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## The old fights of Lisbon's new left

Portugal's left-wing politicians cut their teeth as militants against the Salazar regime.

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Published: *Politico website 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2015* <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-old-fights-of-lisbons-new-left-last-maoist-guerilla-fighter-rui-manuel-despiney/>

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LISBON — Here lies Portugal's last Maoist guerrilla fighter. I sit at the foot of the unmade bed where he is resting, medical supplies strewn about, in a working class apartment of the port city of Setúbal, near Lisbon.

He alternately breathes into an oxygen respirator and inhales smoke from the coarse cigarettes his doctors told him to forsake.

His limbs are scrawny, his grey skin hangs limply off his bones. At a glance, he weighs no more than 50 kilograms.

As a sociology student in 1966, he was rounded up on the Lisbon University campus, brutally interrogated, beaten up, tortured, convicted and imprisoned for nine years in Peniche prison. His name is Rui Manuel D'Espiney. We are the same age: 72.

This is the first time I meet him in person. I reported on his imprisonment and torture in '66, and after my story appeared in newspapers abroad, hundreds of students demonstrated on the Lisbon University campus for more democracy and less repression. D'Espiney became an underground celebrity, not least of all for the Maoist style suit, sewn by his family that he wore to trial.

I decided to track him down after [I declassified my 50-year-old file](#) from the sinister PIDE political police of Antonio de Oliveira Salazar's dictatorial regime (1933-1974) a few months ago.

D'Espiney has admitted to his participation in the murder of an alleged PIDE political police infiltrator. He also set off bombs targeting officials of the dictatorship. But he did not "disappear."

Today, his old political allies and the heirs to the violent Marxist, Trotskyist and Maoist guerrillas of the 1960s and 70s hold sway over the stability of a possible Left wing coalition in Lisbon, and the return of a Communist faction to a European government.

**As a Lisbon-based foreign correspondent for the** Associated Press in 1965, I reported on D'Espiney's imprisonment and subsequent injuries, as well as the murder and disappearance of countless other regime opponents. I was heavily censored, threatened with expulsion, and blackmailed. I found all of this documented in my PIDE file No 4287 ci (2) NT 7338, kept in Torre do Tombo archive, on the Lisbon university campus, to which I was recently granted access.

My dispatches on D'Espiney and other clandestines and student opponents were widely printed in international media at the time. The government enforced strict censorship on newspapers, TV, literature and even theater critical of the regime, and the Portuguese had to track down foreign newspapers or mimeographed underground reports to read about these incidents.

Those articles acted like a shield, D'Espiney told me. He is convinced they prevented his jailers from killing him on the spot.

"From the moment my name appeared in the foreign press, they [PIDE] didn't dare finish me off," D'Espiney told me. "I noticed right away because they started to worry about how I looked and they would use ointment to try to erase scars and bruises ... It made me realize that the phase when they planned to kill me had come to an end."

He was later convicted of murder and condemned to 19 years in jail.

The day before he was freed — when "[Carnation Revolution](#)" swept out Salazar's regime in April 1974 — his daughter died of cancer in exile in London. He hadn't seen her since his arrest. His father broke the news as he emerged, eyes blinking into the sunlight, from Peniche prison.

**Besides D’Espiney, who began teaching and** worked with migrants and the Roma population, many Left Bloc Socialists and Communists members have personal histories of clandestinity and exile from their days of resistance against the Salazar regime. Some of them have now entered Parliament, where, following the October 4 elections, the arithmetic gave a potential center-left coalition a working majority with a total of 122 seats, out of 230.

Domicilia Costa, 69, is a former member of the Communist party underground who ran “safe houses” for Communist clandestines in the 1960s, as well as underground presses to stimulate resistance among agricultural workers. Her father was a Communist and worked as a carpenter, before he left for Paris and joined the opposition to the Portuguese dictatorship. Costa quit the Communist party in 1991, joined left-wing bloc ([BE](#)) and was, astoundingly, elected to the current Parliament with over 100,000 votes.

Elected on the BE ticket, [Mariana](#), an economist, and Joana, an international relations graduate, are the daughters of Camilo Mortágua, now 81 and formerly one of the masterminds of the world’s first cruise ship hijack. In 1959, with a commando of 24 men, Mortágua helped [capture](#) the Santa Maria and its 350 crew members and 650 passengers in South America. Members of the same group later hijacked a Portuguese airliner in 1961 to rain anti-Salazar pamphlets over the districts of Setúbal, Barreiro, Beja and Faro. The Mortagua sisters were educated abroad by their father, and cite him as their mentor.

Professor Alexandre Quintanilha, recently elected as an independent on the Socialist list, left Portugal’s colony of Mozambique as a child during the dictatorship. His father, a one-time member of an anarchist labor party, was stripped of his post as director of a state Botanical Laboratory in Portugal and forced to retire at the age of 43. Alexandre went on to study in Mozambique, South Africa and the United States, eventually teaching at the University of California in Berkeley.

And the list goes on. The father of Prime-Minister-in-waiting [António Costa](#), who is currently negotiating with the possible left-wing coalition, was a Communist and persecuted during the Salazar regime. João Soares, elected on the Socialist list, is the son of [Mário Soares](#), the historic Socialist prime minister and ex-president who was twice exiled in detention by the Salazar government.

After studying the initial results of the parliamentary elections, President Aníbal Cavaco Silva first invited outgoing prime minister and center-right leader Pedro Passos Coelho to form a government. “In 40 years of democracy, Portuguese governments have never been dependent on anti-European and anti-NATO political forces,” the President said. “This is the worst moment to radically alter the foundations of our democratic regime.”

But Passos Coelho was beaten in Parliament, with 123 votes against him and 107 in favor. Cavaco is expected to offer Socialist Costa a chance to form a coalition instead. Alternately, Cavaco could maintain Passos Coelho in a caretaker capacity or swear in a technical government.

“We, the Communists and the left-wing in general, shared exile, imprisonment and clandestinity,” [Manuel Alegre](#), a elderly Socialist statesman who lived in exile in Algiers and France, and returned home after 1974, told me. “We see this ‘convergence’ [a euphemism for the left-wing coalition] as something closer to the the Roosevelt New Deal.”

Alegre, a renowned poet often mentioned as a possible literature Nobel Prize, dismisses Cavaco’s fears that the country would turn Communist or stray from Europe under a left-wing coalition.

“You shouldn’t forget that the Portuguese Socialists brought Portugal into Europe and reaffirmed Portugal’s membership in NATO. These pillars are not and will not be in question in any of the negotiations,” he added.

Their proposed plan — including an increase in minimum wages, better health care and education, the gradual restoration of public sector salary cuts, a halt to privatization and incentives for small and medium size companies — would challenge the EU imposed austerity program that pulled Portugal out of recession and brought modest economic growth.

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**So the embers of the conflict between Portugal's** left and right still glow beneath the ashes. Resentment still simmers from the days, now 40 years ago, when the left was in disarray in the post-revolution government, in a coalition of former exiles, clandestines, militants and progressives.

Four decades ago, when Portugal returned to democracy, a fractious alliance of leftist parties and politicized army cadres tried to guide the country through agrarian reform and mass nationalizations of key sectors of the economy.

The alliance fell apart when Socialist leader Soares challenged the Communists in 1975 and stopped the process, in a months long battle of demonstrations and debates which finally led to the first constitutional government of modern day Portugal in 1976.

“The inheritance of the Salazar era continues to bedevil the political scene in Portugal: the protagonists, their children and even their grandchildren,” Irene Pimentel, a historian and author of a comprehensive study of the PIDE political police, said. “It constantly intrudes into the political discussions 40 or 50 years later.”

D’Espiney does acknowledge his past militancy, though “the most which I said to PIDE is that I was a guerilla,” he told me. He went on to work with agricultural cooperatives and social activist groups after his release from prison. Many of his co-workers were not aware of his past.

This week, doctors told his colleagues to visit his bedside to pay their final respects.

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