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PORTUGAL 1974-1975:  
THE FORGOTTEN DREAM

PETER ROBINSON

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## Glossary

CIL	Cintura Industrial de Lisboa. The organisation of the 'industrial belt' of Lisbon was based upon workers' commissions and dominated by supporters of the PCP.	MES	PCP. Movement of Left Socialists. Although it was only formally launched as a party in May 1974 MES originated from a network of socialist forums that had been active from 1970. These included trade unionists, Catholics and students.
COPCON	Continental Operations Command. Set up in July 1974 under the leadership of Otelo Carvalho, this was the internal security force of the MFA.	MFA	Movimento das Forças Armadas - Armed Forces Movement.
CRTSM	Revolutionary Councils of Workers, Soldiers and Sailors. Formed by the PRP/BR in April 1975 with the intention of setting up a network of Soviets, committed to armed insurrection.	MRPP	Movement for the Reorganisation of the Party of the Proletariat. Founded in 1970 by students and young workers who left the PCP.
CT	Comissão de Trabalhadores. Workers' committee, usually elected by mass meetings	PCP	Portuguese Communist Party, founded in 1921.
CTT	Correios Telegrafos e Telefone. An enterprise responsible primarily for postal services, and whose workers went on strike in June 1974.	PPD	Partido Popular Democratico. The most established party of the centre/right. It had ministers in every Provisional Government, except the Fifth.
FSP	Popular Socialist Front. The result of a left breakaway from the Socialist Party in January 1975.	PRP/BR	Revolutionary Proletarian Party/Revolutionary Brigades. Founded in 1972, setting up the Brigades, which were responsible for various attacks upon military installations before 25 April.
FUP	Frente Unitaria Popular. A short-lived front, which comprised the PCP as, well the MDP, FSP, PRP, MES, LCI and the First of May Group.	PS	Socialist Party. Founded in 1973 and led by Mario Soares
FUR	Frente de Unidade Revolucionaria. This was set up after the PCP left the FUP. Comprising MDP, FSP, PRP, MES, LCI and the First of May Group.	SUV	Soldados Unidos Vencerão. A rank-and-file soldiers' organisation.
Inter-Empresas	A Lisbon-based federation of workers' committees. This initially emerged spontaneously after 25 April. It was most active in January and February 1975, although it continued formally to exist for some months after.	TAP	Tranportes Aereos Portugueses. The national airline.
Intersindical	The main national trade union federation, predominantly controlled by the PCP.	TLP	Telefones de Lisboa e Porto. The main telephone company
LCI	International Communist League. Founded in 1974, this was the largest of the Trotskyist groups.	UDP	Popular Democratic Unity. An electoral front founded in December 1974 by three Marxist-Leninist groups. By 25 November 1975 this was the most significant of the Maoist groups/fronts.
MDP/CDE	Portuguese Democratic Movement/Democratic Committees for the elections. Originally formed in 1969 as an electoral front, the CDE, it was constituted as a party, the MDE, in October 1974. In practice it was perceived as being a front for the		

## Portugal 1974-1975: the Forgotten Dream

*“The actual unfolding of the revolutionary process takes place subterraneously, in the murky depths of the factory and of the minds of the countless multitudes that capitalism subjects to its laws. This unfolding cannot be controlled or documented.”*

Antonio Gramsci<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Up till now the turmoil of 25 years ago in Portugal, in 1974 and 1975, has been the most observed and televised revolutionary period ever. Posters advocating armed insurrection were legal, and even bus tickets had revolutionary slogans on them. Seven year old children could tell one about the many political parties of the left, their papers, badges and slogans and furthermore would explain why they supported a particular party. There was nothing but goodwill for the working class throughout the world. Workers discussed the situation in France, in England, Argentina and Brazil as if they'd been professors of politics all their lives. The European left hired charter planes, to observe, join in, and celebrate the renaissance of revolutionary ideas.

Strike waves rippled through the industrial sector. The scale of factory occupations recalled Turin in 1920, Catalonia in 1936, or France in 1936 and 1968. It was not only the factories that were taken over; popular clinics and cultural centres mushroomed. In one hospital the workers took over from the nuns and urged them to come and vote at the mass meetings. Empty houses and apartments were requisitioned and the organisation of tenants and residents was incomparably larger than anything else seen in Europe. On the land, workers took over the estates and gave their communes names like 'Red Star' and 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat'.

A visitor to Portugal now would see little evidence of those halcyon, unbelievable days. Some wall paintings may be visible, a slender tribute to the creativity of the painters, people with little artistic and political training who, within months, painted gigantic murals. Since then the whole thing has been allowed to dissolve. Only a handful of books has appeared in English.<sup>2</sup> It is almost as if nothing happened; as if we have nothing to learn.

In August 1975 a British political group, the International Socialists (IS), organised a cheap two-week trip for 70 comrades on a commercial flight. On our first night we stayed at the comfortable Hotel Ambassador which had been taken over by the workers. Naturally they gave a large discount to foreign revolutionaries. A member of the workers' commission, the telephone receptionist, told us the story of the occupation. Much of that trip was spent on demonstrations, visiting workers' commissions and various centres (*sedes*) of the left.

From October 1975 until the following June I worked for the IS as a political organiser, based in Lisbon.<sup>3</sup> I was fortunate to be able to spend a considerable amount of time talking and interviewing rank and file militants<sup>4</sup> and scouring the left wing press of the time, factory communiqués, and an assortment of pamphlets. I returned to Portugal a number of times in the late seventies and middle eighties to research and write up the events.<sup>5</sup>

Gramsci is right when he warns us: “This unfolding cannot be readily controlled or documented”. The workers' struggles did not take place at the level of official public politics. Just as naval historiographies of mutinies will tend to neglect the lower decks, the accounts of the revolutionary process neglect the mass movement. This particular study focuses, intentionally, upon the lower decks.

Documentation is scanty, particularly concerning the months immediately following the overthrow of the old regime on 25 April 1974. The factory committees and embryonic councils lacked even minutes and record books. It is quite unusual to find details of such matters as meeting places, dates of meetings, regularity of sessions or even the levels of attendance and breadth of representation. Sometimes lack of precise detail makes the actions and organisations seem insubstantial, but the lack of documentary evidence is compensated for by other evidence of workers' activity.

However, it would be misleading to infer that the struggles for control and power were not reported. As the struggle heightened, the coverage increased. As already mentioned, the struggle in Portugal, especially in the summer and autumn, was extensively covered by the international press and TV. For a time the oppressed classes controlled their own organs of information, epitomised by the newspaper *República* and the Lisbon station of *Rádio Renascença*, both of which were under workers' control in

the summer and autumn of 1975. The daily newspapers would print, often in full, a communiqué from any left-wing group or an official statement from any workers' committee or gathering of soldiers that managed to issue one. This evidence of the activity of the masses is extremely useful, but it is often stilted and only partial. Statistics were wholly inadequate. It was all too rare that the papers, even those under workers' control, felt or sounded representative of working people.

In the middle of the revolution rank-and-file activists rarely found an adequate written expression for their ideas, although shortly after or during the revolutionary process quite a few accounts, collections of documents and round table discussions were published as pamphlets or as books, usually slim ones. Given these weaknesses, the documentation of workplace struggles and structure created by the academics attached to the *Gabinete de Investigações Sociais*, and those who wrote for their journal *Análise Social*, has proved to be invaluable. The most significant repository of documentation has been established at the University of Coimbra and this has also produced a bilingual annotated bibliography.<sup>6</sup>

Why is it that nothing has appeared in the press in Britain 25 years later? Was it that the overthrow of Europe's longest standing dictatorship was insignificant? It is as if memories of millions of people wrestling for control of their lives is an aberration, some sort of dream or fairy tale. Since then we have seen the collapse of communism paralleled by attempts to reject the notions of Marx and a disbelief in any notions of the working class as an active force. It is this ideological skewing which has generated the myopia that obliterates memories and understanding of the Portuguese events of 25 years ago.

#### **Before 25 April 1974**

Before entering into the discussion of the events of 1974-75 it is useful to have a brief outline of the historical background to the development of the dictatorship in Portugal. The Portuguese monarchy was overthrown in 1910. During the next 16 years there were 45 governments, incessant bombings, assassinations, coups and attempted coups, mutinies, riots, strikes and lockouts. The period of parliamentary rule was terminated by a coup in 1926. Antonio de Oliveira Salazar was appointed Minister of Finance in 1928. He built around himself a mass movement, a party and the

ideology of the *Estado Novo* (the New State). Within years he was to establish a dictatorship. Under this regime a handful of private empires flourished. Protected by tariffs and state controls two giant corporations emerged, CUF and Champalimaud. CUF grew to control one tenth of Portugal's industry. It had a virtual monopoly of tobacco and a large share in the soap, chemicals, textiles and construction industries, and in insurance. Champalimaud was involved in insurance and, later, tourism. It came to acquire a virtual monopoly of steel production. These native conglomerates were deliberately fostered against foreign competition. Even Coca-Cola was prohibited. The regime bred an oligarchy - a few powerful families and their business empires - intertwined with the state bureaucracy and the upper echelons of the armed forces. In the shadow of the oligarchy there was a large number of small craftsmen and traditional firms but little room for independent capitalism. Political parties, trade unions and strikes were outlawed. Opponents were arbitrarily imprisoned and tortured by the notorious secret police, the PIDE.

Although the Salazar regime has been commonly identified by the left as fascist, it was a different form of fascism from that of Germany and Italy. Salazar did not come to power through mobilising sections of the masses against communism. Furthermore, by comparison, Portugal was still largely underdeveloped. The regime was, however, labelled fascist both by its enemies and by the population. It is important to realise the strong anti-fascist dimension of the popular power movement before and after the overthrow of the regime.

By the late 1960s Portugal had three distinctive features. Firstly, it was the least developed country in Western Europe. It had a large peasantry in the North, landed estates in the South and relatively small, concentrated industrial centres around Lisbon and along the North Coast in the Porto region. Between 1960 and 1970 emigration, a response to underdevelopment, increased five-fold. Social provisions were archaic. Portugal's rates of infant mortality, infectious disease, and illiteracy matched those of Turkey. The population actually declined in the last years of the sixties.

Secondly, Portugal, having acquired the first of the European colonial empires, clung to it long after other nations had relinquished theirs. The African and Far Eastern colonies provided both a source of cheap raw materials and secure, protected

markets for Portugal's industrial goods. But by the 1960s, anti-colonial uprisings began to weaken the empire. In Africa, freedom struggles began with an urban uprising in Luanda, Angola, in 1961. Guerrilla movements emerged in Guinea in 1963 and Mozambique by 1964.

Thirdly, Europe's oldest dictatorship needed to reorganise and modernise its industry. New developments like the gigantic shipyard complexes of Lisnave and Setenave were financed with the help of foreign capital. In search of cheap labour and a friendly regime, the multinationals such as Timex, Plessey, Ford, General Motors, ITT and Philips set up large modern plants, mostly in the Lisbon industrial belt. The urban working class grew along with the shanty towns. Foreign capital accounted for 52.2% of Portugal's total manufacturing investment by 1968.

By the end of the sixties Portuguese fascism was an archaic social system fighting a war which could not be won. The ramshackle Portuguese empire proved incapable of modernisation without a fundamental political overhaul. Thanks to the collapse of a British-made deckchair in September 1968, Salazar suffered a stroke and severe brain damage. His withdrawal from politics encouraged those who were attempting to reform the system from above. Salazar's successor, Marcello Caetano, introduced the so-called *primavera*, the 'spring' of liberalisation. Censorship was relaxed. Political prisoners were allowed exile and some exiles were allowed home. The student movement emerged, encouraged by liberalisation and inspired by the students in Europe and the United States. The movement identified with the anti-colonial struggle in Africa. Students who failed their exams could be conscripted into the armed forces. This helped to spread radical ideas to the military.

Tightly controlled elections were held in October 1969. During the campaign an electoral front of communists, Catholics and prominent 'left' intellectuals called the CDE - the Democratic Electoral Commissions - was formed. The CDE was to be an important forum for anyone who opposed the regime.

The 'new spring' allowed the trade unions to run internal elections without first submitting lists of candidates to the secret police (PIDE). In 1969 and 1970 elections took place in 5 unions. Fresh blood was brought in. The textile union, for example, appointed a student militant as its organiser. By October 1970

there were 20 or so unions with independent elected leaderships who convened a semi-legal federation called the Intersindical.

The rise of the student and workers' movement, the drain of the colonial wars, and economic crises, combined to alarm the regime. By the early seventies Caetano had returned to traditional conservatism and repression. There was no room for reforms when a war was being fought and when nearly half of central budget expenditure went on the armed forces. But the workers' movement could not be simply pushed back. Caetano had introduced a Law of Collective Contracts which resulted in an annual round of wage negotiations. As a result, in the textile industry there was a strike every year from 1970-73. Short-lived spontaneous strikes also took place in a number of sectors.

A new strike wave broke out in the last three months of 1973. The files kept by the Ministry of Corporations and Social Security describe in detail the agitation in a sample of 33 firms in the greater Lisbon area (in commercial aviation, metalwork, clothing manufacturers, building industry and transport). It involved some 17,000 workers out of a total of 30,000 employees in these firms. It was estimated that from October 1973 to March 1974 more than 100,000 workers from about 200 firms put in for wage increases and about 60,000 resorted to strike action. Outside Lisbon strikes occurred in Braga and Covilha (textiles), Porto and Aveiro (engineering) and in Marinha Grande (glass industry). Because of fear of repression strike committees often were not elected or organised. In some cases the workers did not even define their demands. They simply said they wanted an increase in wages. Where there were militant unions (e.g. textiles, electrical, bankworkers and engineering) the strikes were integrated into the framework of their activities. Other forms of action included go-slows (Siderurgia, Lisnave), street demonstrations (insurance workers and bank workers), factory gate meetings (Casa Hipolito, Soda Povoá), overtime bans and the presentation of lists of grievances.<sup>7</sup>

The first major industrial conflict was in 1973 and involved the maintenance engineers at TAP, the Portuguese airline. Some occupied a Boeing 707. On 12 July two of these workers were shot and wounded by the police during eviction. A workers' committee, one of the first in Portugal for several generations, was formed.

“The Police beat up a lot of people. The strike lasted for 15 days. It was a very well organised strike. A comunicado was produced every day, signed by a ‘group of workers’... Workers from different parts of the factory met in each other’s houses. About 150 were involved with the clandestine organisation of workers inside. The interplay of the clandestine and the legal struggle enabled them to succeed in the strike. Not only did they win their wage demands, they succeeded in releasing those imprisoned, the wounded were compensated and those forcibly dismissed reinstated.”<sup>8</sup>

The workers at TAP, at Lisbon airport, were politically influenced by an emerging left. By 1972, within the CDE - which had originated as an electoral front - arguments were developing around the use of violence, semi-legal political action and democracy within the organisation itself. In 1972 a crucial split took place where about a third to one half of the militants - 40 or 50 people - left the CDE. Those who left became prominent members of many of the (non-Maoist) revolutionary groups and the kernel of the Socialist Party, founded in exile in 1973.

The Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) had long claimed to be the only political organisation active in working class struggles under fascism. Its leader Alvaro Cunhal was fond of reminding others that he “and many other comrades who are still alive, participated in the preparation of the organisation and development of the strike of May 8th and 9th, 1944 (in Lisbon and the Lower Ribatejo)”. (*Avante* 22/11/74) Despite this legacy the strikes of 1973 far exceeded the PCP orbit. Unable to influence the massive outbreak of strikes the clandestine PCP paper, *Avante*, sought to link it to the strategy of the Party, and to represent it as part of an anti-fascist political offensive. This connection was tenuous. The evidence is that the strikes were immediate demands based on material needs. While undoubtedly the workers hated the regime they did not have the confidence to move directly against it.

There were also tensions amongst those who had the control of wealth. Industrialists were impatient with the inadequate banking and financial network in the country and the lack of reliable information on which to base economic decision making. They were frustrated by labour shortages and the emphasis upon Africa. In 1973, in fact, nearly half of Portugal’s foreign trade was with the EEC, whereas the volume of trade with

the country’s overseas territories was less than a third of that. “To a segment of the great economic interests, therefore, the corporate state of Salazar and Caetano had become a positive hindrance.”<sup>9</sup>

The forces opposed to the regime were given a massive boost by events in Africa. By early 1974 the PAIGC in Guinea was on the verge of victory and FRELIMO - the front for the liberation of Mozambique - had opened a new offensive. The number of Portuguese dead, 13,000, was greater than in any conflict since the Napoleonic wars and the army was being blamed for these failures. Some officers were ashamed of wearing their uniforms in the streets of Lisbon. A crisis had been developing in the middle ranks of the army. There was no prospect of winning the wars in Africa.

### **The MFA - The Armed Forces Movement**

The story of the Portuguese Revolution often starts with the *Movimento das Forças Armadas* (MFA) - the Armed Forces Movement. On Sunday 9 September 1973, amid stringent security precautions, 136 officers, none more senior than captain, met deep in the countryside ostensibly for a ‘special farmhouse barbecue’. This was the first meeting of the MFA.

By April 1974 the MFA had built a network of 300 supporting officers from all three services and had drafted its first programme calling for “Democracy, Development and De-colonialisation”. The MFA wanted a democratic modern ‘mixed economy’ on the Western European pattern and refused to accept blame for colonial reverses. At that time only a few of the officers could have been labelled ‘socialist’.

The coup itself succeeded with remarkable ease. With only a dozen military units mobilised, the radio and TV stations, the airport and the general military headquarters were taken with little resistance. Only four people were killed, shot by terrified secret police agents (the PIDE). A regime that had lasted nearly fifty years crumbled totally in less than a day.<sup>10</sup>

The MFA had mutinied and sought a social base to legitimise its position. It needed mass support. This was expressed in terms of collaboration across the classes. The slogan “the MFA is with the people, the people are with the MFA” soon gained enormous popularity. Red carnations were immediately adopted as the symbol of the revolution, red for the revolution and flowers for peace. Soldiers stuck carnations in their rifle barrels. By the end of the day the tanks were swarming with joy-riders. The

relationship between the middle and junior officers and the popular movement is certainly fascinating but the Portuguese revolutionary process was not just about this. It was about the forces which the MFA helped unleash.

### Struggles and Organisation in the Workplaces

Street and bridge names were changed. May Day was declared a national holiday. Walls blossomed with graffiti, slogans and posters and later with brilliant murals. The days before May Day became a permanent 'festival of the oppressed'. Even the prostitutes of Lisbon organised and campaigned to sack the pimps.

The coup released a host of popular energies and aspirations. On 29 April more than 100 families living in the shanty towns occupied a new government housing project on the outskirts of Lisbon. In the next two weeks more than 2000 houses were occupied around the country. The movement of residents' commissions and shanty dwellers was to come to the boil over the next eighteen months.

On the day of the coup only one factory was actually on strike, the Mague metallurgical factory, with two thousand workers. Their demand for 6000 escudos (£100) as a monthly minimum was immediately conceded by the management, who feared the consequences of being branded as fascists by Portugal's new rulers. However the military Junta (which the MFA had helped set up) was unhappy about this victory and declared that the new pay deal was an example which should not be followed.<sup>11</sup>

After 25 April most workers did go to work, but they spent those days celebrating. Celebrations quickly hardened into battles. Managements wanted to restart production but the workers wanted the 'revolution' to be carried into the workplaces. Managements resisted, workplaces erupted. The eruptions were not co-ordinated, demands varying enormously. Both economic and political demands were raised. Some strikes lasted a few hours and others, months. The disputes were mainly in the newer industries (electronics, shipyards, etc) and newly expanded parts of older industries (textiles, construction). Wage claims sprouted haphazardly. At the time Agostinho Roseta was both a functionary of the textile union and also a conscript officer. He recalls meeting early in May, organised by women in the textile industry:

"There were some 7 or 8000 people there. Everything was completely confused. Somebody shouted should we ask for a rise

of 3000 escudos. From across the hall the answer was no. 4000. Then no. 5000 escudos."<sup>12</sup>

Workers at the Timex watch factory, predominantly women, went on strike for wage increases and the purging of six PIDE informers. They sold the watches in the streets to bolster their strike funds. On 13 May 1600 miners at Panasqueira struck for a minimum wage of 6000 escudos a month, free medical care, an annual bonus of a month's wage (known as the 13th month payment), one month's holiday and the purging of fascists. Within a week they had won all they had asked for. On 15 May Lisnave's 8400 workers occupied their shipyards and went on strike for a 40-hour week and a 7800 escudo (£130) monthly minimum wage. In May at least 158 workforces were involved in fierce confrontations, including 35 occupations. In four of these members of management were held prisoner.<sup>13</sup>

In the big companies, especially the multinationals, economic demands accompanied demands for the purging of all members of the management with fascist connections. In some places this meant 'sacking them all.' This ousting of fascists was known as *saneamento*. Very quickly it spread beyond outright collaborators and came to include anybody who was opposed to the workers. *Saneamento* occurred in more than half the firms employing more than 500 people, revealing both the weakness of the management and the growing confidence of the workers. Although workers did not make the distinction at the time, *saneamento* was highly political and could easily lead to questions about where real power lay. It distinguished those who controlled the factory from those who might control it. At the end of the Second World War similar processes, *epurazione* and *épuration*, occurred in Italy and France.

Figures for 1970 show that 36.7% of the working population was employed in industry and another 33.5% in the service sector.<sup>14</sup> This working population was highly concentrated. The vast majority of workers was to be found either around the Lisbon industrial conurbation or the area between Porto and the coast.<sup>15</sup> So when 200,000 workers from the Lisbon region struck in May, other workers could readily learn from them and support each other. (The converse problem was the isolation from other regions).

Before 25 April, clandestine workers' committees had existed very briefly at the moment of conflicts under various



names. Following the coup, workers' commissions rapidly emerged and by the end of May 1974 workers' commissions, councils and committees had been formed at almost all workplaces in the Lisbon region. They usually evolved the name *Comissões de Trabalhadores* - CTs. It has been estimated that between May and October 4000 CTs were established, one in virtually every workplace, almost always following mass meetings (*plenários*).

The workers' commissions may have lacked formal organisation but the high level of struggle forced them to meet and consult frequently. They were highly democratic. The commission at Plessey included 118 workers - all of whom insisted on going to the first meeting with the management.<sup>16</sup> I first met Fernanda, a young assembly worker for the Plessey multinational, when she toured Britain in 1975. Plessey employed a total of 4300 workers, most of them women. Fernanda worked at the site on the South bank of the Tagus estuary and she was a member of the first workers' committee. She told me:

"It was said 'why should we be on our own if other people (across the road) had the same problems?' Then we decided to join, and to discuss things in general. Workers from practically all the factories of the Margem SUL - (South Lisbon conurbation, on the far side of the Tagus Estuary) - were there. The meetings were a place, a way, for people to meet and discuss. The main purpose of these meetings was to defend the revolution!"<sup>17</sup>

Although there is very little written evidence, these inter-factory (*inter-empresa*) meetings were not dissimilar from workers' councils which emerged in other countries in revolutionary periods.

### **The Portuguese Communist Party (PCP)**

The intention of this article is primarily to celebrate the activities and achievements of those people whose only source of power was their labour, so-called 'ordinary' people who became extraordinary. But in looking at the empowerment of people one has to look at the forms of organisation which they create, such as the workers' committees and residents' organisations along with the more overtly political forms of organisation, such as the political parties.

The most significant party, in terms of size, was the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP). The Communist Party had a respected tradition of opposition to fascism, and it proudly

proclaimed that its 247 candidates for the April 1975 elections had served 440 years behind bars between them.<sup>18</sup> Over the years the party had developed a cadre and organisation with perhaps 5000 members by 25 April 1974. This meant that it was a potentially significant force, given that the population was nine million, and that the other opposition forces were tiny. The Communist Party was the only party with a substantial base and some influence in the working class, including the militant landworkers of the Alentejo.

The Communist Party had not jettisoned the notion of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. The PCP was a 'hard-line' pro-Moscow party, following in the tradition of Stalin. Its unswerving allegiance to Russia meant that it was, or soon became, unattractive to a number of militant activists, both before and after 25 April. Nevertheless, the Communist Party was a major force within the Portuguese process, and it is impossible to understand the dynamics of the process without some reference, at least, to the PCP.

On 15 May the First Provisional Government was formed. A strategy for defusing the workers' movement had to be developed. This hinged on the establishment of a government of 'national unity' in which the interests of all classes - including the working class - could be said to be represented. Accordingly the Socialist Party, which at the time had only 200 members and was less than a year old, was given three cabinet ministers in the first Provisional Government. President Spínola felt the communists would be less dangerous in the government than against it and so a communist party was pulled into a government for the first time in Western Europe since the immediate post-war period. Alvaro Cunhal, the long-serving secretary of the Communist Party, became Minister Without Portfolio, while the other communist in the government, Alvaro Gonçalves of the bank workers' union, became Minister of Labour.

The PCP also wished to consolidate its own position. Uninterested in further revolution, it fostered an alliance with the MFA, to which it was to stick to like a limpet. Like other communist parties, such as that in South Africa, it had developed a stages analysis. The first task was to develop an all-class alliance to establish a bourgeois democratic framework within which it would be able to extend its influence and win positions. This led to its promoting the Socialist Party as a prospective 'left' ally, but it also

meant the rejection of any idea that a socialist revolution could be achieved in 'backward' Portugal because it presupposed that the country's industrial base had to be built up first. Thus the Communist Party constantly pointed to the 'the crises of production' and exhorted workers to 'save the national economy'. As a partner in the Provisional Government the Communist Party immediately played its main card, that of influence over the workers' movement. It had to distance itself from the wildcat strikes and the accompanying workers' commissions (over which, in reality, it had little influence). Within a fortnight the most established 'revolutionary' party of the workers was organising a demonstration against strikes. The PCP paper *Avante* warned workers to avoid 'reactionary manoeuvres to promote industrial unrest'. The demonstration on 1 June was a disaster - Phil Mailer claims less than 500 people attended, although *Avante* claimed 10,000. This was an indication of how far the PCP was at odds with the workers' commissions. Its official statements at the time accused the workers' commissions of being 'ultra-left', of 'playing the game of the right', and of being 'lackeys of the bosses'. Many leading activists in the workers' commissions left the party as a result. Swamped by the spontaneous militancy of the rank and file, the PCP for a time lost much of its influence in the workers' struggles. Those places where the party had influence were characteristically less militant.

### **The Communist Party and the Union Movement**

The PCP was putting its resources into an alternative power base - the unions and a national trade union confederation, the Intersindical. The Intersindical had emerged in 1970 as a loose conglomeration of relatively independent unions ready to fight for better conditions, wage increases, and union recognition. On 25 April 1974 there were 22 unions in the Intersindical. No one political organisation dominated it but the influence of the revolutionary left, in particular that of MES (Movement of Left Socialists), had been important. Within weeks the number of affiliations to the Intersindical rose from 22 to about 200 unions and the Intersindical was dramatically transformed into the national trade union umbrella organisation with the Communist Party gripping the handle.

The take-over of unions was often achieved in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour. In some cases, but by

no means always, the unions were empty shells. Unions did not have money to pay officials. Communist Party militants went to work full time in them. Some had been recently released from prison and were looking for work, others went on indefinite holiday from work and many were paid by the party. Most of the leaderships of these unions were not elected but established by those who had occupied the union offices.

Although the unions had now become legalised and it was possible to transform or manipulate them, they had, in general, insufficient authority within the workplaces. Very occasionally, for example in some textile factories, workers belonged to a single union, and the union committee was in effect the workers' commission. Otherwise, in a factory of 150 workers, there could be members of as many as twenty unions. In response to the proliferation of the workers' commissions, the PCP had to promote Commissions of Union Delegates, co-ordinated by the different unions in the workplaces. As a result of this in many workplaces there was a crucial clash of organisations, between the workers' commissions elected by the workers in the assemblies, and the union delegates. In a number of cases the union delegates were not elected by the workers, or indeed may not even have worked in the factories.

### **Workers and Soldiers**

In the first weeks after the coup, the army, including senior officers, was very popular. It is reputed that the prostitutes of Lisbon offered their services half-price to all ranks below Lieutenant. A meeting of women textile workers, previously mentioned, was interrupted by "a soldier who was completely pissed out of his mind asking for a whip-round for soldiers because he wanted another drink for himself and his mates."

Agostinho Roseta, who chaired that meeting, remembered: "I told the soldier to piss off. The bloke went. The people in the hall were outraged by my treatment of the soldier. I would have been lynched if I had not explained that I was an officer. I was in civilian clothes. At that time the military could do no wrong - soldiers were looked on as saints."<sup>19</sup>

The popularity of the armed forces was to be exploited by the Junta and the First Provisional Government, which had been formed on 15 May. In its first 10 days it was only the personal intervention of MFA officers which persuaded the workers at

places like Lisnave and ITT to go back to work. But the government was prepared to exploit the army in another, more traditional way, physically against strikers. The first major industrial confrontation took place in the middle of June. The government, the Communist Party and the unions worked together denouncing strikers, particularly those strikers who 'were attempting to become a privileged group at the expense of the mass of the population'.

On 19 June the government gave the order to call in the army against 1000 postal workers employed by CTT who had gone on strike. Faced with this threat the strike committee called off the strike, and secured desultory gains. A number of PCP members tore up their party cards in disgust and joined the rapidly expanding revolutionary left. By contrast with the Communist Party, the Socialist Party had conspicuously supported the strike and stressed the democratic (i.e. non-PCP) nature of the strike organisation. By doing so it enhanced its reputation as 'democratic' and 'left wing' - which proved important later.

When two army cadets who had refused to participate in the mobilisation against the CTT strikers were imprisoned, far left groups organised a demonstration in their support. This was the first of many occasions when the rank and file came into conflict with military orders. The postal workers' dispute was an isolated victory for the First Provisional Government, and the MFA discovered that the tap of revolution, once turned on, was difficult to turn off.

The government was also being torn apart by the issue of decolonisation. Its instability was reflected in the growing flight of domestic and foreign capital from Portugal. It fell on 9 July 1974. The new, second, provisional government combination included seven representatives of the MFA and was headed by Vasco Goncalves, who was generally regarded as favourably disposed towards the Communist Party.

Potential disunity and unreliability amongst the armed forces could not be tolerated. One of the priorities of the Second Provisional Government was to create a 'reliable' internal state security force, called COPCON (Continental Operations Command). COPCON had to appear to be independent from the old structures and also untainted by the soldiers 'who were on the side of the people'. It was not a new regiment but a new command structure, one which incorporated most of the armed regiments in

Lisbon. It tended to act as a law unto itself, headed by the avuncular Otelo Carvalho, the architect of the 25 April coup. At that time he was not well known and certainly not considered to be left-wing or even political.

COPCON was soon called into play. On 28 August workers of TAP (the national airline) went on strike and Lisbon airport was placed under military control. One of the leading workers, Santos Junor, was arrested by the state security force. The Goncalves administration, backed by the Communist Party but not the Socialist Party, initiated a series of strike laws. These officially legalised strikes for the first time but banned political stoppages and sympathy strikes. A 37 day cooling off period was introduced. The strike laws were introduced on 29 August, the day after COPCON forces occupied TAP.

A handful of revolutionaries, mainly Marxist-Leninist (Maoist), from the Lisnave shipyard who had been calling for the purging of fascists from the administration, called an 'illegal' one-day strike and a demonstration against the legislation.

"We do not support the government when it comes out with anti-working-class laws which undermine the struggles of workers against capitalist exploitation. We shall actively oppose the anti-strike law because it is a great blow to the freedom of the workers."<sup>20</sup>

The demonstration was denounced by the PCP and banned by the government. The government made preparations to use COPCON troops to prevent the demonstration. On the day, 12 September, more than 5000 helmeted Lisnave workers marched in serried ranks to the Ministry of Labour in Lisbon. The shipyards were brought to a standstill.

The effect upon rank and file soldiers was profound, as one of them testified: "Before lunch the rumour circulated that we were going out and we soon guessed it was to Lisnave... We formed up at midday and the commander told us that he'd received a telephone call about a demonstration at Lisnave, led by a minority of leftist agitators and that our job was to prevent it from taking place. We were armed as we had never been before with G3s and 4 magazines... As you know, the demo began and a human torrent advanced with shouts of 'the soldiers are the sons of the workers', 'tomorrow the soldiers will be workers' and 'the arms of soldiers must not be turned against the workers'. The commander soon saw that we weren't going to follow his orders,

so he shut up. Our arms hung down by our side and some comrades were crying. Back at the barracks, the commander wasn't too annoyed but told that in future we would have to obey orders. The following day in the barracks, things were more lively. Before morning assembly many comrades were up and shouting the slogans of the demo, 'the soldiers are sons of the workers', 'down with capitalist exploitation'.<sup>21</sup>

A Lisnave leaflet drew the political conclusion: "We support the Armed Forces as long as they support the struggles of the oppressed and exploited classes against the exploiting and oppressing classes."<sup>22</sup> Such highly conditional support was entirely justified, for units of COPCON could still be used against workers.

The interaction between workers and soldiers was to be repeated many times over the next year, and indeed it became an endemic feature of the revolutionary process. This is not to say that army and workers were always united. But the impact, above all of workers upon the armed forces, came to be an integral part of the Portuguese story. Time and time again this interaction resulted in a wedge being driven between the MFA on the one hand, and the 'civil' authorities alongside the Socialists and the Communists on the other.

### The Demonstration of 7 February

It was sometimes the smaller demonstrations which caused the most consternation. And the ones that politicised the troops most, that of 7 February, organised by a revitalised *Inter-Empresas* organisation, did just that.

Many small and medium enterprises were bankrupted or simply abandoned by their owners. By January 1975 there were a number of bitter battles against them. The 1000 workers in the Lisbon branches of an electrical engineering group, Efacec/Inel, called upon the *Inter-Empresas* to call a demonstration against redundancies and unemployment. At the last minute, the *Inter-Empresas* decided on another slogan: 'NATO out, national independence.'<sup>23</sup> This was due to the harbouring in Lisbon of part of the American fleet undertaking NATO exercises.

All the political parties in the coalition government opposed the demonstration and it was prohibited by the Civil Governor of Lisbon, a PCP fellow-traveller. The Communist Party questioned the 'representativity' of the demonstration and raised doubts as to its 'true intentions'. Octavio Pato from the PCP went

on TV and advised people to give flowers to the marines of the NATO fleet. Nationally only the far left groups showed support, but the MFA, after hearing a delegation from the workers' commissions, announced that it did not object.

Displays like these politicised rank and file soldiers, as well as the officers in the MFA. Artur Palacio was a well known militant who worked at Lisnave for many years. He had been a member of the Lisnave workers' commission for most of the time since its inception and was one of the leaders of the demonstration. Artur told me of the effect upon the soldiers:

"The demonstration met police and military officers all along the way. They wanted to discourage or divert us. The demonstration never stopped in spite of different attempts. The army blocked the streets leading to the American Embassy. When we met the army block we stopped. I asked the people through the megaphone whether or not they should advance the people would not let themselves be fooled or impeded. So I went to talk to an officer and told him 'the people of the demonstration want to pass'. And so we moved on. When this happened the army realigned the armoured cars (*chaimites*) in front of the embassy so that the people could pass in front of the embassy.

"As the demonstrators went past, the commandos turned their backs to the demonstration, turned their weapons on the building and began joining the people in the chanting."<sup>24</sup>

*Libération*<sup>25</sup> reported people were crying with joy and "such scenes help you understand Portugal today".<sup>26</sup>

Joanna Rollo, of the International Socialists, wrote: "In the *Inter-Empresas* we see a special type of organisation which attempts to unite all organised workers and which attempts to lead a fight on behalf of the working class. In all of history there is only one type of organisation which does that. It is the birth of dual power. It is the embryo of the workers' state. *Inter-Empresas* - Council of Workers' Delegates - Soviet."<sup>27</sup>

On reflection, the claims of the birth of dual power and of Soviets were a bit far-fetched. Whilst the actions of the *Inter-Empresas* flouted the ban and undermined any attempt to impose discipline upon it, it was not an alternative power, more an indication that an alternative was possible. The situation had not produced two opposing powers, the working class and a reactionary establishment. The very fact that eventually the MFA did not oppose the demonstration deflected that particular

polarisation. Nevertheless Rollo was focusing on an independent organisation linking workers' committees.

It turned out that the demonstration of 7 February proved to be the zenith of the *Inter-Empresas*. The Communist Party had changed tack, and was now making ground in the workers' commissions because it had decided to work systematically inside the commissions instead of fighting against them. It had become clear that the juxtaposition of unions against the workers' commissions was no longer tenable, and that the commissions were too important. The PCP had been behind the organisation on 2 February, the same day as the *Inter-Empresas* meeting, of an ostensibly 'non-party' conference attended by 191 workers' commissions from the whole country.<sup>28</sup> In many workplaces there were debates over the need to have a separate 'workers' power'. Many of the workers' commissions, although to the left of the Communist Party, were taking up PCP positions, and pulling away from the extreme left.

"In this period the Communist Party took control of the workers' commissions in various enterprises such as Lisnave, Setenave, Siderurgia, Efacec (but this took a long time) and Sorefame. It had the majority of factories. When it took control it allied the workers' commissions with the Intersindical."<sup>29</sup>

### Counter-revolution?

Marx once said the revolution needs the whip of counter-revolution. From Russia there is the example of the Kornilov revolt in August 1917. In Portugal there were two outstandingly botched coup attempts, 28 September 1974 and 11 March 1975.

By September 1974, industrialists who had welcomed 25 April now began to denounce the Second Provisional Government in the bitterest terms. They had little faith in the government, which was generally regarded as favourably disposed towards 'communists'. They were worried that the troops could no longer be trusted and longed for 'law and order'. Many factory owners and foreign investors were withdrawing entirely from Portugal and sections of the ruling class now drew the conclusion that the use of armed force was becoming necessary and urgent. Leading industrialists met with President Spínola and a few of the generals. They claimed they had a mandate from the population, the so-called 'silent majority'. Spínola called on the 'silent majority' to mobilise, culminating in a march on 28 September 1974, which

was intended to be 300,000 strong. Arms were supplied to fascists who would foster enough disorder to give the generals an excuse to intervene, attack the left and re-establish 'order'. Their calculations did not take account of the reaction of the mass of the workers. The demonstration of the 'silent majority' never took place and the débâcle led to the resignation of Spínola and the strengthening of the left.

In March 1975, as in September 1974, sections of the ruling class saw a military coup as the necessary response to radicalisation. The March conspirators included businessman Miguel Champalimaud (of the conglomerate by that name) and several high ranking military officers who had connections with Spínola. Although 11 March was an amateurish and a rather desperate affair it succeeded brilliantly in cementing the alliance between soldiers and workers. On that day two Harvard T-6 trainer planes and three helicopter gunships from the Tancos airbase strafed the RAL-1 barracks in Lisbon, killing one soldier and wounding fourteen others. Paratroopers surrounded the barracks but could not be persuaded to fire. Fierce discussions broke out between the two camps and within hours the paratroopers were explaining to the RAL-1 soldiers "we are no fascists - we are your comrades".

The organisation of military resistance to the coup attempt of 11 March was led by COPCON, which had some forewarning and was on the alert. Working people responded magnificently. Within hours of the attack barricades were set up along the main roads, sometimes using expropriated bulldozers, lorries and cement mixers. Soldiers fraternised openly with workers manning the barricades and handed over arms. Armed workers searched cars, and strikers at *Rádio Renascença* went back to work and occupied the radio station in order to 'defend the revolution'. Many papers printed second editions or special broadsheets, including the workers' committee of the big Lisbon daily *O Seculo*. This reported how the Porto section of the union of bank employees commanded its members to "Close the banks immediately. Don't make any payments. Set up pickets at the doors to check entrances and exits. Watch the telex and the telephones."

After the failure of the coup, right-wing generals and some company directors were arrested. Former President Spínola and others were whisked off to Spain 'by the helicopters of reaction'.

## The Revolutionary Left

So far this account has deliberately steered clear of any detailed description of the revolutionary left. This is, in part, due to the danger of confusing the reader. There were at least 57 varieties of revolutionary sects. The Portuguese have a wonderful word for them - *gruposculos*. Some were tiny, many changed their names, numerous splits and fusions took place. One problem was that they often had delusions of grandeur. It was often the case that the rhetoric espoused by the *gruposculos* had little touch with reality. Yet, party militants managed to be effective in organising around issues and battled for and alongside working people. One or more sections of the revolutionary left were in the midst of virtually all the struggles and revolts mentioned so far. Often these militants played leading positions and of course it is difficult to say whether this was because the best and most aware militants happened to join political organisations or whether it was because they were in organisations which gave 'the lead' which made them the best militants. We have to step back and remember the context in order to understand why the revolutionary left warrants more than a passing footnote. Many events, such as the strikes in May, the failure of September's attempted coup, and now the 11 March coup attempt, gave a boost to the far left.

I first met Jorge in his home town, Barreiro, in the autumn of 1975. He joined the PRP when he was a conscript serving at the Caldas da Rainha barracks (consisting of 690 soldiers and officers). He recalled how easy it was to build:

"I joined the PRP after March 11th. When I joined there were five militants in the barracks. After three months there were twenty, two of whom were officers.

"The PRP demanded, in response to March 11th, that one platoon of armed volunteers be assembled and if necessary, mobilised, to help the local population, and, if necessary, attack the fascists. The commander of the regiment, who probably had Socialist Party sympathies, succumbed."<sup>30</sup>

The PRP/BR (Proletarian Revolutionary Party/ Revolutionary Brigades) emerged relatively slowly after 25 April 1974. Guerrilla traditions developed in clandestine operations against the previous regime made it difficult for the PRP to operate openly. The PRP emphasised the role of the armed few acting in the name of the workers. Indeed many of its militants emphasised

that the issue was not one of making leftish demands of reformists, but of power being seized by means of armed insurrection. This struck a chord with some radical officers, especially in months following 11 March 1975. Because it was prepared to organise the taking of power, it meant that a relatively small organisation, albeit with significant influence with the officers (especially Otelo Carvalho) and within the armed forces was at times a major force within the revolutionary process.

But the PRP/BR was, in terms of day to day struggles, one of the less significant groups of the far left. Most of the groups shared a third worldist ideology, which was hardly surprising, given the widespread support for the African liberation movement and the general perception that Portugal was a developing nation. The largest party outside the orthodox communist framework was MES (Movement of Left Socialists). This emerged from the electoral front of 1968, bringing with it a number of young militant Catholics. With its open organisation, MES acquired a footing in the Intersindical, the textile and metal workers' unions and in Lisbon airport. MES always stressed the workers' struggle and the struggle of the people, but its lack of ideology meant that it tended to be seen as 'reactive' and rather 'soft'. MES tended to act as a pressure group, but still had considerable influence in a number of quarters.

Another significant force on the left was the Maoists. In general these were hard line communists who had broken away from the PCP. Although they condemned the Communist Party, they shared its basic understanding of the struggle. They all argued that, given Portugal's economic and political backwardness, it was necessary to achieve national independence and democracy through an alliance of different classes in which the role of the working class, although leading, was subordinated to creating a bourgeois democracy. Establishing socialism was out of the question because in 'underdeveloped' Portugal the working class was small. Actually industrial workers formed a third of the working population compared with one-twentieth in the Russia of 1917.

By April 1974 the largest, strongest and certainly the most strident of the Maoist groups was the MRPP (Movement to Reorganise the Party of the Proletariat) which had been formed in 1970. The MRPP proved to be terribly sectarian. It constantly condemned the MFA, COPCON, the Communist Party and the

role of the Intersindical. It referred to the Communist Party as 'social-fascists', a term used by Stalinists in the early thirties to condemn social democrats. As far as the MRPP was concerned the PCP was the main enemy. The MRPP leaders were arrested by COPCON. It is significant that the MRPP managed to make some inroads, and even became a dominant force in the union committees at TAP, CTT and Timex - all places where COPCON had intervened against the workers. In practice such influence as the MRPP had amongst workers was often achieved in alliance with the Socialist Party, which usually did not have an organised framework on the shop floor and was prepared to make common cause with the MRPP in its battle against the Communist Party.

Subsequently, many historians have not seriously analysed, or have downplayed, the role of the far left. There was, at this time, considerable hostility on the ground towards the revolutionary left in all sorts of ways. This was particularly true when the workers' movement appeared incomparably powerful. Belief in the mass movement surged, particularly in the early phases and this was comparable with the 'carnival' or 'honeymoon' periods in other revolutions. For some, the success of spontaneous struggles and the ability of workers to learn and adapt during the course of events made the need for any party, let alone a revolutionary party in opposition to the Communist Party and Socialist Party, appear unnecessary, even sectarian. The response of many of the parties themselves was to be sectarian in their non-sectarianism. The following report of the Lisbon demonstration organised by revolutionaries and workers on 28 September 1974 against Spínola's coup manoeuvrings demonstrates this:

"In the course of the demonstration some members of the MRPP tried to join in. They were asked to remove any sign of their party. This they refused to do so they were not permitted to join in."<sup>31</sup>

However, we have to remember that events and the collapse of the old regime and orders encouraged large numbers of people to examine the ideas of those who opposed the right. Workers and soldiers were hungry for ideas, a concoction of all sorts of new ideas. Censorship had been abolished and pornography vied with political pamphlets on the street-stalls. Personnel managers read Trotsky on *Dual Power*. Lenin's *State and Revolution* was top of the booksellers' lists. Many were receptive to the ideas of the far left. This does not mean they became 'die-

hard' revolutionaries. Ideas and arguments were purchased wholesale.

The newspapers of the *gruposculos*, and not just those of the left, were boring, full of airy political phrases, and did not speak the language of workers in struggle, yet a lot were sold. Most of the groups published weekly papers selling 10,000-15,000 copies per issue. Comrades would go down to the Lisbon ferry stations with bundles of several hundred papers and return empty-handed. Saldanha Sanches, then editor of the MRPP paper *Luta Popular*, said "that the initial print order was for 100,000. Although a lot were kept under beds, comrades had to pay."<sup>32</sup> Workers were prepared to tolerate vitriolic language and seemingly obscure arguments in their search for new explanations and solutions.

The successful resistance to the 11 March coup gave a considerable boost to the revolutionary left. Many, especially the newly converted military, feared that the vicious take-over in Chile less than two years before might be repeated in Portugal. The events of 28 September and 11 March were constantly cited, and exaggerated. According to most of the left the only alternative to 'Forward to Socialism' was 'Back to Fascism'. This was a major weakness because it failed to prepare workers to resist the consolidation of bourgeois democracy.

### The Elections and the Socialist Party

The neo-fascists were not real contenders for power. The Portuguese ruling class itself had suffered the inconvenience of right-wing authoritarian regime. Nor was the example of Chile as inspiring to big business and the CIA as the left liked to imagine.<sup>33</sup> Since the coup of September 1973 the Chilean economy had faced continuing crises. Both the NATO powers and the Portuguese ruling class now preferred the option of building a 'stable' bourgeois parliamentary system, if at all possible. Progressive sections of Portuguese capitalism wanted to join the EEC, which demanded democratic credentials.

After 11 March MFA institutionalised its power. At the top was the 'supreme' Council of Revolution responsible to the MFA Assembly of 240 delegates, in theory from any rank, from the three wings of the armed forces. Precisely because the Council of Revolution was so confident, it felt able to honour its commitment to hold free elections.

The anniversary of the overthrow of the old regime, 25 April 1975, was chosen for the first ever elections based on universal suffrage. Three weeks were allocated for electioneering. Intricate rules were established, including equal TV time for all parties standing, regardless of size. This meant that parties to the left of the Communist Party, which together eventually won less than 8% of the total vote, had more than 50% of the TV air time. As parties were not allowed to flypost on top of one another's posters it became necessary to carry longer and longer ladders to reach bits of unpostered wall. Interest was immense. Of the 6,176,559 enrolled electors, 5,666,696 went to the polls, 91.73% of the electorate.

Including the votes for the revolutionary groups, parties of the left won almost 60% of the total. 'Socialism' was extremely popular. It was clear that people were looking for radical alternatives. However they were still shopping around. So they may have supported the communists when at work, the far left in the residents' commissions and the socialists when in the polling booth. Nevertheless the real victor of the election was the Socialist Party, which obtained 37.87% of the vote. The Communist Party polled a rather meagre 12.53%, plus the 4.12% of its close ally the MDP. (The MDP had once been an electoral front uniting the PCP with independent intellectuals). The status of the Socialist Party was transformed. From 200 members in April 1974 it had grown to the leading *parliamentary* party in Portugal, under the banner of freedom of speech, democracy, and a managed and modern economy. The precise practical meaning of these slogans remained unclear to those who supported them. The very vagueness of its slogans for 'progress', 'democracy' and 'socialism' enabled it to appeal to broad sectors of the population, including the less organised workers who fell outside the influence of the Intersindical and the Communist Party.<sup>34</sup> The experience of reformists in power, commonplace elsewhere, was unknown in Portugal.

The Socialist Party often appeared more left wing than the Communist Party. In September 1974 it had attacked the government's proposed labour legislation. It could afford to tolerate a left wing within its ranks more easily, since it lacked the PCP's monolithic structure and discipline. In this respect, the lack of an organised Socialist Party base in the factories was a positive

advantage since it could afford to oppose unpopular government measures that PCP members were expected to impose.

The newly-elected constituent assembly was not a supreme body but merely an advisory body to the MFA, which still appointed the President. The subordination of the victors of the elections to the armed forces was to be a source of increasing tension. Within 24 hours there was chanting at a Socialist Party victory demonstration of 'down with the MFA', signifying for the first time open conflict between a major political party and the MFA. Over the next six months the Socialist Party, backed by the USA, the CIA and others, relentlessly pursued the interrelated themes of 'power to those elected', 'democracy', and 'freedom of speech'. Behind the slogans of 'pure democracy' the forces opposed to the revolutionary movement rallied increasingly.

### Popular Power

The election results were a humiliation for many within the MFA. The officers regarded themselves, and certainly not Mario Soares and the Socialist Party, as the 'saviours of the people'. Leftists within the MFA were asking questions such as 'Is the Socialist Party merely a face of the bourgeoisie?' and 'Would the Socialist Party help to perpetuate the Revolution?' As the Socialist Party gained confidence, its differences with the military-dominated government became clearer. The left within the MFA had to find an alternative. It was in these months after the election that *Poder Popular* (popular power) emerged as the ideology for the MFA. *Poder Popular* spanned classes, uniting the military with workers, peasants and tenants.

Popular Power wasn't an empty term of the military. It was becoming a reality. Every day workers were taking over their factories on an unprecedented rate. Unpublished Ministry of Labour statistics from 1976 show that already 280 firms were under self-management - '*autogestão*'. A further 600 went a stage further and assumed ownership, becoming classed as co-operatives. The take-overs were usually of small firms, co-operatives averaging 45 employees and self-managed firms averaging 61. Many had been abandoned by their former owners and would have gone out of business in any programme of capitalist modernisation.<sup>35</sup>

These figures do not reflect the struggle in larger workplaces. Often the most militant enterprises were where the



workers decided not to take over completely. For example the workers' commission at the headquarters of the construction firm Edifer took over the board room (and kept the drinks cabinet as a memento) but decided to retain the management. When asked why they replied "It is better for us to see what they are doing".<sup>36</sup> A militant from the Setenave shipyards put it this way: "Even at Setenave we don't have workers' control. How can we if we don't control the banks? Our attitude is that we want to know everything... We want to control decisions but we do not take responsibility. We don't believe we can have workers' control alone."<sup>37</sup>

The action of workers often forced the nationalisation of the firm or the industry. The first act of the Council of Revolution, after 11 March, was to nationalise the Portuguese-owned banks and insurance companies. After the failure of the March coup, land occupations increased dramatically. The importance of the struggle of the landworkers cannot be over-emphasised and for the first time in living memory the drift from the land by workers was reversed. Over the next six months landworkers in the Alentejo region occupied 200,000 hectares. The workers established agricultural co-operatives, often named after political events and characters. For example the '*Soldado Luis*' co-operative was named after the soldier killed on 11 March at RAL-1 barracks. The most impressive of the changes was the transformation of the traditional peasant women. Often illiterate, dressed in black from head to foot, they did much of the backbreaking labour. Now they not only ensured that they were paid regular wages - at almost the same rate as men - but also played an active part in the management of the co-operative.<sup>38</sup>

These take-overs of the land, of workplaces, and of houses and apartments in the cities, drew into self-organisation many people who would otherwise have been excluded since they did not work in factories. The extreme left, workers, students, housewives, and disabled servicemen were able to play an active part in the residents' commissions. Some commissions gave sixteen-year-olds the right to vote at their meetings. The level of political discussion could be extremely high. As one worker put it to me, these residents' meetings were the 'university of the class'. So-called 'marginal' sectors gained confidence and organised, a notable example being that of ex-servicemen disabled by the wars. Workers went and helped in the countryside, children taught

adults to read, popular clinics and cultural centres flourished. People's tribunals were established. A golf course in the Algarve declared that it was now open to all except the members.

This growing radicalisation affected sections of the army. The MFA found it increasingly difficult to preserve its fragile unity. Discussions in the MFA increasingly oscillated between the claims of discipline and those of *Poder Popular*. There was some talk of refusing to hand over power and talk of benevolent dictatorship. Another idea was that the MFA should become a party. The options that presented themselves made the game of balancing, of making concessions to both sides, more and more risky to play. There was a shuffling of schemes.

One scheme was in favour of Revolutionary Councils of Workers, Soldiers and Sailors - the CRTSMs. These had been conceived first by the PRP but were resuscitated by elements of COPCON, including its commander, Otelo Carvalho. Otelo needed a base, in addition to the army. His idea was to build a national network of these councils. The CRTSMs were superficially very political, claiming to be 'the first soviet of revolutionary Portugal'. But they were anti-party and called for 'a revolutionary government without political parties.' This disdain for party politics fitted with the military tradition of the MFA and its role of reflecting and mediating the different classes.

The very size and confidence of the mass movement created a whole set of attitudes, *apartidaria*, which can mean 'a-party', 'above party', and sometimes even 'anti-party'. We have the paradox of a very political anti-party tendency. The apartidarists even had their own newspaper - *República*. The workers' statement of aims (24 May) declared "*República* will not henceforth belong to any party. All the progressive parties will be given identical treatment, depending only on the importance of events".

Eventually one scheme for popular power seemed to unite the MFA. On 8 July, the General Assembly of the MFA narrowly approved the 'guidelines for the alliance between the people and the MFA', otherwise known as the MFA/POVO pact. Its aim was to set up a parallel authority to the state and parliamentary system. The organisations of *Poder Popular* - the residents' commissions, the soldiers' committees, workers' commissions and other local organisations would be integrated, as popular assemblies, in the form of a pyramid, under the protection of the MFA.

The Pontinha popular assembly was cited as a living example. The Pontinha regiment of engineers had been the command headquarters for the 25 April coup. Most of the soldiers were trained mechanics and workers by background. Their regimental assembly became a model for other units. The soldiers and officers formed direct links with the local population, building roads and bridges with military equipment. After the attempted coup of 11 March, meetings between workers and soldiers became far more organised. The first joint assembly was held just before the MFA/POVO pact, with some 17 factories and 30 local tenants' associations present. At its peak the assembly had some 200 delegates from its constituent associations.

There was much talk of assemblies - *República* mentions at least 38, and many planning meetings for others. Few in fact got off the ground. Usually the more stable were those that in effect assumed the functions of local government. The assemblies were dominated by representatives from residents' commissions, who swamped those from workplaces. In general the weakness of the popular assemblies was that they attempted to bridge classes, between 'the people' who lived in a particular area or between soldiers and officers in a particular regiment, and that they were set up from above as an initiative of the left in the MFA and not from below as a response to the class struggle.

But some forms of 'popular power' posed rather than concealed the question of class power and control. The take-overs in Lisbon by the workers at *República*, owned by prominent Socialist Party member Paul Rego, and at the Catholic *Rádio Renascença* are examples. The *Renascença* broadcasters hung a live microphone in the street so that whenever there was a demonstration passing by, or a deputation outside, there would be a live broadcast of street politics.<sup>39</sup>

The adoption of the MFA/POVO pact together with the continued failure of the government to ensure the return of *República* and *Renascença* (where mass demonstrations forced the MFA to veto a government decision to return the station to the church and to allow the workers to retain control) led to Soares and the Socialist Party resigning from the government. This resignation - on 10 July, the day *República* was re-opened - was closely followed by that of the conservative PPD (*Partido Popular Democrático*) and led to the formation of yet another government;

the Fifth Provisional. This was the first government which did not include the Socialist Party or the PPD.

### Reaction and Resistance

Outside Lisbon the forces of reaction were gaining in strength. Western capitalist governments were insisting more and more urgently that Portugal 'put its house in order'. The retreat from the colonies meant that half a million bitterly disillusioned *retornados* had to be resettled and re-integrated into a population of nine million. Many settled in the centre and the North, already traditionally conservative areas. The North in particular was being left behind by the radical thought that was sweeping through some parts of the country.

Land reform, which limited holdings to 500 hectares, or 50 hectares of irrigated land, scarcely touched those in the North. The overwhelming majority of holdings in the North were extremely small. They belonged to small-holders or were farmed by individual tenants - a very conservative mix. Large parts were still extremely underdeveloped. Some of the remote mountain villages in the Trás os Montes had only recently started using money as a medium of exchange. Peasants still wore leather around their feet instead of shoes. The endless media talk of a new life in Portugal contrasted starkly with the continuing grind of existence in the backward regions.

The failure of agricultural policy played into the hands of reactionary forces, especially the Catholic Church. The Archbishop of Braga equated the communists with Satan: "We are called upon to fight for God or against Him. To draw back would be betrayal. And betrayal would be death!"<sup>40</sup> This same archbishop regularly supplied funds and premises to far right organisations<sup>41</sup> which, in what came to be called 'the Hot Summer of 1975', were directly responsible for burning down 60 offices of the Communist Party and the revolutionary left. (In October 1975, while I was England, I was given a copy of a telexed arms order which included mortars and bazookas. This had been passed on to one of the journalists who worked for *Socialist Worker*. The telex was from Porto, in the North, presumably emanating from the far right. I passed this copy of the telex onto the PRP who gave it to COPCON. For security reasons I never kept a copy).

The political context within which the extreme right felt able to start operating openly was provided, however, by the

Socialist Party, which, in the wake of its resignation from the government, unleashed a virulent anti-communist campaign veiled with democratic rhetoric. Right-wing violence in the provinces increased in its turn the political conflict in the capital. Splits were widening within the MFA Council of Revolution.

The growing isolation of the Communist Party from within the MFA, in the North, and from many rank-and-file militants, presented it with innumerable problems. It was partly to protect its left flank that the party initiated a united front - *Frente Unitaria Popular* (FUP) with six groups of the far left. *O Seculo*, a daily paper influenced by the PCP, produced a special midday edition on Monday, 25 August, to welcome the establishment of the front as a historic occasion. Another enormous demonstration, although with fewer soldiers, was held on 27 August. FUP must have caused some bewilderment among the Communist Party rank and file, whose leader had only recently been stressing the 'battle for production'. Their confusion was quickly resolved. Within 24 hours of the demonstration the PCP withdrew from the front and called for a reconciliation with the Socialist Party and the formation of a coalition government.

The FUP front collapsed and the united front was re-formed on 12 September as FUR - *Frente de Unidade Revolucionaria* - with the remaining groups. FUR was to provide some cover, some unification, for the increasingly beleaguered left. The communist-influenced Fifth Provisional Government, without the Socialist Party and PPD and with many stalwarts of the MFA suspended from the Council of Revolution, resigned on 19 September.

### SUV - Soldiers United Will Win

The confidence of the Socialist Party and strength of reaction in the North led to renewed confidence and arrogance amongst many of the career officers, who were largely outside the 'club' of the MFA but not fascists. The strongest reaction came from a totally unpredicted quarter, a new movement of rank and file soldiers in the North. This emerged there in spite of and because of its being the heartland of reaction.

A few militants ('two or three Trotskyists, one or two PRP, one JOC - militant Catholic, one MES and one UPD') met secretly in a forest. Thus began SUV (*Soldados Unidos Vencerão* - Soldiers United Will Win), the first autonomous rank and file

soldiers' organisation in Portugal. SUV called a demonstration in Porto on 10 September. It was estimated that there were 30,000 workers behind a contingent of 1500 soldiers. Jorge said: "As soldiers weren't allowed to sing in public we started whistling. However by the end everybody ends up singing, singing the Internationale. The number of people on the demonstration grew in front of our very own eyes."<sup>42</sup>

SUV began to reveal to the soldiers the conservatism of their officers, which had been obscured by the prestige of the MFA. "The day after the SUV demonstration was the anniversary of Chile and we wanted to have a minute's silence. The officers said no. We put bullets in our guns - and held our minute's silence."<sup>43</sup>

The soldiers began to make demands concerning the inequalities between them and the officers. They began to agitate for pay increases and free transport. For many soldiers a single trip to see their families cost them almost a month's pay. Within weeks SUV had a national organisation, much to the consternation of both the new Sixth Provisional Government and the MFA's Council of Revolution. On 25 September SUV held a demonstration in Lisbon in support of the Lisbon residents and workers' commissions. The estimated 100,000 present included members of the Communist Party. About 4000 demonstrators requisitioned buses and freed soldiers who had been imprisoned 15 miles away when SUV leaflets were discovered in their lockers.

Eduardo Duarte, a member of MES involved in the organisation of the diversion to free the soldiers recalls: "One of the things I will never forget is when, after we had seized a bus, (in order to go to the prison at Traffaria) and our heads were bursting with revolutionary enthusiasm, amazed by the bravery of our deeds - we were doing things we had never dreamed of - and I looked along the aisle and there were two soldiers with us and they were just sitting there reading their Donald Duck comics."<sup>44</sup>

Those readers of Donald Duck comics illustrate the uneven development of class consciousness. Soldiers and workers participated in what appeared to be 'fundamentally revolutionary' acts and yet their ideas were still immersed in a rag-bag of notions arising from the culture and the system which they were trying to overthrow.

By October SUV lost considerable momentum, especially after being out-manoeuvred in strategic showdowns in two

barracks in the North. SUV never built a coherent 'command' structure. In practice the organisational vacuum was filled by the loose and badly co-ordinated FUR alliance in which the PRP and MES were predominant. But the independent role of the struggle in the army was still of first importance.

### Arms and Talk of Insurrection

The resurgence of the right in the summer of 1975 led to renewed fears of a coup. This was fuelled, in the middle of September, by the emergence of the Sixth Provisional Government in which the Socialist Party and the 'Group of Nine' officers had gained at the expense of the Communist Party. The Group of Nine was a coalition of officers around Melo Antunes. They had all been important members of the MFA from the beginning and included active military commanders. Although they were not themselves of the right, their emergence represented a shift to the right.

Many on the left, including those from outside Portugal, warned that the vicious military coup in Chile two years previously might be repeated in Portugal. Otelo Carvalho, commander of COPCON, commented "what worries me is the possible Chileanisation of Portugal ... they are building machines to kill. Machines for repression. With them they can set off a new Chile. I am haunted by that fear."<sup>45</sup>

As mentioned above, the example of Chile was not in fact as inspiring to big business and the CIA as the left liked to imagine. However the vast majority of the left thought 'that there would be sharp armed clashes between the classes within a few months (at most)'.<sup>46</sup> Socialism or barbarism seemed to be the alternatives. So the revolution had to be protected by every means. The supporters of the popular power process, in particular the PRP/BR, were concentrating their hopes on alignments between left-wing officers, specifically between Otelo and COPCON.

At the time sections of the left were trying to prepare for the forthcoming conflict by obtaining arms. The most dramatic incident took place in September and concerned the redirection of 1500 G3 automatic weapons from the Beirolas armoury. This had been arranged by Captain Fernandes, a PRP sympathiser under the command of Otelo. Otelo was to say that the weapons "were in good hands". (For all its seriousness and pomposity the acquisition rivalled the Keystone cops. An IS comrade from Britain told me how he was one of those asked to drive off the lorry load of arms.

As he could not speak Portuguese he gratefully declined. The eventual driver turned out to be a MRPP supporter, whose paper promptly exposed the 'diversion' of the weapons).

The PRP/BR called for an insurrection to protect the revolution while the ruling groups were in disarray. The revolution had to be protected by every means. They argued that, as in Cuba, working class support would increase after power had been seized. The class would flower as it had done after 25 April and 11 March. Insurrection would be a technical service and the PRP/BR its technicians. The guerrilla tradition of the PRP/BR meant it was prepared to substitute itself (or COPCON) for the class.

I will never forget how, in September, one of the PRP comrades, a Lisnave shipyard worker and a member of its leadership, telephoned from our house in Salford, Lancashire, and asked impatiently, over the international telephone lines "Well, when is the coup?"

One comrade active in Setubal told me how: "There was much discussion about armed insurrection. The *Comité de Luta* was always talking about seizing power but did nothing to make this feasible. There was no practical preparation, no military organisation, no militia. There was no distribution of arms. Some small groups came and asked for arms but never in Setubal. It happened in Almada. An insurrection in Setubal would have required the arms of the barracks, not the PRP. A related weakness was that the problems of the soldiers were not openly discussed in the meetings. The PRP was more interested in discussing these in a more conspiratorial manner."<sup>47</sup>

One of the reasons why there was no mass mobilisation on 25 November 1975 in support of the left and popular power was that the movement did not identify with what were presented as 'left-wing coup adventures'. The move against the left was justified on the grounds that it was the left itself which was preparing a coup.

### The Crisis Intensifies

The Sixth Provisional Government took office on 19 September. This was to be the government until the next round of elections in April 1976. But continuity is not the same as stability. It is very difficult to explain the twists and turns of those times. There were so many actions and reactions. So many things happened in such a short space of time. The government had failed to exert control

over whole sections of society. The mass movement was still strong, with land occupations accelerating towards the end of September. Within little more than a month, more than three times as much land was occupied as had been in the previous year and a half. This was partly because the Ministry of Agriculture had been forced to agree to make state funds available to pay salaries in the co-operatives.<sup>48</sup>

The unresolved struggle over *Rádio Renascença* epitomised the powerlessness of the ruling government and demonstrated how moods and energies shifted quickly. On 29 September Prime Minister Pinheiro de Azevedo ordered COPCON to occupy it. After a demonstration by workers, Otelo Carvalho, in tears, ordered his troops to withdraw. Within six hours the radio was re-occupied by the commandos under Colonel Jaime Neves. An enormous demonstration on the evening of 16 October forced the commandos to withdraw and the radio started transmissions again.

The government was almost powerless. Its only resort was terrorism. On 7 November its saboteurs, under the protective cover of the supposed loyal 'and backward' paratroopers, blew up the station's transmitters. The paras thought they were providing protection and that 'the orders came from the left.' This betrayal so shocked them that they were to revolt within weeks. The 1600 previously loyal paratroopers from Tancos now rebelled against their officers and forced 123 of the 150 officers to walk out. This led up to them demanding to be placed under the overall command of Otelo and COPCON.

The mass movement had involved huge numbers of people and there was still enormous potential support for popular power, but weaknesses were becoming more and more apparent. Political consciousness was inevitably uneven and frequently contradictory. "More than once I'd visit a factory which the workers were running. They would be telling me about the evils of capitalism, how well workers could run things, the need to take state power sooner or later, because of the precariousness of the situation, etc., etc., etc., and then they would readily slide into saying 'and now the most important thing is the battle for production'".<sup>49</sup>

The reformists and the right could not count on the sympathies of such people. But the call for stability was making headway. The forces of law and order could not guarantee law and order. Some workers were demoralised as a result of empty promises. Financial crisis and withdrawal of investment had taken

their toll. How could such a poor country have a socialist revolution and survive? Where was the money to come from? Could more be done within the national boundaries? What about inflation? Workers controlling their own workplaces did not always lead to greater militancy. As Cliff and Peterson wrote: "...workers' control without workers' power has terrible consequences. The fight for workers' control without workers' power tends to become control over the workers by the capitalist system. Without state power the lack of technical and administrative experience further weakened the confidence of workers in their own ability to manage the economy."<sup>50</sup>

The preponderance of left and right military intrigues was particularly numbing. Rumours of impending coups were an endemic feature of political life. In Barreiro, across the Tagus estuary from Lisbon, the *bombeiros* (voluntary firemen) sounded the fire-bells at any sign of a 'putsch' and the population, often woken in the early hours of the morning, rushed into the streets only to discover the alarm was false.

Many workplace and community meetings went on till the early hours of the morning. I remember a worker from the Sacor refinery saying that his workplace meeting finished at 4.00 a.m. and they had to start work again at 6.00 a.m. Some workers, especially those who were not inspired by a revolutionary vision, dropped by the way. Sometimes workers stopped being active themselves and abdicated, leaving decisions to the technicians, the experts and the 'políticos' in the factories, to the Communist Party and the Socialist Party outside the workplaces. The adaptability of these reformist organisations within the working class meant that they could attract tired workers looking for safer solutions.

But at the same time sections were turning to self-organisation as the way of breaking through the impasse. In Lisbon militants in the factories were turning to a network of workers' committees in Lisbon - *Cintura Industrial de Lisboa* (CIL) built up by those on the left within and around the PCP. The inaugural conference was held on 8 November 1975. 124 workers' commissions sent delegates and 400 people attended the meeting. Most of the major workplaces were represented. This meeting launched what was to be a truly gigantic demonstration, (some said of more than half a million), on 16 November against the threat from the right within and beyond the Sixth Provisional Government.

The strength of CIL was that it could co-ordinate a national strategy of resistance. Its weakness was that it did so only in a half-hearted manner and was very much influenced by the tactics of the Communist Party. The revolutionary left had no organised plan for intervening inside the conference.<sup>51</sup>

Only 30 miles to the South the Setubal *Comité de Luta* - Committee of Struggle - showed what could be done. Here the revolutionary left set the pace. The Communist Party was sufficiently flexible (and isolated) to feel it had to be involved. Indeed the *Comité de Luta* is the most impressive example of a workers' council to have emerged in Europe since the workers' councils in Hungary 1956.<sup>52</sup>

It is crucial to stress that the committee was more than a collection of political activists. It was a front united in common activities, despite political differences. It had a life like that of many other *apartidaria* organisations, which affected the ways that the parties intervened.

"Sometimes the slogans of the parties, the PRP included, did not coincide with the discussion. Sometimes the parties even spoke with a language which made people laugh. It was really difficult for a party to control the process, including the PRP. The PRP was in a better position because it always defended the autonomous organisation, and did not mind if the organisation went in directions other than it wished.

"I think that what happened in Setubal was very, very interesting. I learnt a lot. I learnt that people can organise and discuss together even when they have political differences. I remember one political discussion, prior to a demonstration organised by the PCP, MES, UDP, LCI, PRP and MRPP. It was decided that the slogans would be by consensus. They would never be voted on. They would talk until agreement was reached. And they did.

"I remember that the greatest argument was over the UDP proposal of the slogan 'Against all imperialism' and the PCP didn't want this because for them there is only one imperialism, Yankee imperialism, of course. Eventually people settled for some sort of slogan against exterior aggressions. But what was curious was the capacity to agree. Curious because most of the time was spent on arguments like this. Often we would have 2 hours of talk about Russia, about the United States, about China.

"In the *Comité de Luta* lengthy discussion around such items didn't happen. There was very little party political discussion. Even the MRPP was affected. It was very strange because they had a particular way of speaking and writing. When they spoke like this on the *Comité de Luta* all the people laughed. So they never spoke in that way again, they spoke in another way, as if they were humans. They learned how to speak. It was a process in which even the parties learned how to speak."<sup>53</sup>

The building workers provide another illustration that the struggle within the workers' movement was by no means exhausted. Previously construction workers had not as a whole been an active sector in the working class. Many were peasants who had migrated to towns for work, some were blacks from the Cape Verde islands. In mid-October workers from 32 workers' commissions met and formulated a demand for a national wages structure and a single union for the industry. A national strike and march was organised. The climax was the biggest demonstration ever held by one sector of workers, at São Bento, the home of the Constituent Assembly. The workers erected barricades in an area up to 15 blocks away from São Bento itself. The streets, many of them narrow, were blocked with tractors, cement mixers and trucks. Building workers armed themselves with pick-axes, clubs, etc., and held hostage the members of the Constituent Assembly. Prime Minister Azevedo asked the commandos to come and rescue them. They refused. He then requested a helicopter to rescue just a few of them. The military police overheard the request, alerted the building workers and the helicopter was prevented from landing. After 36 hours the Prime Minister conceded all the building workers' demands with effect from 27 November.<sup>54</sup>

The paralysis of formal government was so total that on 20 November it actually declared it was not going to do anything 'political' but would merely act in an administrative capacity until the resolution of the power conflict. The government threatened to set itself up in exile in Porto while the peasants and farmers in the North threatened to cut off food supplies to the 'red commune' of Lisbon.

### 25 November 1975 - The Collapse

By late November it was obvious to all that 'something' had to happen. Events in the army were coming to a head. From October onwards the moderates in the army had been consolidating their

position. Behind the scenes, preparations were now being made for a decisive move against radical sections of the troops.

The Council of Revolution ensured a showdown on the evening of 24 November when it confirmed the appointment of Vasco Lourenço to replace Otelo as commander of the Lisbon military region, which included the paratroopers. The force that stemmed the revolution was one faction of officers, ostensibly socialists. Carlos Fabião, the Chief of Staff of the Army, Soares and others had rejected the idea of an overtly counter-revolutionary coup. A state of emergency had been declared and the anti-revolution operation centre set in motion with its headquarters at the commando barracks at Amadora. In effect the operations centre used only 200 people as its task force, including the highly 'professional' commandos led by the notorious Colonel Jaime Neves, and some officers who had been sacked by their underlings from other units.

The 'moderates' moved into action. They sought to avoid a potentially bloody confrontation and even they must have been surprised at the ease with which they succeeded. They were not sure that the commandos would leave the barracks - let alone fight. Once on the road confidence grew as one by one, all the rebel units collapsed. Three soldiers from the military police were killed. The officer networks 'on the side of the people' failed to act. This collapse led to confusion of the 'Popular Power' forces. Much more than on 12 March, people were confused, and demobilised. For example, just before midnight on 25 November, several hundred working-class people gathered on one of the approach roads leading to the military police barracks. There was a discussion with a bus driver. Should they turn his bus over? It would help to make a good barricade. On the other hand perhaps the military police wanted to take to the roads. Nobody seemed to know. Nothing was done.<sup>55</sup>

The previous day, the Lisbon ferries and many factories had emergency meetings and stoppages lasting two hours in order to discuss the threat from the right.<sup>56</sup> On the 25th "People stopped working - but there was no organised strike. Many did not go to work, others went in, saw nothing was happening so came into town. Some went asking for machine guns in front of the barracks; there were assemblies in factories but no-one knew what to do."<sup>57</sup>

All the revolutionary groupings were taken completely unawares by the speed of the events. None were involved in

instigating a military response. The radical soldiers and their friends on the revolutionary left were isolated.<sup>58</sup> In the preceding weeks the Communist Party had turned left, once again, in order to retain its political support and to buttress its position within the unstable Sixth Provisional Government. On 24 November it called a two-hour general strike against the threat from the right, with limited success. The sergeants of the paratroopers and some of the officers who planned the resistance to the removal of Carvalho were encouraged and influenced by the PCP. But on the afternoon of the 25th the party sharply altered tack.<sup>59</sup>

It used its main agencies, the Intersindical and the *Cintura Industrial de Lisboa*, to do so. Officials and activists in the engineering union offices who were organising overnight occupations and strikes changed their tune at 6 o'clock on the Tuesday evening when the message from headquarters got through. Other unions got the message later. One of the workers at the Ministry of Social Communications recalls witnessing union officials backdating the call for a retreat from 26 to 25 November.<sup>60</sup>

The Portuguese Communist Party was prepared to abandon its radical army supporters (and a great many others) in exchange for a continued stake in government. In real terms the level of physical repression was slight. Some 200 soldiers and officers, plus a handful of building workers, were arrested. Yet 25 November was the turning point. The change was abrupt - similar to the change described by George Orwell in Barcelona in 1936 where the 'startling change in the atmosphere' is something which is 'difficult to conceive unless you actually experience it'.<sup>61</sup> In this way the revolutionary process petered out.

### Reformism

Workers would have resisted and possibly defeated any conservative forces outside the MFA. The popular movement was looking for an external enemy, not one within the MFA, and not on the left of the political spectrum. It is true that the disarray of the ruling class could lead it to take desperate measures like the abortive coup attempts of September 1974 and March 1975. The fear of a repressive coup was further fuelled by the activities of the right in the summer of 1975. This stress on the overthrow of fascism, and counter-revolution, blurred the distinction between fascism and capitalism, resulting in an underestimation of the

capacity of capitalism to modernise and reform, using the tools of social democracy.

The military origins of the overthrow of the Portuguese regime meant that the mass movement relied heavily upon sections of the armed forces. In Portugal the traditional military stance of disliking political parties took on a new dimension when officers, soldiers and sailors started to build an extra-parliamentary mass movement in opposition to the emerging bourgeois parties and the so-called 'workers' parties'. Many felt there was no need for political parties. Workers, residents and radicals within the military would defend the revolution by themselves. Always being at the service of the movement and not siding with parties meant that it was difficult to comment on or even discern the variety of views and weaknesses which existed. At *República*, for example, when there was a difference in the workers' movement, the paper would refrain from issuing an editorial which took sides.

The military wanted short cuts which bypassed the main parties. Often the left saw the military as its own short cut. It did not build by learning from its own mistakes and experiences but operated in the shadow of the left officers' flirtation with popular power. The interplay between the workers' movement and army was obsessive. The focus was on the military, rather than on the working class. Neither the officers 'on the side of the people' nor the left groups called for strikes, occupations or barricades. A strike and occupation by a powerful group of workers such as Lisnave could have given a lead to waverers in the armed forces and to other sections of workers. The downside of the left's interest in the military was neglect of the class struggle itself. This is illustrated by its differing strategies towards the unions and industrial struggles. Strikes, actual and potential, were neglected.

Although sections were exhausted the movement was still enormous and it was by no means spent. The resistance by groups of building workers gives some indication how the working class could have exerted its not inconsiderable forces. These workers, using walkie-talkies, commandeered enormous earth-movers and concrete-mixers in order to block the advance of the commandos. In Setubal they contacted the *Comité de Luta* and asked them to set up blockades around the city. The committee set up a clandestine radio which operated for a few days. The town hall had been occupied. I remember well the feeling of frustration among activists. Several years later I tape recorded an interview

Isabel Guerra. She said "we tried to contact all the organisations including the unions and cultural organisations. We called a rally outside the barracks. All the time we were connected with the principal barracks in Lisbon and other cities. The problem of 25th of November was that neither the unions nor the CTs controlled by the PCP were interested in what was going on - they said so - they did not mobilise. Many people were influenced by them. In the regiment the soldiers took arms from a captain and controlled the situation as long as they could. After a certain time they couldn't do so any longer..."

"What 25th of November did show was that the Committee of Struggle could function in time of crisis. But the problem was much more complex. Even today I would like to know what actually happened then. What was clear even then was that the PCP did sabotage the movement. We called the *sindicatos* and they said 'No, nothing is going on'. In the big enterprises, like Setenave, the CT which was PCP controlled, said 'No we haven't heard anything, everything is all right.'"<sup>62</sup>

Gramsci insisted that the working class cannot be prepared mechanically for the struggle, like an army. Its discipline depends upon consciousness which in turn grows in relation to practical experience of struggle. A trust, a bond needs to be built from the experience of struggle. In this respect, despite massive haemorrhaging of militants, the Communist Party had still had some credit. Many of those who left the Party did so because they felt the need to relate to the day to day struggles, the need to build from below. There were many militants, members of revolutionary groups, and independent revolutionaries, who did learn how to relate immediate issues to a perspective of workers' power, but this process was far from consolidated.

The left dismissed reformism as another mask of capitalism but under-estimated its ability to attract and absorb sections of the working class. Militants had not been schooled in the fight against reformists on the day-to-day issues, in the workplaces, the unions and through the ballot boxes. The movement was still young, people were picking and choosing their options. Communist Party militants in the workplaces could still support the workers' commissions when their party did not. Others would have supported the PCP in workplace struggles and voted for the Socialist Party in the elections for the Provisional National Assembly. In reality, if there is such a thing as a 'typical'



pattern of consciousness, that pattern is deeply uneven and contradictory. Because conflict is experienced as uneven, discontinuous and partial, its organisational expressions normally reflect this. Reformist organisations can capture some contradictory patterns of consciousness and struggle.

The behaviour of both the Socialist Party and the Communist Party was necessarily different in some respects from the general pattern of behaviour of similar parties in Western Europe. Despite using a similar vocabulary of 'democracy and socialism', there was a sharp distinction between the two parties. Unlike the Socialist Party and its communist counterparts in Europe, the PCP was not preoccupied with the parliamentary road to socialism. It sought to consolidate its power, making maximum use of its connections within the armed forces and the existing state structure. Had it been sufficiently confident of its popular support, it may even have been prepared to organise a coup d'état like the one in Prague in 1948. That had been a classic instance, one of which Alvaro Cunhal was very aware, of a communist party coming to power after a period of coalition government.

Reformist politicians posed as the champions of the interests of the workers. In September 1975 Soares explained to *The Times* (23/9/75) that his programme "was not meant to correct the most unjust aspects of capitalism but to destroy capitalism". Many workers lacked the experience and judgement to prove otherwise. The 'brilliant' achievements of the struggle did not mean that Portuguese workers had by-passed reformism or were permanently immune from it.

The Socialist Party attracted millions of ordinary people by appealing to socialism, freedom, personal liberty, votes, a parliamentary system and orderly management by the state of the economy. Furthermore the Socialist Party was strongly against the involvement of the military in politics. Having allowed elections, a number of the leading MFA individuals advocated their boycott, as did the PRP/BR. This failed hopelessly. In retrospect, it is hardly surprising so many people turned to the Socialist Party after 48 years without democracy.

### Comparisons

I have tried not to refer to the Portuguese Revolution as such, preferring the phrase revolutionary process. Some have, misleadingly in my view, called the overthrow of the regime in

1974 a revolution. That overthrow may be comparable to February 1917 in Russia - power changed hands and some modification of structures and institutions took place. My main focus has been the after-birth, perhaps comparable to the days between February and October in Russia in 1917, except that in Portugal the revolutionary process lasted three times longer. It was a revolutionary situation, a moment of social crisis, a historic turning point when the population faced a real fork in the path of development. Such situations are always unstable; one of the remarkable features of the Portuguese situation was that length of instability.

Kenneth Maxwell argues convincingly that this ferment was central to the transition to democracy - "the strength flows from the fact that it was a democracy born of struggle". Indeed, the relatively peaceful resolution of the agonising forces faced by the Portuguese in 1975 contributed to the development of Portuguese democracy. Maxwell suggests "the Portuguese upheaval was more like the European revolutions of the 1820s and 1848 than the great revolutions of 1789 in France or 1917 in Russia."<sup>63</sup> But this is not to suggest, and Maxwell does not, that the movement for change was superficial.

The events of 1848 prompted Marx and Engels to write the *Communist Manifesto*, trumpeting the need for a communist party. And at the time in Portugal many argued that what was missing was 'a workers' revolutionary party'. Actually there was a proliferation of *gruposculos* which aspired to become such parties or proclaimed themselves as the party. The lack of a reformist tradition in Portugal allowed the left to flourish.

The organisations clearly identified with Marxist traditions. But they were young and unschooled. Some became embroiled in the intrigues of the military or their own intrigue to instigate another coup - their view was that there was a need to seize power in order to protect and consolidate the revolutionary process (c.f. October 1917 in Russia). Actually these intrigues were seized upon and exaggerated by others. The Communist Party decried the excesses of the ultra-left. Elements of the MFA used this as their excuse to instigate the November clampdown.

Typically in revolutionary periods, when faced with particular issues requiring practical solutions, workplace organisations have co-ordinated their struggles by establishing higher-level bodies of elected delegates.<sup>64</sup> Democratic workplace

organisations have developed in almost all revolutionary situations in this century. They emerged, as *soviets*, in Russia in 1905 and 1917. They were evident in Germany in 1919, 1920 and 1923, Turin in 1920, Canton in 1925, Barcelona in 1936, Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

In the seventies the *cordones* emerged in Chile and the *shoras* in Iran. The Polish inter-factory strike committees and *Solidarno* itself were also example of this type of movement.

And in Portugal there were very many instances of workers' committees coming together, not only with other workers' committees, but with residents' organisations, with land workers, and, especially, with members of the armed forces. The revolutionary left had some considerable influence upon the ideas and types of organisations which emerged. But organisational forms and structure were not that secure, in the main due to the re-birth of a parliamentary tradition, which, while appropriating the language of revolutionaries, promised reforms and democracy.<sup>65</sup>

This leaves an unanswered question. What would have happened if the workers' movement had been able to reverse 25 November and consolidate its hold? Imagine that the network of popular assemblies had been transformed into an alternative power. At the time, Western capitalism was extremely worried by what was happening in Portugal. A workers' council movement in Portugal could have had a far-reaching effects. The Spanish regime was still fascist and looked as if it might collapse. The conservative figures put out by the Spanish government showed that 1196 industrial disputes were registered there in 1974, involving 669,861 workers.<sup>66</sup>

Troops in other European countries were becoming restless. In Italy more than a thousand soldiers, wearing uniforms and handkerchief masks, took part in a demonstration in support of Portuguese workers and soldiers. Many argue that the Portuguese experience could not have sparked off an international revolution. With hindsight such a conflagration now appears improbable. However it has to be remembered that events in Portugal did not occur in isolation. They occurred because Portugal could not continue to exist in isolation!

France in May 1968 was a dazzling affair, unexpected, creative and accompanied by a massive strike wave. Yet, in comparison with Portugal, the process was not sustained, few

factories were taken over and the revolts did not spread into the barracks. President De Gaulle managed to emerge from hiding, and re-establish his authority.

Chile is still well remembered but for different reasons. It is remembered for the violent repression, and the return of authoritarian rule. The notion that there was a revolutionary 'threat' has been preserved, albeit in a distorted form, by those who set out to destroy it. One reason the outcome of Chile 1973 was rather different to that of Portugal was in part because the very strength of the popular movement Portugal. This was something that Henry Kissinger and his allies were was not prepared to take head on.

The fact remains that during those 18 months hundreds of thousands of workers took over their workplaces, the land and houses, tens of thousands of soldiers rebelled. Nobody predicted that from a tiny political cadre so many would try quickly to learn and put into practice the ideas that explode from those who are exploited when they try to take control of their own destiny. Portugal 1974-75 was not an illusion. It was an extraordinary period, one that still needs to be studied and celebrated.

## Further Reading

Barker, Birchall, Gonzalez, Poya and Robinson, *Revolutionary Rehearsals* (Bookmarks, London, 1979)

Nancy Bermeo, *The Revolution within the Revolution: Workers Control in Rural Portugal*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1986)

Charles Downes, *Revolution at the Grass Roots: Community Organisations in the Portuguese Revolution*, (Albany, 1990)

John Hammond, *Building Popular Power: Workers' and Neighbourhood Movements in the Portuguese Revolution*, (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1988)

Sunday Times Insight Team, *Portugal: The Year of the Captains* (Sunday Times, London, 1975).

Phil Mailer, *Portugal - The Impossible Revolution?* (Solidarity, London, 1977)

Kenneth Maxwell, *The Making of Portuguese Democracy*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995).

Douglas Porch, *The Portuguese Armed Forces and the Revolution* (Croom Helm, London, 1977)

Peter Robinson, *Workers' Councils in Portugal 1974-1975* (unpublished M.Phil. thesis, Centre for Sociology & Social University, Open University, 1989).

## Notes

- 1 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings 1910-20*, ed. Q. Hoare, (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1977) p. 261.
- 2 A most graphic contemporary account was by Phil Mailer, *Portugal - The Impossible Revolution?* (Solidarity, London, 1977). Mailer is a libertarian who argues on principle against all parties and trade unions.
- 3 My terms of reference were threefold:- (i) To write reports and articles (e.g. *Socialist Worker* and *International Socialism*) (ii) To liaise between the International Socialists and the revolutionary left in Portugal - in particular the PRP-BR and MES. (My 'duties' ranged from acting as a 'revolutionary tourist agent', to preparing and selling pamphlets in Portuguese) (iii) to co-ordinate between workers' organisations in both countries. (This was done under the aegis of the 'Rank and File Organising Committee').
- 4 I would like to thank all these people. And also Bill Lomax and John Woollacott, for the all the help and encouragement over a number of years.
- 5 One of the chapters in *Revolutionary Rehearsals*, ed. Colin Barker, (Bookmarks, London, 1979) was on Portugal, written by myself. Much of the material in this paper is derived from that chapter. Eventually I completed an M.Phil. thesis with the Open University, on *Workers' Councils in Portugal 1974-1975*.
- 6 Ronald H. Chilcote, *The Portuguese Revolution of 25 April 1974* (Coimbra, 1987).
- 7 Refer to Maria de Lurdes, Lima dos Santos, et al., *O 25 de Abril e as lutas sociais nas empresas; Greve e o 25 Abril*, (BASE). Further details are summarised in the Vignola dossier, pages 369-70. This dossier was compiled by Gerry Vignola who was working alongside Bill Lomax on a research project funded by the Ford Foundation. The dossier comprises more than three hundred typed pages of notes and translations. The numbering has been added by this writer.
- 8 Interview with Agostinho Roseta, 3/5/84. Roseta was a student leader in the late 1960s and then worked for as a functionary of the Textile Union. He was also a *miliciano* (conscript officer) in 1974-75. He participated in 25 April and 28 September. He was expelled from the army after 25 November 1975. He was also a member of MES.

- 9 Kenneth Maxwell, *The Making of Portuguese Democracy*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995), p. 24.
- 10 The most readable account of the coup of 25 April 1974 is *Portugal: The Year of the Captains* (Sunday Times Insight Team, 1975).
- 11 *Ibid.* p. 120.
- 12 Interview with Agostinho Roseta, 3/5/84.
- 13 Details are provided in Maria de Lurdes, Lima dos Santos, et al., *O 25 de Abril e as lutas sociais nas empresas*.
- 14 Details from Tom Gallagher, *Portugal - a Twentieth Century Interpretation*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1983) p. 172.
- 15 Richard Robinson, *Contemporary Portugal*, (George Allen & Unwin, London, 1979) pp. 136 & 146.
- 16 Insight, *op. cit.*, p. 152.
- 17 Interview with Fernanda, 30/4/84. Fernanda asked that her surname not be quoted in the interviews.
- 18 Figueiredo, *op. cit.*, p. 238.
- 19 Interview with Agostinho Roseta, 3/5/84.
- 20 Reprinted in *Combate* No. 7, 27 September 1974.
- 21 Published in the first issue of *Causa Operario*, a Marxist-Leninist paper, September 1974.
- 22 Full text of the Lisnave workers' manifesto is in Mailer, *op. cit.*, pp. 313-14.
- 23 Refer to *Libération* and also *Capital*, 6/2/75.
- 24 Interview with Artur Palacio, 2/8/82. Artur Palacio was a veteran militant who worked at Lisnave for many years. He first became involved with the Communist Party in his teens, in the early 1950s. At the time of 25 April he was a militant in one of the Marxist-Leninist sects which later was to help to found the UDP and was very involved in the very first *Inter-Empresas* meetings.
- 25 The article from the French weekly *Libération* was republished in 'Portugal a Blaze of Freedom' by *Big Flame*, June 1975.
- 26 Despite the support from Lisnave on the demonstration of 7 February, the support from that shipyard was by no means unanimous. *Diario Popular* (6/2/75) reported: "The workers of Lisnave, meeting in general assembly in the Margueira yards, published a communiqué against the demo and refused to allow their CT to form part of the *Inter-Empresas* commission."

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27 Joanna Rollo, 'One Year After the Coup', *International Socialism Journal*, No. 77, April 1975, p. 16.

28 A report of this conference was published as *Conferencia Nacional Unitaria de Trabalhadores - Conclusões*.

29 Lisnave workers in round table discussion; including Artur Palacio and Fernando Figueira, 2/8/82.

30 Interview with Jorge, 13/8/80. He joined the PRP after 11 March, having attended the first CRTSMs conference. In August and September 1975 he was based in the North in the RTM (regional transport barracks) and was very active in SUV. He subsequently, after 25 November, became a full time organiser for the PRP.

31 From *Revolução*, the paper of the PRP, No. 15, 4/10/74.

32 Interview with Saldanha Sanches, 4/4/84.

33 This was not to say that the CIA abstained. A CIA defector (Philip Agee) had done a study on 'the company's' connection in Portugal and was eager to tell people in Portugal about these connections. I was in the middle of helping organise a meeting, with delegates from all the barracks in Portugal when it had to be abandoned because of the events of 25 November. At times I was accused of being a CIA agent (a not uncommon allegation) and subsequently I found a letter, dated 1977, addressed from the PRP to all other political groups on the left, specifically warning them about my CIA involvement!

34 Ian Birchall develops a similar analysis of the Socialist Party in 'Social Democracy and the Portuguese Revolution', *International Socialism*, Second Series, No. 6, Autumn 1979.

35 The returns to a Ministry of Labour questionnaire provided the following reasons for transformation in Lisbon: bankruptcy 75%, abandonment 44.3%, fraud 9.6%, contract violation 15.4%, managerial incompetence 11.5% and unlawful firing 11.5 %. Taken from Bermeo's essay on 'Workers' Management in Industry', Graham & Wheeler *In Search of Modern Portugal- the Revolution and its Consequences*, (Wisconsin Press, London, 1983).

36 Interview with Edifer worker, December 1975.

37 Quoted in article by Cliff and Peterson, 'Portugal: the last 3 months' *International Socialism*, No. 87, March 1976. Robin Peterson was a pseudonym of the present author.

38 Conversations; I worked there for a few days in April 1976.

39 Denis Macshane, *New Statesman*, 18/7/75.

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40 Richard Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

41 Günter Wallraff, *The Undesirable Journalist*, (Pluto Press, London, 1978), pp. 13-14.

42 Interview with Jorge, 13/8/80.

43 Interview with Jorge, 13/8/80.

44 Eduardo Duarte was a student leader and an active member of MES. He was interviewed in December 1989.

45 Jean Pierre Faye, *Portugal: The Revolution in the Labyrinth*, (Spokesman Books, Nottingham, 1976), pp. 49-50.

46 The quote comes from Chris Harman, 'Portugal the latest Phase' in *International Socialism*, No. 83, November 1975.

47 Interview with one of the most prominent activists in Setubal *Comité de Luta*, Isabel Guerra, 4/6/84.

48 Lomax, 'Ideology and Illusion in the Revolution', in Graham & Wheeler, *op. cit.*, p 120.

49 Annie Nehmad in a letter to this writer, March 1986.

50 Cliff and Peterson, article 'Portugal: the last 3 months' in *International Socialism*. March 1976, No. 87. This article quotes from several interviews with workers about the problem of workers' control in their own workplaces.

51 I am convinced it was not impossible for the left to work alongside with those in the CIL. One example comes from personal experience. With the backing of *Cintura Industrial de Lisboa* and Intersindical we from the British Rank and File organisation organised a delegate conference on the theme of 'Health and Safety in the Workplace'. 200 workers attended and the conference was addressed by speakers from the British Trade Union movement. I organised the translation of a directory of toxic chemicals which was published by the Intersindical.

52 See my forthcoming article in *Socialist History* on Workers' Councils in Portugal.

53 Interview with Isabel Guerra, 4/6/84.

54 Refer to the marvellous eye witness account by Ben Pimlott, in the magazine *Labour Leader*, February 1976.

55 Personal recollections.

56 SWP & IS writings have claimed 90% of the workers in Lisbon area had stoppages on 24 November. This was a gross exaggeration. I attended a meeting addressed by a delegate from the Ralis barracks in the canteen at Plessey's. My feeling is that at most 20% of the workforce stopped work to listen.

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57 Interview with Mauricio Levy, December 1975. In 1975 Mauricio was stationed at the Epam Barracks. On 11 March he had been one of the people responsible for the take-over of the state radio service, and using this to broadcast news about the coup attempt. He worked, in addition for the Fifth Division, where he was involved in administration and attended, in this capacity, all the MFA meetings. He left the Army shortly before 25 November 1975 and became the international organiser for MES, when I first got to know him.

58 Incidentally, by the first week of December, a few of us were selling on the streets of Lisbon, the pamphlet *The Lessons of the 25th November* produced by the British IS, which had been translated from English.

59 The first issue of *República* following 25 November contains similar examples.

60 Interview with Jorge Freire, 26/12/75. I knew Jorge from 1975 when he helped me at the Ministry of Social Communications, where he worked.

61 George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, (Penguin, London, 1962), p. 110.

62 Interview with Isabel Guerra, 4/6/84.

63 Kenneth Maxwell, *The Making of Portuguese Democracy*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995), p. 1

64 I would suggest that the extent and depth of a workers' councils movement is an important indicator, indeed the most fundamental, of the profundity of a revolutionary process.

65 Thus the *Inter-Empresas* were limited geographically to the Lisbon industrial belt and in effect disappeared after the 7 February demonstration. The CRTSMs never really got off the ground, they were an idea of the PRP's which coincided with those of Otelo Carvalho. The popular assemblies were too incoherent. And the Setubal Committee of Struggle, while sometimes brilliant, was isolated from any national network.

66 Figure cited by Tony Cliff, 'Portugal at the Crossroads', *International Socialism*, July/August 1975, p. 48.