, the SWP leaves unsaid nothing less than the Trotskyist struggle for the liberation of colonial and semi-colonial countries from imperialism, as well as the women’s movement for their emancipation. The former constitute three-quarters of the capitalist world, the second, half of humanity.

To assert that “we oppose the program and practice of each of the nationalist groups” is an exaggerated bias. All these assertions — of class and socialist — are part of our “policy and program” for the colonial and semi-colonial countries, which are not reduced to just that, but are combined, transitional, since they contain an anti-imperialist and an agrarian part, as much or more important as a program, than the one referring to “class and socialist”, because it is adapted to the structure of the country.

It is completely false, for example, that we are only “with the struggles of the workers, the youth and the peasants who aim at a socialist society”. We begin by placing ourselves at the side of the struggles of the petty-bourgeois peasantry, who do not “aim” at all to socialism when it fights the great landowner and imperialism. We continue by supporting any youth movement that raises democratic demands, even if they do not “aim” to the establishment of “a socialist society”. We struggle not only for the liberation of “the workers, the youth and the peasants” from the capitalist yoke but also for the liberation of the backwards countries from imperialist rule. We see no contradiction between the two struggles, although we do not believe that they are identical either. This is the reason why we unconditionally support the struggle of the Angolan people for their national independence, although this does not mean that the masses, directly at that moment, “aim at socialism”. The dynamics of the class struggle and our intervention will bring us closer to the socialist revolution, but this will be so on condition of continuing to defend national independence. Let us reflect on the situation in Angola in particular. Would future struggles that “aim” to the establishment of “a socialist society” be facilitated by the South African occupation or would this be a colossal additional obstacle? The spirit of struggle of the masses (“the workers,

the youth and the peasants”) mentioned by Tony Thomas, the spirit of struggle without which the socialist revolution cannot be achieved, would it have been strengthened if the newly independent national independence conquered from the Portuguese was lost at the hands of the South African army?

In the combination of tasks faced by the Angolan masses, as it happens in colonial, semi-colonial and backwards countries, the fundamental programmatic importance rests on bourgeois democratic, anti-imperialist and agrarian tasks, not on socialist ones. This was the case in Russia, with the agrarian revolution or the struggle for the republic and the overthrow of Tsarism. Also in China, independence, national unity and the agrarian problem were the central tasks. This was also the case in Vietnam and Cuba, as well as in all colonial and semi-colonial countries. Another thing is the class dynamics. Only the working class is capable of reaching the end in the fulfilment of these bourgeois democratic tasks and of imposing the socialist tasks which it is incumbent upon them to demand.

Until the SWP report on Angola, this was the ABC for a Trotskyist. Now it seems this is no longer the case. Tony Thomas’s program for Angola is exclusively “socialist and of class”. Until recently, however, the fundamental importance for the SWP and the LTF in countries like Angola lay in the bourgeois democratic program of national liberation and agrarian revolution. But it has evaporated and belongs only to the past.

Democratic program for Portugal and the United States; “of class and socialist” for Angola

We need to take into account the astonishing contradiction existing in the policy of the SWP, since they, for Portugal, a colonialist country, presented a fundamentally democratic program; instead, for Angola, they demand a program “of class and socialist”.

On the other hand, for the United States, the other great SWP theoretician, George Novack, argues, apparently supported by his entire party, that “the revolutionary program” to achieve “the most determined mass offensive for workers’ power and socialism” “as the best defense of democracy” must have as a “*pivot*” “the confidence of the working masses in their own organizations and independent mobilizations *to protect and extend the democratic rights*” (*Democracy and Revolution*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1971, p. 271).¹

Finally! Thomas recalls the anti-imperialist struggle

After the report by Comrade Thomas, as it is customary, the NC held a discussion on the subject. This discussion has not been made known, but in summing up, the informant seems to have noticed the wide gap of his document, we do not know whether in reaction to certain criticisms or for another reason, and, for the first and only time, he mentioned, albeit in passing, the necessity of the anti-imperialist struggle in Angola. However, it should be emphasised and made clear that the variation appeared only in the summary and not in the official report. “What do we think we should do in Angola?” He wondered. “First, to call on the anti-imperialist unity of action of the three nationalist organizations together with any other organization that exists in Angola. We call them to unite against the different imperialist powers that have intervened [...] We propose the same with respect to South Africa or any other imperialist power that tries to intervene.”

How is this? Were we not opposed in the report to the “practice of each of the nationalist groups”? How then can it be understood a joint action with these groups around a major political task? Does it not also mean that there is a possibility of a common “anti-imperialist” practice?

¹ Unfortunately the original English version of *Democracy and Revolution* was not available to the translator, and this quote had to be retranslated from Spanish. [Translator]

However, let us not exaggerate, let us leave Thomas alone. It seems to us enough that, by means of the last-minute addition, he should cancel the entire preliminary report in its entirety, since neither in the first, nor the second, nor in the last part of this report did he appeal to “the anti-imperialist unity of action”. On the contrary, he placed special emphasis on the “class and socialist” struggle, exclusively, and in complete opposition to the nationalist movements. Of course, we understand the tremendous effort Thomas has made to recall the anti-imperialist struggle; it would be unfair to ignore it.

To make matters worse, there is no one to do it with

Unfortunately, his new call, though correct, is dangerously ultra-general and abstract. It looks like it was made by compromise. After all, we know already that it was at the last moment, after facing the discussion of a whole day and to save face. Anyway, calling on nationalist organisations to “unite against the various imperialist powers that have intervened” and against South Africa, leaves many issues up in the air. Who do we have to face and with whom? It is curious to see, for example, how Thomas systematically refuses to identify Yankee imperialism as the main enemy.

To make matters worse, Thomas and the SWP are indefinitely abstract in reference to whom to confront South Africa with. They vaporise this “with whom” in the invocation to “the three nationalist organisations or any other organisation that may exist”. We do not know how in the call for “unity of action” against South Africa, the SWP was able to remain silent about the military collaboration rendered by the FNLA-UNITA with the South African invasion, while the MPLA was fighting it. Why this refusal to see and speak clearly? Why this eagerness to dissolve in abstractions the merit and positive “practice” of the MPLA and the “betrayal” of the FNLA-UNITA?

On the warpath against the South African-Yankee invasion

For us, proud “archo-Trotskyists”, from the moment of the invasion, the South African-Yankee presence became the main enemy of the Angolan people and the fundamental element to raise our program, the political line and the slogans to follow. In this sense, the categorical slogan was one: Everyone to the war against the South African-Yankee invader until expelled from Angola!

The SWP would have come down to earth, ending its inconsistencies, by accepting the priority of this slogan in two basic directions:

- First, by pointing out against with whom the “unity of action” should be called, specifying the name and surname of the powers that intervened in January 1976, that is, proclaiming the anti-South African and anti-Yankee “unity of action”.

- Second, by being specific with whom to do the anti-South African unity. In this way, they would have called for “unity of action” with organisations opposed to the racist occupation and not with the traitors who supported it. It was obligatory, then, to join the MPLA army, being the only one facing the South African invasion, and also to confront the struggle against the FNLA-UNITA (allied with the racists), making an appeal to its soldiers with the purpose of provoking their desertion and their incorporation into the anti-South African struggle.

CHAPTER 5

An addition that subtracts or an addition that multiplies — a world policy against imperialism

The Fourth International, our World Party for the Socialist Revolution, could not settle for a purely Angolan political course in the face of civil war. On the contrary, a worldwide, internationalist and proletarian political course was essential.

However, to our surprise, the SWP does not do this. This is why the structure of the report-resolution is not accidental. In four parts, totally separate, it presented us with national and tribal slogans. The first part, for the US; the second, for the Bakongos, Mbumbus and Ovimbundus; the third, for South Africa; the fourth and final, for Angola and the United States. Nowhere was it raised the worldwide internationalist policy of mobilising the masses throughout the world, from the European to the Chinese, from Latin American to Arab and Asian, to face and defeat imperialism in Angola.

The omission is really serious if we consider that the SWP is the leader of the LTF, a worldwide faction that includes English, Spanish, Colombian, Canadian, Australian militants, et cetera. Was there not a single common task to be carried out by all these militants? If there was, what was it and why did the SWP not propose it? We believe that the Fourth International always has worldwide tasks to face the critical situations of the revolutionary process and that is the *raison d'être* of its existence.

In the first imperialist war, if we do not remember wrong, Lenin formulated two meridian slogans for the world proletariat: “the lesser evil is the defeat of one’s own imperialist country” and “turn the imperialist war into a civil war”. Although not formulated with the same precision, we think that the Leninist-Trotskyist policy for a war between an imperialist and a colonial or semi-colonial country can be summed up in the slogan: “the greater good is the defeat of the imperialist country and the triumph of the colonial country or movement attacked by imperialism”. From this global strategic slogan follow the tactics and national slogans, appropriate to the level of class struggle and the consciousness of the masses of each country. In the imperialist oppressor, for example, these slogans can range from a demand for the return of imperialist troops, to direct economic aid to the colonial country, and together with certain acts of sabotage that may help us defeat imperialism, according to the degree of mass consciousness, to achieve “the greater good, the defeat of our own imperialist country”. In the colonial country, it is our direct intervention, as vanguard soldiers, in the anti-colonial war, maintaining our political independence from the bourgeois or petty-bourgeois leadership that will, inevitably, negotiate or betray the war or its outcome.

True, the SWP demanded the withdrawal of US arms and mercenaries, as of the South African troops from Angola. That was very good, but given our internationalist consciousness, the political projection could not stop there. Instead, our policy, and not so our slogans for the metropolitan country, was solidified in the call for the “defeat of the USA-South Africa and the triumph of the MPLA and the People’s Republic of Angola in the new imperialist colonial war”. Where does the SWP say this? Nowhere. But let us not demand so much. Let us ask it to just tell us where it has

put forward a worldwide, global policy to “expel the United States and South Africa from Angola”? Was it important, then, that the masses of the world would help the MPLA to defeat Vorster’s racist army? Without a doubt, then, why the silence? Why did they not raise it? And otherwise, why did they not explain their reasoning to launch this slogan: “Against the help from the world mass movement, from Cuba, the USSR, from the left to the MPLA trying to defeat militarily the FNLA–UNITA–USA–South Africa bloc?”

No matter how many times we go around it, we will always reach the same point — the SWP has limited itself to giving us a sum of national and tribal tactics and slogans regarding the Angolan conflict, never a world policy to militarily defeat Yankee and South African imperialism in Angola.

Vietnam was a good example

For us, it is painful to confess an old admiration for the SWP, especially for the policy developed for the Vietnam War. We have reread their press and their resolutions in order to verify the certainty of what we have asserted. The terrible conditions of legality in our country prevented us from completing this re-reading, but, to the best of our knowledge, the SWP policy did not correspond to the guidelines we have listed. For that reason, we will merely present our position on what should have been our policy in the Vietnamese war.

To mobilise the US workers and the mass movement against the colonial war it was necessary to understand their political backwardness. For this reason, in the case of the Vietnam War, the SWP wisely formulated its slogans, “Out of Vietnam, now” and “Let the soldiers return home now”. Of course, the correctness of these approaches mobilised millions of people.

However, a national slogan, however correct, cannot replace a global policy and strategy. For example, the two famous slogans of the SWP were correct, as long as they were part of a truly internationalist and Trotskyist global policy. In this way, they had to constitute the tactical adaptation and agitation, to the level of consciousness of the American masses, of the global and strategic slogan: “For the defeat of the United States. For the complete triumph of the Vietnamese FNL”.

If the level of consciousness of the American masses had been higher, the appropriate slogans for their mobilisation would have been others, such as sabotage, mass desertion, refusal of soldiers to embark, support for the victory of the FNL, economic and military aid to the FNL in struggle against our imperialist country, and so on.

Some IMT comrades harshly criticised the SWP for not raising in the US the slogan “Victory of the FNL”. They were wrong because they identified international politics with national tactics and slogans. They did not understand that, given the level of consciousness of the American masses, the expression “soldiers to return” was the best slogan to find their support against the colonial war and thus help the triumph of the FNL. It was argued that, as a matter of priority, the slogan was directed to the vanguard and not to the broad masses. Obviously, it lacks weight and correctness, because the slogans are released to the mass movements. Just as the slogan of “Victory for the MPLA, defeat of the USA–South Africa”, the global and strategic slogan “Victory of the FNL, defeat of the United States” is of masses, because it covers from the whole of the Vietnamese masses, the decisive and fundamental ones, to the masses of the colonial and workers’ countries, including the masses of the metropolises. At the global level, it is not of the vanguard, but massive, although it cannot be directly applied as a mass mobiliser in some imperialist countries, mainly in the USA, because of the backwardness of its workers.

In other words, the slogan, “let the soldiers return home, now”, corresponded to a correct national tactic because it took into account the level of consciousness as part of the strategy and slogan of our world party: “For the victory of the FNL, for the defeat of the USA in the Vietnamese war”. The SWP, as a Trotskyist party that is part of a world party, or at least as a sympathiser organisation, given the reactionary laws of that country, had to make it clear that its national

slogan was a tactic that was part of the politics of the Fourth International of military and material support to the FNL to defeat Yankee imperialism. If this is not done, there is a danger of falling into pacifism: denouncing imperialism itself and being against war, when in fact, we must be in favour of the FNL war and the defeat of imperialism itself. As Trotsky would say, if we could we would fight with arms in the hand against our own imperialism and in favour of the colonial people.

CHAPTER 6

Did the SWP oppose the Cuban aid?

It is difficult to understand, without having an internationalist and proletarian vision, the importance of Cuban military aid to the MPLA. A small country, located in the Caribbean, across the water from the imperialist monster, takes its troops to a distant country of another continent. Again, the SWP made a serious mistake precisely because of its inability to define a world policy. This explains its regrettable silence around the sending of the Cuban troops who participated in the liberation of Angola.

Was the surprising presence of Cuba positive or negative for the advance of the black revolution in Angola and Africa? Does this historical fact not have any significance for the SWP? Is it a problem foreign to its concerns? Thousands of Cuban combatants risked their lives in an unknown and distant country, in support of the MPLA. However, it seems that for the SWP this did not matter, as it hardly commented on it or made slight references. It may be necessary to pay tribute to the “personality” of the new leadership of the SWP since it has been the only left-wing organisation in the world that has not yet pronounced itself categorically on this event that shook world politics. In compensation, the SWP report-resolution on Angola devotes a brief heading to the “Cuban Intervention”.

In the heading we have just mentioned, in fact, very little is said about Cuba and mainly revolves around the USSR. “The intervention of Cuba, which according to reports has about five thousand soldiers in Angola, is subsidiary to the intervention of the USSR. For diplomatic reasons, Moscow prefers not to send Soviet troops. From Cuba’s point of view, this action could be valued as a demonstration of opposition to imperialism.” In Lobito, on 5 November 1975, two months before the SWP approved this phrase, Cubans fought Vorster’s white army to prevent him from taking the city. From our point of view — not from that of Fidel Castro’s government — is this Cuban intervention of “opposition to imperialism” or not? Yes or no, comrades of the SWP? If you accept this, then why does your resolution not say so and does not come to any valid conclusion. If you do not share this internationalist collaboration, why have you not expressed your opposition and demanded the withdrawal, explaining to us the negative part of the Cuban military confrontation with the South Africans for the anti-imperialist struggle? In reality, your evasive attitude is a true political crime because it has led you to wash your hands; however, they remain fairly dirty.

With regard to Soviet collaboration, the SWP does not define its position either and, through a series of generalities and abstractions, tries to disqualify this support. “The intention of the Kremlin in giving military and diplomatic assistance to the MPLA is not to help the Angolan masses, but to commit the MPLA regime to Moscow...” “Do we believe, perhaps, that Cuba and the USSR are more ‘progressive’ because they support a petty-bourgeois nationalist faction, while Peking and Pyongyang support another equally petty-bourgeois faction?” On 27 February 1976, after the war ended, *The Militant*, through the mouth of one of its leaders, said: “*the Soviet Union and Cuba have been wrong to support one side against the other in the Angolan civil war...*”. This, in reality, meant the triumph of the South African invasion, since without the Russian-Cuban support the MPLA would have been completely defeated.

In January and February of this year, we can verify it with their own documents, for the SWP, it was equally worthy of criticism to support the MPLA on the part of the USSR-Cuba than to support the FNLA-UNITA on the part of Peking. They seemed to place themselves above the civil war and were not interested in the weapons given to the MPLA to aid the defence of Angola from the South African-Yankee invasion, while those provided to the FNLA-UNITA invigorated the invasion.

In other words, in the same way, that there was absolutely no anti-imperialist slogan, there was no clarity in the report regarding Soviet-Cuban collaboration. In the closing, the rapporteur tries to overcome the silence or the implicit criticism to that aid, noting: “If the Soviet Union stops sending arms to the MPLA, would that be a step forward for the Angolan revolution? No, it would embolden imperialism!” It is little, but they do take into account, however, the silence on the sending of Cuban troops remains. Anyway, the quote is not in itself a policy; it is a journalistic commentary that foresees the lesser evil. It is a simple footnote.

Unfortunately, without becoming obsessive, we have to arrive at the same point: the lack of a policy of military support for the MPLA on a worldwide scale, just as it did not have a policy to an Angolan or South African scale to face the new imperialist colonisation. It was not a question of investigating how far Soviet and Cuban aid would come to; it was urgent to have a world policy, just as there was one against the Vietnam War. For this war, we, the Trotskyists, demanded that the USSR and China increasingly help the FNL. If the SWP in its other resolution on Angola — and some of its leaders in their writings — classified the Angolan war as almost identical to the Vietnamese war, why did they not propose the same line of global support to the MPLA, which, like the Vietnamese FNL, was fighting imperialist forces? Why did they not criticise the USSR — as they did during the Vietnam War — because of its insufficient aid to the MPLA? And all these arguments should not be an obstacle to concealing our analysis of the bureaucratic policy of the Kremlin and the leadership of the MPLA, but such criticisms had to be made within the support of the just MPLA war against imperialism and its national allies, and from the just and colossal support of the USSR and Cuba to that courageous war. In other words, instead of assuming poses of hysterical commentators, we should have been the vanguard in helping the MPLA on a world scale, in the united front that the SWP should have done with the USSR and Cuba to back the MPLA’s struggle against the racist hordes of Vorster and the black allies. The SWP should have acted the opposite of how it did. Its obligation was to have called on the masses of the entire world, including the workers’ states, to militarily support the MPLA and defeat imperialism. Failing to do so, they remained at the rearguard, behind the Soviet bureaucracy and Fidel Castro, who, with their negotiating and bureaucratic methods, knew to be more consistent and positive than the SWP to contribute to the MPLA’s gigantic anti-imperialist victory.

CHAPTER 7

An unwanted guest — the international Black Movement

The erroneous lack of an international policy to confront imperialism in Angola had its maximum expression in the total ignorance, by the Socialist Workers Party, of the black movement on a world scale. In order to elaborate a revolutionary policy on Angola, it was necessary to refer to the framework of a general policy, a policy that understood the development of the black movement in the world. Angola is, precisely, a link in that revolutionary process, common to all the blacks of the world against racism and white exploitation. However, the SWP has not seen this problem even in dreams; it did not place the Angolan civil war within the black revolutionary and white and imperialist counter-revolutionary processes around the world. It considered it an isolated case; therefore, it did not propose a policy to develop the black revolution in the world, in Africa and in the Republic of South Africa that would face the racist and imperialist aggression.

Our slogan (All to war against the South African-Yankee invader!) and our policy (For the “defeat of the United States-South Africa and the triumph of the MPLA and the People’s Republic of Angola in the new imperialist colonial war”) would have been incomplete, and in a short time wrong, if we did not frame them in an internationalist context (That the black masses of the world mobilise to prevent the manoeuvres by fascist Vorster and Yankee imperialism against Angola and the black MPLA!).

The SWP does not call for the support of American blacks to their race brethren of the MPLA

In the resolution and report by Tony Thomas — our obligatory point of reference — there is no specific call to the black movement of the United States in defence of its race brethren of the MPLA, threatened by American imperialism and the racist South Africans of Vorster. However, in the other resolution, *United States out of Angola!*, there is a long commentary on American blacks.

“Black Americans, in particular, want no part of Ford’s war policy. The American government has waged an unceasing war on the Black freedom struggle—in Africa and in the United States. Black Americans know better than anyone that Washington’s policies are thoroughly racist. Why should they believe Ford’s rhetoric about defending democracy in Africa, when they see the U.S. government refusing to enforce its own laws on desegregation at home?

“Why should they believe that the CIA is fighting for freedom in Angola when they know that the United States plotted to murder Patrice Lumumba, the Congolese rebel leader, just as it has conspired to disrupt and destroy the Black liberation movement in this country?

“Why should they support the spending of millions of dollars for war in Angola, while social services desperately needed by the Black communities are being slashed?” (*IP*, Vol. 14, No 2, 19 January 1976, p. 57).

The other reference to the black movement comes at the end of the SWP’s appeal: “The labor movement, the *Black communities*, the colleges and high schools, ought now to become the arenas

for antiwar discussion, education, and action.” Finally, let us quote the three fundamental slogans set forth by the SWP. First: “No secret war! Let the American people know the full truth about U.S. intervention!” Second: “Not one penny for the war, not one soldier for Angola!” And last: “No more Vietnam! Hands off Angola!” (Ibid).

We have perhaps exaggerated in the length of the quotations previously made, but it was deliberate to show, quite clearly, how the Socialist Workers Party in none of its two resolutions made a specific appeal to the blacks of the United States, as part of the world Black movement. It limited itself, simply, to a description of the reasons why blacks could not support the United States, but from that description, it did not arrive at any specific and well-defined proposal with the intention of enlivening the solidarity of race.

In the two documents there is not a single call to support the following: “Blacks of the United States, you are as exploited as Angolan blacks by imperialism and racism, for this reason, you have a common and fundamental task. You suffer from this exploitation, which the rest of the American people do not suffer and therefore you have a specific, present, immediate brotherhood of struggle, while the other sectors are not directly affected.” That is, American Blacks are part of the global black movement and they have to act as such. This grave error becomes more serious and culpable by not publicly denouncing, before the Black Americans, that imperialism and racism attacked the MPLA, and that they formed a common military column with two Black Nationalist traitor movements. It was necessary to speak clearly; to affirm, for example, that racism and imperialism did not attack the FNLA-UNITA. That is, there was no factional question or program discussion involved, but a concrete military fact, which was concealed by the SWP. That is, the SWP, on the one hand, did not consider the black American masses as part of the black revolution of the entire world, and secondly, it did not allow the black American masses to know the truth. It did not raise, then, the banner of racial solidarity with the black MPLA, brutally attacked by the South African army. Nor did it proclaim the unconditional defence of this movement, confronted with criminal white racism.

For the Federation of Black Republics of Southern Africa

Nevertheless, this proposal is incomplete if we do not agitate, right now, the great transitional slogan that unifies the black revolution: “For the union of southern Africa states in a great Federation of Black Socialist Republics! That this Federation be part of the Socialist Black African Federation!

The NC of the SWP has not taken into account at all this formidable slogan of the unity of all the new black states in a federation to avoid dispersion in the face of imperialism. Neither did it observe the intimate bond of this policy with the Angolan conflict, through multiple ties. Moreover, it is the only slogan that allows us to develop the existing black revolution, beyond the borders that the various bourgeois and petty-bourgeois sectors enriched within each republic want to impose, ultimate defenders of this quick bourgeois and bureaucratic appropriation within each national state. It ties, on the other hand, with the revolutionary anti-imperialist sentiment of all the black people of southern Africa and the continent, of the world, who feel part of a single, continental, anti-racist movement which overcomes the political divisions imposed by the whites when they colonised the continent. It is the only policy that can respond to the tribal and cultural problem since African “countries” retain the borders of the former colonies and embrace several tribes; these, in turn, overflow the “national” boundaries (the Bakongos, for example, are scattered in three “different” countries).

In this sense, the Federation of Republics would leave it to the free will of each tribe to establish itself in the Federated Republic, allowing, in this way, to defend and develop the rich cultural and ethnic heritage of the different tribes. Thomas tried to solve the Bakongo problem within the own Angolan borders, through the “right to autonomy or even secession”, but the only true answer is not to give the cited tribe freedom to decide their separation, but the possibility of joining the Bakongos of the other two republics in a single federated nation. It is obvious that the

integration of this Federation would allow a colossal development of the productive forces and would transform black Africa into a world power, instead of a disunited set of banana republics, an easy toy of the imperialist nations, as it has happened with our Latin American countries for over a century. This explains the “tribalist” policy of imperialism because it encourages divisions. It is the old story of dividing to reign.

One benefit of this cardinal slogan is the use of the advantages of backwardness, such as the recent structuring of modern African bourgeois states, their indefinite consolidation, united with the ever-increasing advance of the continental black revolution. The MPLA’s victory over the racists has given a significant boost to the black movement in southern Africa, making our slogan feasible and immediate for action and agitation, without having to overcome large obstacles in the consciousness of the masses, since it counts on a strong acceptance from them. Our slogan is deeply anti-imperialist and of transitional and socialist consequences, since it opposes the black bourgeoisies and petty bourgeoisies of each state. This shows us once again that only the working class, accompanied by the plebeian masses of the countryside and the city, is capable of developing the revolutionary process needed for its achievement.

The Angolan conflict has to do directly with the slogan put forward by us. The racists and the Yankees intervened in Angola, ultimately, to stop the process of permanent revolution of the black movement across the continent. There is no doubt, therefore, that the supreme slogan of this movement, that which combines all struggles and all necessities, the only one in force to confront the black movement from southern Africa and this continent to the South African invasion of Angola, is none other than Long live the Federation of Socialist Republics of Black Africa!

Not a single word for the blacks subjected by Vorster

In addition, it was necessary to revive the brotherhood between the black people of South Africa and Angola, since they are united by a common interest — the defeat of its more immediate enemy, the fascist Vorster.

As we have already seen, the resolution-report of the NC of the SWP never invited the Angolan masses and their organisations to “unity of action” in order to expel South Africa out of Angola. Neither did it summon the African masses for the same task. We hoped that at least it would call on the black South African masses to fight against the racist regime and the non-occupation of Angola. But no, the SWP’s political contempt for South African blacks, the vast majority of the population of that “white” Republic, is encyclopaedic — they do not mention them at all in their entire resolution. Did Tony Thomas, Joseph Hansen and Jack Barnes have nothing to say to the black people of South Africa, who were brutally persecuted and repressed by the racist Vorster regime in order to prevent the invasion of Angola? What kind of internationalists and anti-racists are they?

In order to be consistently Trotskyist and internationalist, the SWP document would have needed a paragraph like this: “Blacks from South Africa, the sinister white racist government of Vorster has invaded the recent independent black republic of Angola. The racists do not want you and your Rhodesian race brothers to follow the example of Angola and Mozambique, causing the defeat of the last two white regimes. That is why Vorster invades Angola with his army in support of FNLA-UNITA, traitorous nationalist groups that have opened the door wide to once again propitiate the colonisation of their own country. We must avoid it! All together to fight with the MPLA! The defeat of Vorster will be the beginning of the end of the racist regime in South Africa and the triumph of your black republic!”

CHAPTER 8

The double face of nationalism unmasks sectarianism

“Our judgment of the civil war between the nationalist groups in Angola”, Tony Thomas’s report says, “can be summarized as follows: 1) All three of these groups favor collaboration with imperialism and are opposed to working-class mobilization and any real struggle for socialism. 2) All three of them seek to inflame animosities between the main nationalities in Angola. 3) At the same time, each of them has a real mass base and has played a real role in the struggle for independence.”

Instead of formulating a dialectical judgment based on equalities and differences, as well as on the dynamics engendered by these contradictions, this final “summary” tries to highlight those factors that identify the nationalist movements and ignore their differences. Everything is identical (and, moreover, eternal and immutable). Within their rigid mechanicism, the fact that two movements support the racist-imperialist invasion while the other fights against it, seems simple “minutiae”. However, the most serious appreciation in the “summary” of the rapporteur is one which seems a feat of Houdini. It does nothing less than to blur, to abstract, the USA-South Africa coalition! The SWP strives to demonstrate in that report that the war faces three nationalist movements and not two military sides, one colonial and one anticolonial.

Therefore, even from the merely descriptive, non-Marxist point of view, the “summary” is deplorable. It “forgets” to point out what any reader can derive from the daily press or from the publications of the own SWP. That is, in one of the trenches of the civil war members of UNITA-FNLA, US mercenaries and South African soldiers fought together, forming the colonising side with American arms; while in the opposite trench fought, elbow to elbow, soldiers of the MPLA and Cubans, with Soviet arms, making up the anticolonial side.

In their attempts to hide the truth, they ignored Thomas’s own assertions, who said that the FNLA and UNITA had formed a “military bloc with the South Africans”. The war was between two blocs, in January of this year, and not between three nationalist movements. How did the SWP define the two blocs? What characterisation do we give to the military bloc South Africa–FNLA–UNITA with reference to the bloc MPLA-Cuba? Fraternal or colonial?

The generalities presented in the report do not help to characterise or “summarise” the concrete fact of the war and the role of each of the movements in it. It is “true” that the three nationalist groups — like all national movements under the sun — are in favour of collaborating with imperialism, applying anti-workers measures, and so on; in addition, they have their respective “ranks of masses”. But, if they are the same and identical, as Thomas claims, why are they fighting? The “summary” does not explain why they are embarked on a civil war or what the reasons are for imperialism to support one against another.

What would Trotsky have said?

With the SWP method, in the Chinese civil war of 1925–1927 we would have asserted that Chiang Kai-shek's side was the same as the warlords' side. In the Spanish conflict of 1936–1939, we would have equated the Francoist and Republican sides. They all were “in favour of collaborating with imperialism” and were “opposed to the workers' mobilisation and the struggle for socialism”.

But the reasoning of the Bolsheviks and Trotsky was dialectical and concrete, unlike the SWP's. In the first case they did not hesitate to support Chiang's side; in the second, the Republicans. In each of these civil wars, they were able to see the equalities of the sides, but also the inequalities that explained the war. Nevertheless, they pointed out that Chiang “was in favour of collaborating with imperialism” because he represented the pro-imperialist bourgeois leadership of the mass movement that fought the warlords, military agents of imperialism. And while both Franco and the Republicans were “agents of imperialism”, the former constituted the fascist agent, while the latter were their bourgeois-democratic agents, which was why they fought on different sides in the Spanish civil war. What would Trotsky have said in January 1976 about Angola? Certainly, the leaderships of the MPLA and FNLA-UNITA are equally reformist and neo-colonial, but the former confronted the South African-Yankee army with weapons, while the latter collaborated militarily with it. Here lies the “small” difference that leads us to determine our policy of military support to one of the groups.

The Three Musketeers of Nationalism

The “summary” presents us as a key concept the equality of the three nationalist groups because the “three favor collaboration with imperialism”. It is the argument that leads the SWP to define the war as fratricidal.

Although it may seem repetitive, it must be remembered. On 5 November 1975, the South African army, allied to FNLA-UNITA, occupied Lobito, the second city of Angola, as a result of its victory over the MPLA and its allies, the Cubans. If an SWP journalist, for example, Ernest Harsch, had been in Lobito at the time of the combat and had met a black soldier, what would he have said? Perhaps that the FNLA, UNITA and MPLA are like droplets of water, identical. If the combatant had been a patient person, a difficult thing in such a situation, he would have proposed that he disguise himself as a South African soldier or a US mercenary for the purpose of walking in front of a detachment of FNLA-UNITA and later before one of the MPLA, and thus check what was his welcome. “That is, do it in that order, otherwise, you will not be able to do the full test, because the first will receive you as a saviour, while the seconds will rustle you with bullets. After this, do you still believe that the three groups, or their soldiers, have the same policy against the South African invaders or the CIA mercenaries?”

As supreme judges

At the time, the SWP and we agreed that the International Majority Tendency (IMT) judged nationalist movements with an ultra-leftist and sectarian methodology. Instead of assessing a nationalist, feminist or democratic movement for its objectives and dynamics, its only angle of view was the worker and socialist character of it. They looked very much like Maoism, which divides movements into workers, socialists or counterrevolutionaries.

The Trotskyist method analyses each movement by its character: Feminist, in relation to the immediate tasks of women's liberation; democratic, by referring to the extension of democratic rights or to its defence; nationalist, according to its relation with imperialism.

In the case before us, we believe in a relatively progressive attitude when a nationalist movement fights against imperialism; and we consider it reactionary, however, when it makes

deals or collaborates with it. In other words, our measure to judge a nationalist movement is the anti-imperialist struggle, not the workers' and socialist movement. This is an element of decisive importance to complete our characterisation and to elaborate a policy, but it is not the fundamental thing to define it. In this sense, we assert that the position of the Majority on the face of the Angolan nationalist movements, during part of 1976, was ultra-leftist and workerist. By characterising the MPLA as more progressive than FNLA-UNITA, because of its greater link with the mass and workers' movement, they concealed a fundamental element — its relationship with Portuguese imperialism, the main enemy of the Angolan masses in those circumstances. This relationship determined that the MPLA was the most reactionary group at that time, despite its relations with the trade union movement and its socialistic formulations.¹

The SWP made the same methodological error after the Portuguese left Angola, although their conclusions were opposite. For Comrade Gabriel, as for the SWP later, the key to our policy was centred on the civil war between the nationalist movements. From this, Comrade Gabriel came to the conclusion of supporting the MPLA during the civil war and not taking, instead, the struggle against the Portuguese to its ultimate consequences. For its part, the SWP considered it convenient to refrain from intervening in the “fratricidal war” and, therefore, did not have to fight to the end against the South African occupation. An opportunist policy characterised the first position, while the second was sectarian and abstentionist because it refused to fight the main enemy of the moment; but both ultimately took as the main element of their policy the war between nationalist movements rather than the anti-colonial war.

Nationalist movements and Yankee imperialism

Tony Thomas strives to prove that FNLA-UNITA are not puppets of imperialism, despite accusations by the MPLA. Although it warns of a possible transformational change in such characterisation, the report is devoted to verifying that the two groups cannot be agents of imperialism by virtue of their character of nationalist mass movements. For us, there is no sharp contradiction between the concepts “agent of imperialism” and “nationalist mass movement”. On the contrary, historical experience has shown that there is a close connection and, as a rule, all nationalist movements are doomed to become, sooner or later, agents of imperialism.

Examples are not lacking: Peronism in Argentina; Nasserism in Egypt; in Bolivia with the MNR and in Peru with the APRA; the Kuomintang in China, which since 1927 became a bloody imperialist agent, and until just a few years ago was the only Chinese movement recognised by the United States.

Thomas's characterisation is correct, but his final conclusion is false, precisely because UNITA, FNLA and MPLA are mass nationalist movements; it is necessary to follow their policy very closely in order to realise when they cease to be such to become partners, then agents and finally puppets of imperialism. The leadership of the SWP must rise from the metaphysical conception (because they are mass movements they cannot be puppets of imperialism) to the dialectic (because they

¹ The LTF, in its resolution on Angola, summarises the close relations between the MPLA and Portuguese imperialism throughout 1976: “The MPLA's ties with Portuguese imperialism were shown with particular clarity during the period when the MFA designated Admiral Rosa Coutinho to serve as governor of Angola in late 1974.

“During both the Fifth and Sixth provisional government, the Portuguese armed forces provided military assistance and other aid to the MPLA. When the MPLA expelled the FNLA and the UNITA from Luanda in June 1975, the Portuguese command threatened to use its troops to prevent these groups from reentering the city.

“In fact, in a statement issued in March 1975, the MPLA attacked the ‘passivity of the Portuguese Armed Forces in Angola’, implicitly calling on the Portuguese regime to play a more active role. In early May, MPLA president Agostinho Neto said that the Angolan people ‘continue to wait for the [Portuguese] high commissioner and the Portuguese troops to assume their responsibilities’.

“When the coalition transitional government in Angola collapsed during the the summer of 1975, the Portuguese regime transferred administrative control of the country to the MPLA-controlled ministries. And when formal independence was declared in November 1975, the Sixth provisional government gave military equipment to the MPLA regime.” (“Draft Resolution on Angola of the LTF”, *IP*, Vol. 14, No 38, 11 October 1976, pp. 1456-1459.) [NM]

are reformist nationalist mass movements they are doomed to become agents of imperialism at some point in their development). In other words, we revolutionary Marxists must know when a nationalist movement is transformed (from relatively progressive) into counterrevolutionary, agent of colonisation.

Differentiation is all the more necessary at this time since imperialism has changed its tactics with respect to the first pre-war period. European imperialism, at the end of the last century, and Yankee imperialism, at the beginning of this century, colonised the backwards countries by military occupation of them. At present, US imperialism prefers to use local nationalist parties and movements to effect its penetration. We have the case of the failed invasion of Cuba (Bay of Pigs, 1961), armed and financed by the Pentagon and the CIA, although the combatants were Cubans.

Since this is the policy of imperialism, we must ask ourselves: what are the groups that the main imperialist enemy — US—South Africa — envisaged as their possible agents for total domination of the country? There can be no doubt: UNITA and FNLA.

The FNLA and UNITA

As good Marxists, we must specify at what point, through what fact, UNITA and FNLA transformed from nationalist movements into imperialist partners. Some leaders of the IMT argue that the FNLA was always an agent of the enemy, since Holden Roberto, its top leader, from the beginning was linked to the United States and received its help. Another leader of the IMT, Livio Maitan, has refuted this argument. It is not possible to make a police interpretation of mass movements, nor can they be characterised solely by the help they receive from Yankee imperialism. For many years, the FNLA military fought against Portuguese imperialism, dominant in Angola. The fact it maintained good relations with American imperialism, not dominant in those moments, showed only the character of its leadership. Under Portuguese domination, the FNLA was characterised as the most consistent and progressive nationalist movement. It rejected agreements and manoeuvres with the invading army that the MPLA outlined. The change took place between August and 11 November, from the moment when Portuguese rule becomes nominal and its troops stop fighting; at that instant, the main enemy happens to become Yankee imperialism and the South African racist army. Tony Thomas is not wrong to argue that the FNLA and UNITA formed a military “bloc” with South Africa. That was the qualitative leap that led us — and that should have led the SWP — to change characterisation; from fighters against Portuguese imperialism, they became military allies of the new Yankee imperialist colonisation and its partner, South Africa. In no way do we try to insult the two nationalist movements, but to show the objective process of their decline and degeneration. We use the term “military allies” instead of “puppets” to draw a distinction. It is possible that by the end of 1975 UNITA and FNLA had not yet been the latter, but they were in a contradictory process of degeneration by stages, of which they had certainly fulfilled the first stage, becoming military allies of imperialism.

Disagreeing with this Marxist definition of the FNLA and UNITA leads to the following question: How to define the nationalist movements that “form a military bloc” with the main enemy of the Angolan masses and help them colonise and invade the country? Are they truly mass nationalist movements? If so, how does the SWP define the MPLA, militarily facing the occupation with Soviet and Cuban aid? Were there not already, during the South African invasion, differences too deep to place an equal sign among them, as the SWP does?

Past and present of the MPLA

At this point, we must reaffirm our methodological alert. We believe, then, in the variable character of the MPLA, as a nationalist reformist movement of masses, since it is always exposed to transformations. In that sense, it is necessary to be prepared to specify what they are, at what moment and around what events occur, and, therefore, immediately modify our policy concomitantly.

As usual, Tony Thomas makes a keen observation but refuses to pinpoint the conclusions. He points to the “collaboration” given by the MPLA in the past to Portuguese imperialism and confirms the formation, at present, of a military “bloc” with South Africa by the FNLA-UNITA. The first conclusion, for us, is that it is not the same “collaboration” and forming a military “bloc”. In the first case, it is a more or less lax link, it can be broken at any time; in contrast, the second relationship is more firm, lasting and committed.

The other conclusion has more significance and weight, since at the time of the adoption of his report, the MPLA-Portugal “collaboration” was a thing of the past, although recent, while the military “bloc” FNLA-UNITA–USA–South Africa was a present fact, in full action.

For Thomas, it is necessary to make the denunciation of both attitudes. In our opinion, that is not enough. In Angola, a military bloc had formed, not an electoral front. Therefore, just as we denounce and confront the electoral blocs on their same ground, in the same fashion a military bloc, in a plan of aggressor and invader, it is indispensable we denounce it and combat it on military grounds, with arms in hand.

Again, Thomas is wrong about the formation of military blocs; it is not one but two, the other bloc was that of the MPLA-Cuba-USSR, the only opponent of the imperialist invasion. With the retreat of Portugal and the emergence of the new main enemy, Yankee imperialism and South Africa, the MPLA transformed itself from sporadic and relative “collaborator” of Portuguese imperialism into a progressive nationalist movement; meanwhile, the FNLA-UNITA went on to defend other banners.

Of course, this does not mean that our current characterisation of the MPLA is the definitive one. On the contrary, its past of collaboration with Portugal, in addition to the general characteristics we noted about the nationalist movements, forces us to be extremely careful. That does not alter the present facts which are decisive for our policy.

Sectarianism and opportunism — two sides of the same coin

Tony Thomas justifies his sectarian position of not supporting the MPLA militarily, mainly because of the MPLA’s friendly relationship with multinational corporations and imperialism. He falls into the error of dissolving a concrete situation, the war, into economic and political problems. Civil war is a specific fact that requires a specific response. Economic and political phenomena are part of a reality contingent upon war but do not replace it. It is true that the MPLA accepted the millions of dollars owed by Gulf Oil for royalties due to the exploitation of Cunene. And that is fine. It has capitulated to the same company, making it concessions, and that is wrong. However, our policy is determined by the invasion, which was not carried out by Gulf Oil, but by the South African army and Yankee imperialism, in collaboration with FNLA-UNITA, finding the MPLA as the only adversary.

In the past, sectarians of the day reminded us of the trajectory of Chiang Kai-shek or of Negrin-Largo Caballero to accuse us of supporting these leaderships because we were for the triumph of China against Japanese imperialism and of the Republic against Franco. This is the content of Tony Thomas’s indictment of the *Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores* (PST), since, from his point of view, to provide military support is to support the action in political terms.

The opportunists inverted the same reasoning: if we supported China against Japan, the Republic against Franco, we had to politically support their leaderships. Sectarians and opportunists are the two sides of the same coin, which confuse political struggle with military struggle. We learned from Trotsky to draw a division between them. They are related struggles, but qualitatively different. We fight militarily with China against Japan; with the Republic against Franco; with the People’s Republic or the MPLA against the USA–South Africa–FNLA-UNITA, as the only way to combat politically those reformist leaderships. That is why we have always insisted that we fight for the triumph of the People’s Republic of Angola against the imperialist creation of the Democratic

Republic. It is a military support, not political, valid from the invasion, at the very moment when the Portuguese troops were no longer the main enemy.

This tells us that, just as the SWP is sectarian against the MPLA by refusing to support it militarily, it is opportunistic with reference to FNLA and UNITA. What other meaning can it be to not combat militarily the military allies of the racist Vorster, that is, the FNLA-UNITA? The SWP's position cannot be more disconcerting — leaving the field free to the traitors to defeat the MPLA and colonise Angola again.

We would also like to ask the SWP some questions, although its answers are always obvious or evasive. If the Vorster-FNLA-UNITA military bloc had triumphed in the civil war, in February of this year, instead of the MPLA, does the SWP believe that this would have meant a victory or a defeat for imperialism and racism? We have no doubts. The triumph of that counterrevolutionary military bloc would have meant an overwhelming victory of the racist counterrevolution. It is thus how not to combat militarily the FNLA-UNITA is the worst of opportunism, the most unworthy.

CHAPTER 9

The right to national self-determination

The tribal issue

The so often quoted report is truly miserly in relation to elucidating the problem of imperialism, while it is too lavish in terms of tribes and their links with different nationalist movements. It is so broad in this sense that it raises as a policy “the right to self-determination” of the different tribes in Angola, although it overlooks it, as we mentioned before, in the final political synthesis. Anyway, it is the only democratic task that it raises during the war. It is necessary, therefore, to stop in its consideration, since it is an attempt to magnify the “national” character of each movement embarked in the civil war and to minimise the importance of the South African invasion, making it the accessory fact of an inter-tribal struggle.

In the report, we find a description of each of the three tribes-nationalities that support each of the movements.

“The MPLA’s base is the Mbundu who live in north-central Angola and around Luanda. They number roughly one to one and a half million.

“The FNLA is based among the one to one and a half million Bakongos in the northwestern area of Angola.

“The UNITA finds its support among the more than two million Ovimbundu who inhabit the central region and southern Angola.” (“Behind the Civil War in Angola”, op. cit., p. 92.)

The conclusion of Tony Thomas is: “The bulk of the population of Angola consists of ethnic groupings in well-defined geographical regions, spilling over into other countries in some cases. These groups have their own distinct languages and culture, and they have their own body of historical experience as distinct peoples. In short, each of the three has the attributes of a nationality.” (Ibid.)

This characterisation is more than debatable since it sets aside a fundamental element — the capitalist development of Angola. Peter Freyer, in his well-known book *Oldest ally: a portrait of Salazar’s Portugal* (London, Dennis Dobson, 1961), pointed out many years ago the importance of capitalist development in Angola, since he had differentiated it qualitatively from the other Portuguese colonies. According to him, the majority of its working population is working class, wage labour (industrial, commercial or agricultural). The weight of the peasantry is minimal. The stratification explained the differences between nationalist movements. For example, the FNLA-UNITA, in its beginnings, had a bourgeois program and policy, “Bourguiba¹ style”. In contrast, today’s MPLA relies essentially on the workers or petty-bourgeois sectors linked to capitalist development, assimilating it, according to Peter Freyer, to a “Fidelist” current. In our terminology, we would have to characterise the FNLA-UNITA as a national bourgeois current or project and

1 Habib Bourguiba (1903–2000) was a Tunisian nationalist leader and statesman who served as the country’s leader from its independence from France in 1956 to 1987. He provided support and aid to Holden Roberto, leader and founder of the FNLA. [Editor.]

the MPLA as a petty bourgeois one. The relations of each of the movements with the tribes did not modify that character, but at the most complicate it. We do not know to what extent this characterisation is correct, but the SWP has not disputed or debated it. They have proudly tried to ignore it, despite its importance and being shared by many.

The right to “national-tribal self-determination”

From the characterisation quoted above, the report approved by the NC comes to formulate a program:

“We must make it clear that we aren’t exactly ‘Angolan patriots’. Being a ‘pan-Angolan’ is not necessarily more progressive than being for helping the Bakongo, the Ovimbundu, and the Mbundu establish working relations against the common enemy — imperialism.

“As Leninists, we understand that the road to uniting the masses in Angola against exploitation and oppression is not to denounce the national aspirations of these peoples as ‘backward tribalism’, but to support their right to self-determination, which includes the right to autonomy or even secession.

“Urging a victory for one of these nationalist factions against the two others leads to exacerbating the tensions.” (Ibid.)

Nowhere in the report is stated that we, as Trotskyists, are for the unity of Angola in a single nation or federation and that we oppose its division into several different countries. Unity in large nations or federations fortifies Africans against imperialism. Instead, subdivisions weaken them. This does not mean that we are speaking against the right of every nationality or tribe to self-determination, including their right to form a separate nation. In our policy, we try to balance two contradictory tendencies. We support centralisation in large, unitary or federal, nations, but not at the expense of confronting the mass movement of the nationalities to impose our judgment. Precisely to avoid these clashes, we defend the right of every oppressed nationality to free itself in whatever form they want — autonomy, federation, and even independence. They have to choose and we will respect that choice. There concludes the “right to self-determination” for us Trotskyists, who continue our struggle for unity in a great nation, through the slogan of federation, even contending against the separatists. It is not, then, a positive slogan, but a negative one. We fight for the respect of the national will. However, our positive slogan is unitary. For a Federation that allows us to build great nations.

But, what is the will of the tribes in Angola that, according to the SWP, constitute nationalities and are expressed in three movements? Here comes the paradox. The report itself stresses that no one in Angola proposes self-determination, secession. On the contrary, Tony Thomas stresses the decision of the three movements to form a single Angola, united, and, because of this, face the other movements accusing them of “tribalists”, that is, of wanting to secede from the common homeland. The SWP is, therefore, more papist than the Pope and Comrade Thomas more Bakongo than the Bakongos, since he has raised a struggle that no Angolan political movement has postulated — the self-determination of the different tribes.

False predictions of prophets of doom

The contradictions do not end there. On the contrary, they just begin. The SWP has become a prophet and makes gloomy predictions. “The prospects” of this “fratricidal war”, for Thomas, offer no doubt — the victory of the MPLA will immediately produce a “tremendous slaughter” of the Bakongos, as it happened in Biafra.

From this gloomy prognosis, and from the right to self-determination of the tribes-nationalities, a political line would clearly emerge, supported on different occasions by Marxism and the SWP. It is to defend, in all war between nationalities, the most attacked. We are not, in

the abstract, against the war between nationalities, but we postulate the defence of the nationality which is subjugated by another. And in the case of Angola, according to the SWP, it was not a simple political or economic oppression, but something much worse, almost total extermination (no less than “another Biafra”), a potential *genocide* of the Bakongos (or, eventually, of the nationality that was defeated).

By accepting the SWP’s predictions about the sad fate of the Bakongos in the case of an MPLA’s victory, we could not wash our hands, since it was necessary to defend the nationality about to be defeated. As soon as one nationality begins to dominate another, its war becomes counterrevolutionary, because it goes against the right to self-determination of the defeated or dominated nationality. Simultaneously, the war of this invaded nationality becomes progressive, because it fights for the right to continue existing in its territory and with its culture. In short, the dialectic of every war between nationalities is that: to a certain extent (that is, to defend its own nationality) is progressive; but, beyond that defence and when it becomes dominant, it is reactionary and, instead, the nationality that begins to be dominated becomes progressive.

Some examples are useful to determine the frame of reference. It is thus necessary to remember that Marx and Engels assumed this political line in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, equally Trotsky in the Balkan wars (1912-13) and also the SWP in relation to Israel, opposing the “right to self-determination” of the Jews and in favour of the Arabs, since they are the dominated nationality and the dominant nationality is the Jewish.

In Angola, we ignore why the SWP has not followed that line. After defining the civil war as a “fratricidal war” between tribes-nationalities, it has not reached the political conclusions discussed above. Like every sectarian, it has stayed halfway. Thus, Tony Thomas states that “urging a victory for one of these nationalist factions against the two others leads to exacerbating the tensions”. But he does not suggest that, therefore, preventing that victory is, at the same time, the only way to avoid the disasters prophesied by him.

Awaiting the advice of the SWP

The policy of the SWP in relation to, for example, the Bakongos (if we accept as true their premises and forecasts) is directly criminal. When we were part of the LTF, we polemicized tirelessly in favour of a policy for the masses, as opposed to the vanguardist orientation of the IMT. What does the SWP propose, then, to defend the threatened Bakongo masses from a horrible holocaust?

Think of a Bakongo Trotskyist, a supporter of the SWP line. *Intercontinental Press* has just informed him in full of the perspective that awaits his entire tribe, his brothers of nationality, in the case of the MPLA winning. Logically, this passionate reader of Gerry Foley, Joe Hansen and Tony Thomas, thinks first and foremost of how to save his family and friends from genocide. At the same time, a question will inevitably be asked: “What does the SWP advise me to do?” And, deep down, he will think: “Hansen will not waste this opportunity to give a clear example of a policy for a mass movement — a nationality in the process of extermination”. If this defenceless militant followed this line, his disappointment had to be huge and terrible, because the SWP had no slogan, no line, and no program to prevent the MPLA from murdering his parents, brothers and children. However, he will still have some consolation. Wait until next week, as in chapter comic strips, to attest whether *Intercontinental Press*, perhaps a little late, advises some concrete action to avoid the prophesied disappearance of their tribe brothers. Raising the slogan was not a problem: Let us defend the Bakongos from the extermination of the MPLA! But this easiness is at odds with the sectarians.

In the high seas of confusion

The sad end of this unfortunate Bakongo, a member of the LTF and an admirer of the SWP, does not end here. If he still has the spirit to read the summary of the report, he will see that Comrade Tony Thomas is planning to put an end to the shipment of imperialist supplies and mercenaries to Angola, which are designed to prevent “the total defeat of the UNITA and the FNLA” at the hands of the MPLA. In contrast, as we have noted, he is not opposed to the dispatch of Soviet arms to the MPLA.

At this point the gullible Bakongo comrade no longer knows where he is in the world; he is navigating dangerously in a sea of doubt and confusion, wondering the following reasoning and questions. “On the one hand, the SWP opposes sending arms to defend us against the extermination of the MPLA; on the other hand, it is in favour of Soviet collaboration towards those who are going to slaughter us, then, does the SWP really defend our right to self-determination? Does the SWP support or not our right to defend ourselves against the MPLA invasion-massacre? What does the SWP propose, both in Angola and in the USA, and on a global scale, to help us and to avoid extermination? In particular, what should the Bakongos — and what does Hansen — do to avoid our annihilation among the backwards peoples and nations of the earth? On behalf of the transitional program and method, I ask not for a policy or even a transitional slogan; I request only one word that will help to save my Bakongo people from the genocide that, according to you, the MPLA prepares for us. If you do not help me quickly, I will begin to believe that, in the end, the fate of my people does not interest you at all.”

Fortunately, the Bakongo comrade of the LTF should have already survived the scare. The MPLA won and the extermination predicted by the prophets of *Intercontinental Press* did not take place. At least this publication, so well-informed, does not say a single word about it.

The inconsistencies of sectarianism

Now our Bakongo comrade has the time and serenity to take stock and reflect on the enormous problem that the SWP embarked him on. If he does so, he will catch on of the real and true cause, the delirious sectarianism carried to its ultimate consequences:

— Sectarianism by characterising the war as a “fratricidal” between nationalist-tribal groups, rather than giving priority to the South African-imperialist invasion.

— Sectarianism by not being consistent in its wrong characterisation and not extracting from it the only possible policy: defence of the Bakongo people against the threat of extermination by the MPLA.

— Sectarianism, finally, in the face of the help of the great powers. If in fact, as the SWP claimed, there was a danger of Bakongo extermination, how could the SWP then help this genocide by accepting the sending of Soviet armament to the MPLA and opposing the sending of imperialist weapons to the FNLA-UNITA, which would serve to prevent the extermination? Like any sectarian policy, the one advocated by the SWP is an ocean, dark and deep, of contradictions.

Because of this, the SWP is totally unable to give a whole revolutionary policy. Not realising that it was not a problem of the Bakongos but one of the colonisation of all Angola by Vorster and the Americans, it did not know how to place the Bakongo problem as a tactical question within a priority policy in defence of that great African nation, including its tribes and against the racist invader.

Buenos Aires, April 1976

Addendum

1: Two resolutions and a single policy

The SWP, at its August 1976 Convention, heard and approved a new report by Tony Thomas on the black revolution in the south of Africa, in clear contradiction with the fundamental points that the same rapporteur and the resolution taken by the National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party had adopted in January of the same year; however, its sectarian-opportunist line had no change.

Regrettably, the new leadership of the SWP has resolved — as appearances indicate — to put its prestige above all serious and objective consideration of its policy. Between the petty student prestige and the revolutionary facts, they have chosen, unfortunately, for the first. We have been surprised how the report approved by the SWP in January of this year on the Angolan civil war and the analyses on the same subject have been the subject of a book considered exemplary by the leadership of the same party.¹ We are also baffled by the justification of its political line on Angola assumed by the SWP Convention. It is not about a greater or lesser success, but something too categorical — reality has shattered the SWP's political line for Angola and southern Africa. If the SWP leadership has intended to put into operation an advertising campaign, whose main objective is the protection of its prestige, and prevent the repudiation of the ranks of its organisation, mainly black, facts themselves have become its worst enemy, since the facts has given the SWP a hard and terrible beating, one of the most painful in memory of the history of the Trotskyist movement and the world revolution. The more reality shakes it, the more the leadership of the SWP keeps self-praising and even has the cheek of not assuming a self-criticism. It is pitiful but it is so. Let us look closely at the impossible to hide contradictions between the two reports.

I

The SWP leadership stated in January this year: “In fact, I do not think that any of these groups can ‘win’ the struggle...”

We all know that, a few weeks later, the MPLA won the war in full. In August, the SWP recognises that victory without self-criticising its prediction.

II

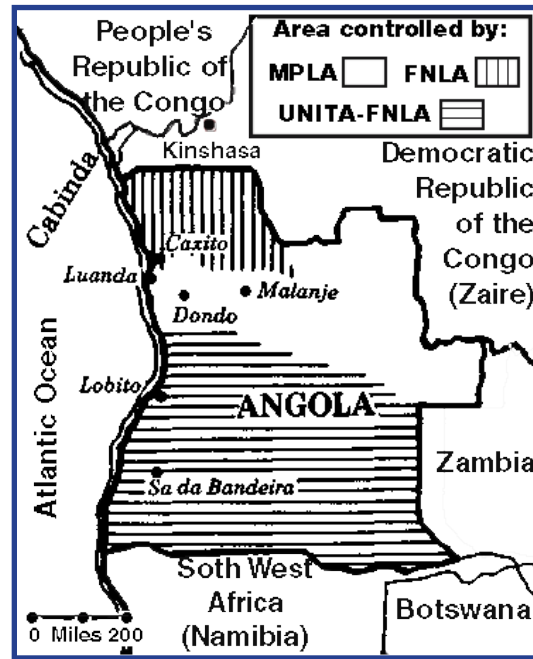
Currently, Tony Thomas and the SWP leadership claim that the triumph of the MPLA meant a defeat for imperialism, the South African in particular. In its official August report on the South African situation, the SWP insists: “The setback suffered by South Africa in Angola played a positive role in the struggle of the entire south of the continent. The demonstration that South African imperialism could be defeated encouraged the masses in southern Africa, particularly those in Namibia and South Africa.”

¹ *Angola: The Hidden History of Washington's War*, by Ernest Harsch and Tony Thomas, with an introduction by Malik Miah, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1976. (NM)

But in January of this year, he said exactly the opposite: “If one [of the nationalist groups] does gain a decisive victory over the others... the real winner would be imperialism.”

III

On December 8, 1975, *Intercontinental Press* published the following map (according to the *New York Times*) of the areas controlled by the different sides in the Angolan civil war.



This map clearly showed the inevitable fall of the MPLA in the civil war. In August 1976, the SWP interpreted the triumph of the MPLA as a defeat of imperialism and racism. But if, instead of the MPLA achieving victory, the FNLA-UNITA had achieved it, as envisaged in December 1975, does the SWP consider that it would have been a triumph or defeat of South Africa and imperialism? The answer is obvious — it would have been a spectacular victory of the imperialist and racist counterrevolution. Where does the SWP say this obvious truth “at the end of 1975 the triumph of FNLA-UNITA in the civil war would have meant an impressive imperialist victory, while the triumph of the MPLA would represent a colossal anti-imperialist and anti-racist victory?” Nowhere, because they asserted the opposite. If right now they accept this incontrovertible truth they are obliged to proclaim it categorically and to deduce the only political conclusion emerging from it: it was inescapable to militarily support the side that in the civil war if it triumphed, would cause a historical defeat to racism and imperialism. That is to say, to support the MPLA.

IV

The new leadership of the SWP in its recent report-resolution of August this year on the black revolution in southern Africa has not said a single word in defence of the Bakongo people, which according to it, was condemned to extermination after the victory of the MPLA. In January 1976, the National Committee of the SWP stated: “We have to anticipate that the victory of either side in this civil war may mean pogroms, with victims running into the tens of thousands. Already leaders of the MPLA have talked about turning the Bakongo areas held by the FNLA into ‘another Biafra’. In Africa, the word ‘Biafra’ is synonymous with the civil war in Nigeria and the immense slaughter that occurred over the so-called tribal issue. A similar perspective is involved in Angola.”

V

In January 1976, the SWP had raised as a fundamental programmatic line for Angola the “right to self-determination”, which included the “right to autonomy and even secession” by the three great tribes that form the Angolan population.

After the triumph of the MPLA, more specifically in its resolution of August of this year, the SWP leaves this programmatic line, it does not mention it even once in its new resolution, but not only are we surprised by the silence but also by the lack of an explanation on the abandonment of a fundamental position of its program for Angola.

VI

In August, the SWP assures us of having supported “the military actions taken by the MPLA against South Africa and the mercenaries controlled by imperialism”.

This is a fantastic lie. The new student leadership of the SWP has resolved to throw to the dogs the magnificent tradition of seriousness, responsibility, intellectual honesty and Trotskyist morality of their party; that is to say, to reveal and assume the truth, however hard it may be, in front of the workers.

Despite the deep and exhaustive information, the SWP, *Intercontinental Press*, *The Militant* or the national leadership of the Socialist Workers Party have never appealed to the Angolan revolutionaries and all the black movements of the world, of Africa and the world working class and of the workers’ states, to form a front to militarily defend the MPLA of the South African attack, providing it with all possible military aid. For those who have little time and cannot browse all the publications, we recommend searching the “exemplary” book by Thomas and Harsch. And if it is not so, if we are in error, we patiently wait for the national leadership of the SWP to extract a single quote from their newspaper, their national documents, their book, or their leaflets published between the South African invasion of August 1975 and the beginning of its total defeat in January 1976. In what remote place do they say what they are saying now— that we had to “support the military actions taken by the MPLA against South Africa”? The official report of January 1976 does not say a word of such support for the “military actions” of the MPLA against South Africa. And if they did not say it then, in the midst of the imperialist invasion, when did they say it? Where is it?

VII

Let us suppose the SWP leadership did not manufacture a gross lie to save their battered prestige, “we support the military actions taken by the MPLA against South Africa”. Let us accept this assertion. Does it mean, then, that it was necessary to take up military support for the MPLA when they confronted on “5 November” in “Benguela and Lobito” “a joint column of South African troops, FNLA and UNITA”, and to fight alongside the MPLA against the “South African–FNLA–UNITA column that seized... Novo Redondo”? However, that means intervening militarily in the civil war in favour of the MPLA against the FNLA and UNITA, since it was impossible to fight *with* the MPLA *against* the South Africans without attacking the other members of the “South African–FNLA–UNITA column”. Bullets have not yet been invented for white South Africans that dodge the FNLA–UNITA black soldiers advancing in the same “column”.

If the SWP militarily supported the MPLA, as they now claim, against the South Africans, it must have been then militarily on the side of the first, against the FNLA–UNITA, who were part of the invasion column. That is, they had to support the MPLA in the “fratricidal war” after the South African invasion. But the SWP was, until the end of the civil war, against supporting the MPLA facing the two nationalist movements that formed “a single column with the South African army.”

VIII

A factor of decisive importance in the defeat of South Africa–FNLA–UNITA was the Cuban and Soviet aid to the MPLA. The SWP, in August 1974, did not attach any importance to this military

aid and did not say anything in any sense. As an echo of the imperialist campaign, they explain the intervention of imperialism in Angola in the “summer and fall of 1975”, “as a way of counteracting the influence of the Soviet Union and Cuba, who had given their support to the MPLA”. Not a word more about the Cuban collaboration.

This strange attitude, to keep its opinion on a political fact of enormous importance, which had shocked the world press, is a symptom: the leadership of the SWP abhors the triumph of the MPLA and continues to be against the help that made possible that victory. With one difference — before they said it, now they are ashamed to say it.

Almost at the end of the Civil War, on 27 February 1976, *The Militant* quoted a leader with the aim of leaning on his position. His statement asserted: “The Soviet Union and Cuba *have been wrong* in supporting one side against the other in the Angolan civil war”. Let’s look again at the map published by *Intercontinental Press*, let’s reread the reports insisting on the South African invasion of Angola, and let’s not be afraid to come to a frightening conclusion. The SWP objectively favoured the South African-FNLA-UNITA victory in the Angolan civil war by questioning Cuban and Soviet aid to the MPLA, which was fighting the racists.

A single policy that ignores the fights of the black people of the entire world

The victory of the MPLA forced the SWP to admit certain facts and to smooth some of the more pro-imperialist aspects of its analysis, predictions and policy for Angola and southern Africa, to better continue with its strategy of adding national policies instead of having a world revolutionary policy. In July of this year, the aim was still to deny the global black movement as a whole, as an entire process, of which the black sector of the United States is a part. The SWP does not unite the blacks of the world in a common struggle against racism and imperialism, on the contrary, it separates them, and it takes into account their “national-tribal” claims, limiting them to special compartments.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the SWP Convention, in relation to the role of blacks in the United States in *The Black Revolution of the Republic of South Africa*, barely said a few words: “Let us come out of this convention to mobilize blacks, whites, workers, students, youth, trade unions, community groups, civil rights organisations and nationalist organisations to push for a campaign for the freedom of South African political prisoners and to end America’s complicity with South African imperialism.” In our way of seeing things, this is not much. Not a single word of the necessary revolutionary unity to be established between the blacks of the United States and the blacks of South Africa to fight against a common enemy, South African-Yankee racism. Not a meagre phrase to support this simple and crystal clear truth: “The black minority of the United States has more than anyone else in this country the obligation to support their South African brothers because they are part of the same race exploited by the same racist combination”.

The neglect of the black minority in the United States as a decisive and fundamental factor is so bizarre, that in the same document it says: “We have to develop an important work here. Understand that we are part of the revolution in South Africa. Because American imperialism plays a powerful role through its investments in the South of the continent, its military, economic and political support to white colonial regimes and as the main international protector of the imperialist order.”

The black rapporteur of the SWP left in the inkwell, or in his throat this cry of hatred for his own imperialism: “We have to understand that we are part of the black movement in South Africa, first and foremost because the largest and the most exploited racial minority by American imperialism and racism within the United States, it is us, the Blacks; precisely the same race that is brutally oppressed by Vorster. This is why our main task is to begin by mobilising our black brothers of race within the United States to obtain from them the indispensable support our South African brethren need against the racist imperialist South African-American scum who oppresses,

degrades, and exploits them. Just like us. The mobilization of white workers, students, youth, trade unions, community groups, civil rights organizations, etc., is very important and decisive, logically, but we must not ignore that they do not, like us blacks, endure the same humiliation and racist persecution. The blacks of South Africa and in the United States have everything uniting them; nothing should separate them in this common struggle against racism and imperialism.”

The SWP refuses to raise the slogan “Federation of Black Republics of Southern Africa” or “Federation of Soviet Socialist Black Republics of Africa”

In its resolution of January 1976, the SWP raised, as we have seen, the program of the right to self-determination and separation of the tribes-nationalities, Bakongo, Mbundu, Ovibumdu. We criticise this position, among other reasons, for unilateralism — if we only fight for the right to self-determination and secession, we play the imperialist policy of division of Africa in many states, easy toys of imperialism and a colossal and insuperable barrier to the development of the African productive forces and culture. For this reason, it is fundamental to combine in our program both contradictory tendencies; the just and unquestionable right of every African nationality-tribe to self-determination with the historical necessity of achieving a great unified black nation. The programmatic slogan that unifies these two contradictory tendencies is the federation of Southern African and Black African republics. With this approach we balance the two trends — every African tribe or nation has the right to have its own state within a single federative state that respects its national characteristics and, at the same time, keeps it tightly united to defend itself from imperialism and to achieve a powerful economic and cultural development.

The slogan of Angolan Federation! is a tactical, momentary application of this line. It is surprising that a Trotskyist party such as the one of the United States does not understand and defend this slogan, also because it became the most powerful nation on earth, precisely, among other reasons, because of the federal character of its structuring as a country.

It is debatable whether the correct formulation of this slogan is expressed in Federation of Black Republics!, or on the contrary, whether Federation of Soviet Socialist Black Republics! is more appropriate. However, the discussion on the goodness of either of these two slogans needs to be based on a common formulation of principles — the agreement on the fundamental programmatic and agitational importance of the slogan of the Federation of Black Republics, with or without the character of the state.

Democratic tasks and the Black Republic of South Africa

The SWP, in its sole and superficial commentary on the main objective of the struggle of the blacks of Rhodesia and South Africa, speaks of “rule of the black majority in South Africa, Zimbabwe [native Rhodesian denomination]”. It is very little, almost nothing, as a program of struggle for the blacks of these countries. This central political task runs counter to the traditional positions of Trotskyism, on the one hand, and some of the proposals made by the SWP itself towards Angola, on the other. They had vindicated the right to self-determination and separation of the different tribes-nationalities. However, for South Africa, the SWP does not raise this same right, that is, the right to make an independent black republic. On the contrary, by proposing the line of government of the black majority in South Africa and Zimbabwe, it is speaking out in favour of a multiracial state, that is to say, black-white and obviously, it takes, in fact, a stand against the right to black self-determination. We do not understand this sudden change, abandoning the traditional position of Trotsky and the one that the Socialist Workers Party itself defended for Angola.

We are truly faced with a paradoxical situation — the SWP was fighting for self-determination in Angola, pointing out that it was no merit to be a pan-Angolan patriot and did not raise a multi-

tribal federative state. Instead, in South Africa, where blacks and whites were concerned (of a tiny white minority in relation to the blacks), it has awakened — to use the terminology of the Socialist Workers Party — a fantastic Pan-South African and Pan-Rhodesian patriotism. That is, it considers that an interracial state must be maintained, while in Angola it was not worth defending the unity of an intertribal state. It is a surprising contradiction. We think that black South Africans, like those in Rhodesia, have as much right or more to national self-determination, because they are not an exploited minority but a racial majority exploited by the minority. They have the right to make their own Black Republic, with an addition of fundamental importance — the process throughout Black Africa indicates not only the compulsory nature of this right but that all blacks in Africa have already developed this right by transforming colonies dominated by whites or by white communities in Black republics. We believe that the process of the Black Nationalist movement in South Africa or Rhodesia clearly points to the formation of Black Republics. To this process, which is extremely progressive, we have to give it a positive slogan, accepting the approach made by Trotsky and by us.

If Trotsky accepted as positive the slogan of “Black Republic”, for the Republic of South Africa, we today not only have to accept it as an expression of black national self-determination, but as a positive slogan that we draw from the experience of the struggle of the own African black movement, because, so far, there has not been a single African colony that has become a multiracial state. In this sense, the defence of national self-determination, today, goes through that specific slogan of “Black Republic of South Africa and of Zimbabwe”.

Let's suppose that some consistent revolutionist does not agree with the slogan of the South African Black Republic. It is something that can be discussed. But what cannot be doubted or forgotten is “the right to national self-determination” of the black majority of the Republic of South Africa or of Rhodesia. This is precisely what the SWP called into question by raising the slogan of “black majority rule”.

2: The LTF Resolution on Angola — a shameful resolution

More than eight months after the end of the war, we wait patiently to know, finally!, all that the revolutionary movement and the whole of Trotskyism expected from the SWP: “1. With the invasion mounted by South Africa and the utilization of mercenaries financed primarily by the CIA, imperialist intervention in the Angolan civil war reached a high point at the end of 1975 and beginning of 1976. For revolutionary Marxists and supporters of democratic rights, it was an elementary duty to offer material support to the military struggle against this intervention, and to organize an international campaign under the general slogans of ‘Hands off Angola!’ ‘South Africa Out of Angola!’ and, in view of the threat from American imperialism because of Havana’s aid to the MPLA, ‘Defend Cuba!’” (“Draft Resolution on Angola of the LTF”, *IP*, Vol. 14, No 38, 11 October 1976, pp. 1456-1459).

It is true that, like a ventriloquist, the SWP did not speak directly, but it hid behind the scenes and used its dummy, the LTF. We all know that game “the deck of the old farce”, which is nothing but nice — a dummy in the foreground speaks instead of oneself.

This magnificent first point of the resolution of the SWP-LTF, concluded in its point number 14, no less magnificent and correct, in which it defines with absolute Marxist correctness the MPLA regime, cannot hide the tremendous gaps and errors of the SWP, both in its performance as in its different official documents, including the one object of our commentary.

The SWP has an odd habit — commentary and ethereal policy

In August 1976, the SWP held its Convention and there it voted the official report of Tony Thomas that we have already criticised. This report brings neither a single fact nor a single quote to analyse the documents and results of the policy produced in relation to the Angolan civil war and the black revolution in southern Africa. Turned into mere journalists, they made present comments and some predictions; they never carried out a comprehensive assessment of their claims and their participation, as well as their objective results. They did not ask whether the SWP had won blacks, white workers and students because of their campaign on the Angolan civil war. Nor were they asked how it had been received their position of not materially supporting, not in any way, the MPLA, at the time of the civil war when “imperialist intervention... achieved its highest point”. Absolute silence, nothing at all. The Socialist Workers Party does not give its line to take part in the process of the class struggle and to see the concrete and objective results of its application, but it is content to exclusively give it, nothing else, and months later — when they should be seriously evaluating what has been done — the SWP points out new lines, oftentimes contradictory and antagonistic with those it gave before. Proposals can change and contradict themselves; the constant is the contempt for analysing its application.

This deficiency is aggravated in the last resolution of the LTF. They do not explain why it took eight months after the end of the civil war to make known a resolution on Angola which,

obviously, is no longer useful at all. But even more serious is the total silence on the activity of the Fourth International during the civil war, taking into account its different tendencies and mainly the Socialist Workers Party. There can be no analysis of the Angolan civil war without specifying, with facts and quotations, what was the policy of each tendency or party during the war, as well as of the IV International as a whole, especially since the direct intervention of South Africa and US imperialism.

Three lines for the civil war

The SWP strives to conceal from its militants and sympathisers the three lines that emerged at the end of the Civil War within the Fourth International when South Africa and the United States intervened in it. This is surprising to us because the official resolution of the Socialist Workers Party in early January 1976 paused correctly in trying to pinpoint the profound differences that divided our movement with reference to the Angolan civil war and established two positions. In their document, they themselves point out that “this issue is being debated in the world Trotskyist movement. The Comrades of the International Majoritarian Tendency are in favour of supporting the MPLA... The leadership of the *Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores* of Argentina agrees in this with the IMT”. The line of the IMT, which according to them was supported by the Argentine PST, of defence of the MPLA, and their line, in opposition to its defence. We believe it is not so. At the end of the civil war, three fundamental lines within the Fourth International had been clearly defined: those of the IMT, of the Socialist Workers Party and of the PST. Let’s look at them and see whether our statement of the existence of three lines and not two is correct.

The position of the majority of the USec

The majority of the Unified Secretariat (USec) systematically supported the MPLA throughout the civil war and felt that this support should become much more intense as a result of the South African-US invasion.

On 25 November 1975, the majority of the USec approved a declaration in which the following call is made: “Against the holy alliance of imperialists, South African racists, neocolonialists of Zaire and Zambia, and the reactionary leaderships of the FNLA and UNITA! Defend the complete independence of Angola! Defend the Democratic Republic proclaimed by the MPLA! Reject any attempt at Balkanization! Immediate withdrawal of all forces of American and European imperialism, of South African racists, and all neocolonial governments!

“Organize an international campaign of solidarity! All workers states and all trade union and political organizations of the proletariat must mobilize on the side of the Angolan fighters by assuring them political solidarity and material support! Boycott the sending of arms to the reactionary bloc of the FNLA and UNITA!” (“The Civil War in Angola”, *IP*, Vol. 13, No 45, 15 December 1975, p. 1757).

At the same time, in the same declaration, they clarified: “Such an attitude does not mean that the Fourth International and African revolutionary Marxists give up their criticisms of the leadership of the MPLA, which they consider to be petty-bourgeois nationalist and not proletarian and communist. Alignment in the same camp and commitment to a common struggle are not in contradiction with the battle for political clarification necessary for a victorious outcome of the war and for the construction of a proletarian revolutionary Marxist leadership” (Ibid.)

In other words, for the majority of the USec at that time, material aid to the MPLA, solidarity in the sense of providing support in its struggle against the reactionary bloc did not mean political support, but quite the opposite, the political criticism of the leadership Of the MPLA; no political unity with it.

The SWP votes against an international campaign of material support to the MPLA

The second existing line is that of the SWP and the sector of the LTF sector that supported it within this faction. The SWP was against the policy and the resolution proposed by the majority of the USec to the International Executive Committee of February of this year, where its line of material support to the MPLA was presented.

In its resolution of January 1976, the SWP was of the opinion: “Still another element in the situation is the imperialist support given to the UNITA and the FNLA, including the use of South African troops. Does this automatically require us to support the MPLA?”¹ The Socialist Workers Party’s leadership asked this question to respond better and explain more forcefully why there should be no material, moral or political support, to the MPLA, despite the South African invasion in order to support the FNLA and UNITA.

Later they added: “In our opinion, no political support ought to be given to any of these three nationalist groups”. And they insist: “Our position is one of opposition to the factional war. (...) We are opposed to the program and practices of each of the nationalist groups”. In other words, at the moment in which the MPLA resisted with arms in hand, a South African invasion, the SWP was strongly against the practice of the MPLA that was one “of the nationalist groups”.

To leave no doubt that the SWP never supported the MPLA in its resolution, let us recall that in it, they said: “If the imperialist intervention increases, as seems quite likely, we may decide to favor the victory of one or another of the groups on tactical grounds, but of course without giving it any political support. In fact, we would continue to oppose that group politically”. That is, in January of this year, the SWP still did not know which group to support if the imperialist intervention was increased; and this was said after more than half of Angola was occupied by the South African army, which had formed a military “bloc” with the FNLA and UNITA, according to *Intercontinental Press* reports.

The summary of the discussion, prepared by Comrade Tony Thomas, says: “At some point the situation could change in such a way that we would call for material support to the MPLA...” That is, they were not determined to support the MPLA at that moment; it was something hypothetical, indefinite, and uncertain. And when, in the summary, they call on the three nationalist organisations to fight against “South Africa or any other imperialist power trying to get involved”, they do not say a single word about supporting the only nationalist organisation that was fighting with arms in hand against South Africa at the time, that is, the MPLA.

On the other hand, neither in the official resolution, nor in *Intercontinental Press*, nor in *The Militant*, was ever raised to give material support to the MPLA to resist the South African invasion; There was, therefore, no call for “Organising an international campaign of solidarity!”, nor a single slogan to “All workers’ states and trade union and political organisations of the proletariat” to support the MPLA fighters who resisted the South African invasion as it did the majority of the USec. Instead, they insisted, in the midst of the invasion, on the right to the autonomy of the Angolan tribes-nationalities, instead of pointing out that the separation at that moment meant breaking the unity against the imperialist enemy. They never stated: first, to militarily help the MPLA and to expel the South Africans; second, the right to separation.

A third position — that of the PST

It is surprising the silence of the LTF about the position held by the *Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores* of Argentina, which was the main nucleus of that faction. This silence is much stranger because the PST maintained a clear position throughout the civil war that sets it apart from both

¹ Tony Thomas, “Behind the Civil War in Angola”, report approved by the National Committee of the SWP, reproduced in *Intercontinental Press*, Vol 14, No 3, 26 January 1976, pages 90-96. All quotes of this document come from this publication. [Editor]

the Socialist Workers Party and the IMT. The PST, it is true, supports the SWP while the most imminent danger of Angola is the Portuguese occupation and accepts the characterisation of the war as fratricidal. In this regard, it said: “The first objective of a revolutionary policy must be the end of the civil war and the immediate call by the three guerrilla organisations to Constituent Assembly elections so that in that assembly the Angolan workers and peasants can solve democratically how to strengthen independence and organise the country”.

But from the moment that the current LTF resolution points to the “high point” of imperialist intervention, “the end of 1975 and beginning of 1976”, the PST changed its position to give critical support to the position of the majority of the International, indicating that this attitude had been completely wrong prior to the South African invasion, and that the whole line of the majority, except for some pro-MPLA exaggerations, had become correct since the confrontation with the new main enemy, South Africa, and that the FNLA and UNITA, abandoning their condition as progressive nationalist movements, had become traitorous movements, allied to the South African imperialist and racist invasion. In this way, the position of the PST is perfectly clear: previously it had insisted on declaring itself in favour of the end of the fratricidal war with the purpose of expelling Portuguese imperialism; from the South African and imperialist invasion. The semi-official line of the PST, as we read in its newspaper *Avanzada Socialista*, is the following:

“The MPLA does not deserve the least trust of the revolutionaries. It has given ample evidence that it does not aspire to go beyond a relatively nationalist neo-colonial regime — its agreement with Gulf Oil (a Yankee company exploring the Cabinda oil fields in northern Angola) and the calls of Agostinho Neto (President of the People’s Republic of Angola) to foreign investors are good examples of this. Undoubtedly, the USSR supports this ominous policy.

“But this does not justify the lack of definition. In the face of the Spanish civil war, Trotsky argued that ‘Only cowards, traitors, or agents of Fascism can renounce aid to the Spanish republican armies’ (“Interview with Havas”, 19 February 1937, *The Spanish Revolution (1931-39)*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1973, p. 279). This did not imply supporting the disastrous pro-bosses and pro-imperialist policy of the Republican government. On the contrary, Trotsky came to admit the hypothesis that the latter, in the case of defeating Franco militarily, could be transformed into a ‘fascist regime’.

“Until 11 November the main enemy of the masses of Angola were the Portuguese colonial troops, and the most urgent task was to achieve their retirement.

“Once that withdrawal is completed, the main enemy is the pro-imperialist forces of Zaire, South Africa and white mercenaries, and there is no more decisive and urgent task than to fight them and to get them to leave the Angolan territory. The active intervention of the masses in this struggle gives it a dynamic that can be driven by revolutionaries beyond the MPLA’s intentions.

“Not placing any trust in the leadership of the MPLA means that, along with the relentless struggle against the FNLA-UNITA bloc, the UNTA [National Union of Angolan Workers] and the People’s Power Commissions must replace the MPLA-imposed government with a workers’ and peasants’ government chosen by the masses. The immediate elections for a Constituent Assembly and an agrarian reform that will give peasants the land of the white settlers and imperialist enterprises will allow the rural masses who follow the FNLA and UNITA to be won, guaranteeing their democratic rights and access to land.

“Revolutionary Socialists throughout the world have a duty to fulfil in connection with the Angolan civil war — to organise a worldwide campaign for the recognition of the RPA [People’s Republic of Angola], as well as to demand the immediate withdrawal of all mercenary, Zairean and South African troops from Angola, and the end of the intervention of the imperialist powers and their African lackeys” (Javier Baigorri, “Long live the People’s Republic”, in *Avanzada Socialista*, organ of the PST, Year IV, No 174, 5 December 1975).

Once again: Did we or did we not have to materially support the MPLA against the FNLA and UNITA at the end of the civil war?

The language of the SWP-LTF is somewhat imprecise: it was an “elementary duty of giving material support to the military struggle” against the South African intervention that intensified at the end of 1975. Throughout the document it is not clarified whether support should be given to the MPLA, the only movement opposed to the invasion. By July 1976, the SWP convention had been more categorical, ensuring, falsely, that they had supported “the military actions of the MPLA against South Africa and the mercenaries controlled by imperialism”. The LTF resolution states: “In September 1975, in an effort to advance their own factional struggle for power, the FNLA and UNITA leaders *reversed their previous stance and allied with the US-backed South African military intervention*. This was a *great betrayal* of the Angolan and African liberation struggles”.

But if in September 1975 the FNLA and UNITA “allied” themselves with the “South African military intervention” and committed a “great betrayal of the Angolan and African liberation struggles”, “reversing their previous stance”, ¿was it progressive or not, from that moment on, the MPLA war against those “great traitors”, “allies of South Africa”, and who had “reversed their previous position”? Was it necessary, then, to give or not military support to the MPLA to defeat these “great traitors”? Was it correct or not the position of the PST that, from November 1975, raised the new position of full military support to the MPLA in the civil war against the FNLA and UNITA “allies” of the “South African intervention”?

A false characterisation of the nationalist movements

The SWP-LTF faces a problem: if in September of 1975 FNLA and UNITA became “allies” of South Africa and imperialism, and if they committed a “great betrayal” and “reversed their previous position”, could they continue being defined as equal, identical to the MPLA, as defined in the resolution of January 1976? Or, perhaps, this was a false characterisation?

Let us recall the final characterisation of the already famous resolution-report: “Our judgment of the civil war between the nationalist groups in Angola can be summarized as follows: 1) All three of these groups favor collaboration with imperialism and are opposed to working-class mobilization (...). 2) All three of them seek to inflame animosities between the main nationalities in Angola. 3) At the same time each of them has a real mass base and has played a real role in the struggle for independence.” In January 1976, for the SWP they were identical as two droplets of water. But in October, they characterised the FNLA and UNITA as “allies of imperialism” because they had “reversed their previous nationalist stance” and committed “great betrayal”. This can only mean two facts: either the MPLA participated in the same betrayal, reversed its previous stance, and was an ally of imperialism at that time so that it could be catalogued as identical with the traitorous nationalist movements, or it was radically different from them. This dilemma answers by itself: when the SWP characterises as identical the three Angolan movements, in January 1976, the MPLA was already different from the other two nationalist movements. It did not commit a “great betrayal”, it was not a “military ally of imperialism” and had not “reversed its previous nationalistic stance”. Even a blind man would have seen it, but only the Socialist Workers Party leadership could not see and continues without seeing that monumental mistake.

Once again on the Cuban aid

In January 1976, the SWP asserted that “The military and diplomatic support given by the Kremlin to the MPLA is not meant to help the Angolan masses but to place the MPLA regime under obligations to Moscow. (...) Do we believe that Cuba and the Soviet Union are more ‘progressive’ in supporting one petty-bourgeois nationalist faction than Peking and Pyongyang are in supporting a different petty-bourgeois nationalist faction?”

In order to leave no doubt as to the SWP's position, let us recall again that at the end of the civil war, on 27 February 1976, *The Militant*, without blushing, quoted one of its leaders — we insist, when the war was concluding — as saying: “The Soviet Union and Cuba have been wrong in supporting one side against the other in the Angolan civil war”. It is true that outside the report, in the summary of the discussion, Tony Thomas accepted the USSR's support for the MPLA as a lesser evil, because if he did not continue to do so, this would “embolden imperialism”, but nothing else. Never in the document was this aid indicated as positive, but quite the contrary; they identified, as we have clearly quoted, the collaboration given by Peking to the FNLA and UNITA and the one given by the USSR and Cuba to the MPLA.

Today, however, we find the SWP-LTF recognising that “Castro's move, in bold defiance of the American imperialist giant, encouraged forces in Africa and elsewhere to step up their struggle for national liberation” and that “the Soviet and Cuban material assistance to the MPLA was decisive in overcoming South Africa's aggression and the pressure from Washington”.

But had not they said before this military aid was not progressive and that, on the contrary, it was as negative as the aid of Peking and Pyongyang and had *The Militant* not said that the Soviet Union and Cuba were wrong in supporting the MPLA? Where does that leave us? Was it not “decisive in overcoming South Africa's aggression”? Why then do they not congratulate Cuba and the USSR? Why was this not pointed out in due time? There are too many contradictions and their mistakes have been laid bare. Reality has been too brutal and they have taken eight months to digest such events.

Finally, let us make a brief summary: the SWP leadership, in January and February 1976 when the civil war was ending with the MPLA triumph against the South African invasion and its FNLA-UNITA allies, criticised Cuba for being “wrong” in taking sides and, in turn, as we have said before, they identified Soviet-Cuban collaboration with Chinese collaboration. Then, in July, total silence. They try to wash their hands by standing aside, without giving their opinion, without characterising the aid. Suddenly, however, they assert that this aid becomes “decisive in overcoming South Africa's aggression” and “encouraged forces in Africa and elsewhere to step up their struggle for national liberation”. According to this, the collaboration of Peking and imperialism was negative and that of the USSR and Cuba very positive for the process of the Black Revolution.

The Socialist Workers Party, it is an irrefutable truth, committed a political crime of enormous magnitude by not having placed itself in the vanguard of the unconditional support to the heroism of the combatants of the MPLA and not having welcome the Soviet and Cuban collaboration, both phenomena with a common goal — the defeat of the South African invasion and the triumph of the MPLA. With an aggravating factor, the SWP and the USSR now acknowledge that the Cuban aid to the MPLA was mainly motivated by the racist intervention, that is to say, it arrived at the precise moment to avoid the defeat of Angola and the MPLA at the hands of the counterrevolutionary front South Africa–FNLA–UNITA, which would have meant a colossal setback for the entire black revolution in Africa.

3. Trotskyism and the SWP positions on Angola

The leadership of the SWP considers itself to be heir, by direct line, of the thought of Trotsky. We could almost say that they have seen themselves as his probate executor. In the face of such a commitment, the entire Trotskyist and world revolutionary movement must compare the teachings of Lenin and Trotsky with some of the SWP positions on Angola and the black revolution in southern Africa. That is the purpose of this appendix.

On the role of black Americans and on the struggle of the global black movement

Trotskyism, being led by the hand by Trotsky, always considered the first four congresses of the Communist International as one of its fundamental programmatic basis. In the fourth congress a resolution was adopted on the black movement in the world; in it, the black sector of the United States was considered as a fundamental part of it. “The history of the American blacks has prepared them to play a major role in the liberation struggle of the entire African race. (...) The post-war industrialisation of blacks in the North, places the American blacks, particularly those in the North, in the vanguard of the struggle for black liberation” (“The Black Question”, 30 November 1922, *Fourth Congress of the Communist International*, www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/4th-congress/blacks.htm)

Despite qualifying it as the vanguard sector, and precisely today this does not happen since the vanguard is in the hands of the African blacks, no one can argue with the noted quote as far as it shows how the Communist International considered the blacks of America as part of the world’s black movement. Perhaps, at this moment, it is the rearguard, but our interest lies in demonstrating that it is part of that movement, as it is asserted in the conception of the Communist International, considering it as a movement and a world struggle, later ratified in the Thesis 3. “(...) the enemy of the black race and the enemy of the white workers is one and the same — capitalism and imperialism. The international struggle of the black race is a struggle against this common enemy. An international black movement based on this struggle must be organised: in America, the centre of black culture and black protest; in Africa, with its reserve of human labour for the further development of capitalism (...) The Communist International (...) feels duty-bound to encourage and support the *international* organisations of the black people in their struggle against the common enemy” (Ibid.)

In Thesis 6, within the political lines, it says: “i) The Fourth Congress considers it essential to support all forms of the black movement which aim either to undermine or weaken capitalism and imperialism or to prevent their further expansion” (Ibid). What are the similarities with the policy of the SWP? Absolutely none. There is not a single exposition in which the SWP considers the black movement of the United States as part of the “international organisations of the black people in their struggle against the common enemy”. Is there, perhaps, a relation between the lack

of support and the lack of vindication of the MPLA with the resolution that asserts the need to support and sustain any form of black movement (MPLA, for example) that aims “to undermine or weaken capitalism and imperialism or to prevent their further expansion”? In January 1976, the SWP published its famous resolution, which denies support to any Angolan black movement with the aim to demonstrate its correct policy of not lending support to the MPLA.

On the right to national self-determination and the danger of “Balkanisation”

While the SWP-FLT raised as program the “right to national self-determination”, including the “right to secede” by the tribes-nationalities, the IMT proclaimed the slogan directly opposed, against the “Balkanisation”; that is, in plain English, against the “right to secede” from the unified Angolan nation. The Bolshevik Tendency has proposed a line opposite to the two previous ones: For a Federation of Angola and the other black states that recognise the right to the national self-determination of the different tribes.

We believe that this to be the true Trotskyist position. The position of the SWP borders with revisionism and tends to be pro-imperialist. The Marxists we have a policy of principles in all regions of the world — to erase borders as the main obstacle, along with capitalist private property, to the development of the productive forces and culture. As any position of principles, it applies to reality through multiple mediations and contradictions. One of them is the struggle of oppressed nationalities, races or tribes to achieve their own state, their own nation. We support this struggle and try to defeat the oppressors of those nationalities so that their “right to national self-determination” is respected. But we do not renounce our principled position aimed at destroying the obstacles and barriers of every region of the world.

Trotsky is very clear on the matter:

“2) What does the program of separatism mean? — the economic and political dismemberment of Spain, or in other words, the transformation of the Iberian Peninsula into a sort of Balkan Peninsula, with independent states divided by customs barriers, and with independent armies conducting independent Hispanic wars. Of course, the sage Maurín will say that he does not want this. But programs have their own logic, something Maurín doesn’t have.

“3) Are the workers and peasants of the various parties of Spain interested in the economic dismemberment of Spain? Not at all. That is why to identify the decisive struggle for the right to self-determination with propaganda for separatism means to accomplish a fatal task. *Our program is for Hispanic federation with the indispensable maintenance of economic unity.* We have no intention of imposing this program upon the *oppressed nationalities of Spain with the aid of the arms of the bourgeoisie. In this sense, we are sincerely for the right to self-determination. If Catalonia separates, the Communist minority of Catalonia, as well as of Spain, will have to conduct a struggle for federation.*

“4) In the Balkans, the old pre-war Social Democracy already put forward the slogan of the democratic Balkan federation as the way out of the madhouse created by the separated states. Today, the Communist slogan in the Balkans is the Balkan Soviet Federation (by the way, the Comintern adopted the slogan of the Balkan Soviet Federation, but at the same time it rejected this slogan for Europe!). *How can we, under these conditions, adopt the slogan of the Balkanization of the Spanish peninsula?* Isn’t it monstrous?

“5) The syndicalists, or at least certain of their leaders, declare that they will fight against separatism even with arms in hand. In this case, the Communists and the syndicalists would find themselves on opposite sides of the barricades, because *without sharing the separatist illusions, while criticising them,* on the contrary, the Communists must stand up unflinchingly against the hangmen of imperialism and their syndicalist lackeys.

“6) Should the petty bourgeoisie succeed — against the advice and criticism of the Communists — in dismembering Spain, the negative results of such a régime will not take long to manifest

themselves. The workers and peasants of the various sections of Spain will speedily arrive at this conclusion: yes, the Communists were right. But this means precisely that we must not assume a particle of responsibility for Maurín's program" ("The National Question in Catalonia", 13 July 1931, *The Spanish Revolution (1931-39)*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1973, pp. 175-176).

This extensive but indispensable quotation from Trotsky not only goes against the Socialist Workers Party when it categorically states: "Our program is for Hispanic federation with the indispensable maintenance of economic unity". The relationship with Angola is clear; so much so that we could transform the phrase in this way: "Our program is for Angolan federation with the indispensable maintenance of economic unity" and against the "separatist illusions". But this line is also against the IMT and its slogan against the Balkanisation since by not signalling our support for the right to self-determination of the tribes, we commit a serious error since it would favour, at the moment, the stronger tribes or those most closely linked to capitalism and imperialism. That is, we are against Balkanisation and for maintaining Angolan unity, but at the same time, we fight for the right to tribal self-determination. The Socialist Workers Party gives a single pole of the Trotskyist position, *one that is not essentially socialist* — the right to national self-determination — while the IMT picks up the other pole of our conception, that is, our program of struggle for unity in Angola, and not only of this country but of all the black republics, we add. Any position that is given unilaterally, without harbouring the two alternatives, falls into petty-bourgeois, bourgeois, or pro-imperialist attitudes. However, it should be noted that the most serious of all these positions is against balkanisation. In this, we recognise that the comrades of the majority are absolutely right because this slogan is the most perfidious weapon of imperialism not only in Europe but also used it in Latin America and now put it into practice in Africa.

On the slogan of "Black Republic"

The SWP, as we have seen, kills with silence the slogan of the Black Republic in South Africa. And even more dangerously, by supporting the proposal of a black majority government in South Africa, it is raising the slogan of a multiracial state, also opposing, albeit with complete silence, the call made by themselves for the tribes of Angola in defence of national self-determination. Are the blacks of the Republic of South Africa or of Rhodesia, who are the majority, entitled to make their independent republic as the Bakongos are? Why does the SWP fight for that right for the Bakongos, and not for the black South Africans?

The Socialist Workers Party does not even pose this question and even less does it answer it affirmatively, thus fulfilling a primary duty of a consistent Trotskyist. But what is most serious is the direct non-acceptance of the slogan for a "black republic", an urgent need imposed by the black struggle in Africa. Likewise, without any reason, they leave aside the approach made by Trotsky years ago.

"Under these conditions, the South African republic will emerge *first of all* as a 'black' republic; this does not exclude, of course, either full equality for the whites or brotherly relations between the two races — depending mainly on the conduct of the whites. But it is entirely obvious that the predominant majority of the population, liberated from slavish dependence, *will put a certain imprint on the state.* (...)

"When the theses say that the slogan of a 'black republic' is equally harmful for the revolutionary cause as is the slogan of a 'South Africa for the whites', then we cannot agree with the form of the statement. Whereas in the latter there is the case of supporting complete oppression, in the former there is the case of taking the first steps toward liberation.

"We must accept decisively and without any reservations the complete and unconditional right of the blacks to independence. Only on the basis of a mutual struggle against the domination of the white exploiters can the solidarity of black and white toilers be cultivated and strengthened.

“It is possible that *after victory* (emphasis by LT) the blacks will find it unnecessary to form a separate black state in South Africa. Certainly we will not force them (emphasis by LT) to establish a separate state. But let them make this decision freely, on the basis of their own experience, and not forced by the *sjambok* [whip] of the white oppressors. The proletarian revolutionaries must never forget the right of the oppressed nationalities to self-determination, including full separation, and the duty of the proletariat of the oppressing nation to defend this right with arms in hand, if necessary” (“On the South African Theses”, 20 April 1935, *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1934-35)*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1974, p. 337-338).

As a probate executor, the SWP is not very honest. §