

Portugal 1974-5: The Carnation Revolution



Portugal's revolution began on 25 April 1974, set in motion by a military coup against the country's nearly-50-year-old fascist regime. It was effectively ended by another coup on 25 November 1975. Portugal started 1974 as a backward, isolated colonial power run by an authoritarian regime, and began 1976 as a state without colonies, on its way to becoming a stable bourgeois democracy, integrated into European capitalism. Mark Osborn tells the story.

SALAZAR

Portugal's unstable democracy was overthrown in 1926 and a period of right-wing military rule began. In 1928 a law professor, Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, was appointed Finance Minister. By 1932 Salazar had become Prime Minister and, consolidating his power, in 1933 he declared the *Estado Novo* (New State) — a corporatism modelled on Mussolini's rule in Italy. Trade unions were banned as were political parties, other than Salazar's own National Union.

Salazar declared: "We do not ask for much. An understanding and consciousness of the Fatherland and of national unity; of the family, the primary social unit; of authority and obedience to authority; ... of the obligation to labour; of virtue and of the sacred nature of religion.

"We are opposed to all internationalism, opposed to Communism, to Socialism... we are opposed to all that disintegrates, divides or dissolves the family; we are opposed to the class struggle. We are against those who have no country and no God."

The labour movement operated underground: the syndicalist CGT, run by Portuguese anarchists, FARP, the Socialist-led Portuguese Worker Federation, and the small Inter-Sindical Commission led by the Communist Party. The penalty for striking was imprisonment and, after 1936, jailing in the Tarrafal concentration camp on one of the Cape Verde islands.

All media and civic activity was monitored by the political police (after 1945 known as PIDE), modelled on the Gestapo. Between 1948 and 1958 the number of political prosecutions varied between 700 and 2000 per year. But many did not get to court; PIDE was responsible for the extensive use of torture. The notorious treatment of political prisoners in Portugal led directly to the formation of Amnesty International, in 1961, following an article in *The Observer*. Two students, apparently jailed for drinking a toast to "freedom", led to an international campaign for political amnesty.

Salazar was a nationalist and Catholic traditionalist and he disliked the social and anti-religious aspects of Nazism. He repressed the authentically fascist National Syndicalist Blue Shirt movement, led by his friend, Rolao Prieto, banning them in June 1934. The National Syndicalists had been founded in 1932, and by 1934 they claimed 50,000 members, including several hundred army officers, and published eighteen newspapers. Prieto was exiled and the less militant wing was folded into the ruling National Union.

The Carnation Revolution

Once in control Salazar set up organisations that were similar to fascist organisations — the Mocidade (youth movement, compulsory for boys over ten), the Portuguese Legion (a militia recruited by political qualification) — but they were created by the state, from above, in 1936, rather than being mechanisms that brought Salazar to power.

The regime lurched rightwards as the Spanish Civil war began. Salazar backed Franco with troops and naval forces. At the end of the war the government announced that 18,000 Portuguese had volunteered in the pro-Franco special force, the Viriatos, with 8000 casualties. Large numbers of republican refugees were driven back into Spain and killed.

In 1940 Salazar signed an agreement with the Vatican allowing the church exclusive control over religious education in public schools. Divorce, which had been legalised under the Republic (1910-26), was made illegal for those who had married in church.

In World War 2 Salazar's personal sympathy was with the Axis powers, and some Portuguese soldiers fought in Franco's Blue Division, for Hitler, on the Russian front. But Salazar felt constrained by the vulnerability of the Portuguese colonies to Allied military action. After it had become clear Germany would lose, in 1943, Salazar tilted towards Britain and the US — which did not prevent him calling a half-day of mourning after Hitler's death.

Inside Portugal Salazar's rule did not go uncontested. There was a general strike and an attempt at an insurrection against the banning of unions on 18 January 1934. There were strike waves in 1942-4. In summer of 1943 50,000 workers struck in Lisbon and other industrial centres. Textile and ship building strikes took place in 1946 and 47. A mass strike of agricultural workers in the south won the eight hour day in 1962.

MILITARY

There were a series of military oppositions and coup attempts in the 1930s, and a naval mutiny in 1936 attempted to divert ships to help the Spanish Republic. There was a major plot inside the army in 1943 and an NCO rebellion in 1946. The coup of 1974 stood in a tradition of reformist military opposition to the regime.

Some superficial aspects of liberal democracy were retained by the regime, including periodic elections, on a narrow franchise, for President. Censorship was lifted for thirty days before the election allowing the opponents of the regime to get a public profile. Again, it was military figures who often stood for the opposition. The most serious challenge was in 1958, by General Humberto Delgado. Delgado was eventually murdered by PIDE agents in Spain.

The Communist Party was subjected to serious repression and was reorganised in 1941 under Alvaro Cunhal. At this point it began work in the army and developed a cell structure to protect its militants. Under Cunhal it was to be a hard-line pro-Moscow party, with Maoist splinters thrown off in the mid-60s.

Portugal's colonies in Africa and Asia were twenty-two times the size of Portugal itself and almost as big in land area as western Europe. Salazar was adamant they would remain in Portuguese hands for ever.

In the 1950s the Indian government demanded Portugal cede control of Goa and two other small enclaves on India's

west coast. Salazar refused, and in December 1961 30,000 Indian troops invaded, crushing token Portuguese resistance.

In the spring of 1961 anti-colonial riots began in Angola. Fully-formed guerrilla wars started in Angola (1961), Guinea-Bissau (1962) and Mozambique (1964). Up to 200,000 troops, from a Portuguese population of only 9.5 million, were stationed abroad to fight the rebels, and soon 40% of the total budget was being spent on funding these colonial wars. 9000 Portuguese troops died and 25,000 were injured as the dictatorship tried to stop the colonies going free, despite widespread international condemnation. From the start many in the officer corps thought the colonial wars were unwinnable, and opposed them.

The regime was ambivalent about industrialisation. One former minister of commerce denounced industrial development zones as, "destroying family life, weakening morality, a breeding ground for strikes and other subversion." Apparently on being told that oil had been discovered in Angola Salazar replied, "How awful."

Some regime figures even openly gloried in illiteracy, for similar reasons. In 1930 70% were illiterate. In 1932 Salazar declared, "I consider the creation of elites more important than the necessity to teach people how to read."

50% of the country's workforce was concentrated in agriculture which was highly inefficient, yielding only 25% of National Income. The percentage involved in industry only marginally increased from 1920 to 1940.

The regime rested on backwardness, and on the families of oligarchs whose economic interests were rooted in large monopolies, banks and latifundia, often with interests in the colonies. During the 1960s the economy grew, in part as a consequence of the colonial wars; many more women were drawn into waged work. By 1973 there were 42 000 companies, a third of which employed under ten people; half the total capital was controlled by 200 companies.

LOWEST

By 1960 the rate of infant mortality was the highest in Europe (89 deaths per 1000); TB deaths were the highest in Europe; per capita income was the lowest in Europe (\$162 per annum, compared with Turkey, \$219, and the US, \$1453).

From 1965 to 1974 1.2 million Portuguese emigrated, many to work in French or West German industry; others went to Brazil and the US. Many emigrated to avoid conscription.

In August 1968 Salazar had a stroke and he was incapacitated until his death in 1970. Marcello Caetano took over from Salazar in September 1968. Despite promises of liberalisation little changed, and the colonial wars ground on.

In June 1973 the government brought together large numbers of junior and middle-ranking officers at Porto. This Congress of Combatants was intended to rally support for an increased war effort. Some of the officers disagreed with the motions they were supposed to vote for, but were forbidden to amend the texts. In response 400 signed a document saying motions that were passed were invalid.

The Armed Forces Movement began to organise in September 1973, at first to defend privileges of the professional officers against those who had been drafted into the army. However, it morphed, rapidly.

Originally known as the Movement of Captains, the MFA was made up of low-rank officers, often in their 30s, many of whom had been conscripted into the army as it expanded to fight the colonial wars. Often these junior officers had been at university in the early 60s at a time when the Portuguese students were beginning to take radical mass action. Their network spanned the entire Portuguese empire and its main aim became ending the colonial wars in the only way possible — by bringing down the regime.

In October 1973 there were parliamentary elections which, as normal, were rigged. A number of those who became active in the MFA supported the legal opposition front, CDE, including Major Melo Antunes, who was a candidate, and who went on to write most of the MFA programme.

The programme, for a post-coup government, proposed dissolving the ruling party, the secret police (except in the colonies where it would be purged and reorganised) and the Portuguese Legion. The programme advocated the abolition of censorship, an amnesty for all political prisoners, freedom of opinion and association, including trade union freedom.

The original draft contained the idea of independence for the colonies, although this was then fudged to allow the MFA to work with the first head of the new government, General Antonio de Spínola. The MFA believed they needed a more senior officer to head the government. Spínola was not in favour of colonial independence, but a new federation of Por-

tugal with its colonial possessions.

The colonial question was the key question for the MFA and the key disagreement at governmental level in the first phase of the revolution.

In the last six months of the dictatorship one hundred thousand workers had taken strike action.

In early 1974 Caetano moved against senior officers who had become publicly critical of the regime's colonial wars. Coup plots — from both left and right — were uncovered and stopped.

Following a military plan made by Otelo Carvalho troops loyal to the Captains' Movement/MFA took over key points in cities across the country early on 25 April. In Lisbon tank crews refused orders to fire on the rebels and in the Tagus, off the Lisbon coast, junior officers on the Almirante Gago Coutinho refused orders to fire their guns at Lisbon.

The regime collapsed. 48 years of dictatorship had crumbled within hours, largely peacefully (only the secret police fired from their headquarters, killing five). Despite warnings to stay at home, enormous numbers headed for the streets, fraternising with the soldiers. The people flooded into the flower market and made the symbol of the movement the red carnation.

Caetano was exiled, ending his days in Brazil. Power was handed to General Spínola by the MFA. Spínola set up a first provisional government, dominated by figures from the old regime but including the Socialist Party leader Mario Soares as Foreign Minister, and Alvaro Cunhal, the Communist leader. The MFA's seven-man Junta of National Salvation (JSN) was also part of the government.

The army leadership was purged (saneamento), and 24 top generals were fired. The secret police, regime militias and the ruling party were all disbanded. The 24,000 militarised police of the GNR and the PSP riot police accepted the junta's rule and were not disbanded. The state remained intact and Spínola was officially proclaimed President in mid-May.

On the night following the coup large numbers went to the notorious Caxias prison, fifteen miles west of Lisbon. The political prisoners inside knew of the coup because relatives had used car horns to tap out Morse code messages. The army arrived and all 77 prisoners were freed. Among those released were Palma Inacio, who had led a series of robberies and spectacular armed actions against the regime. Public pressure ensured an amnesty law for political crimes and censorship was officially abolished.

POLICE

The PIDE (by now renamed DGS, but commonly referred to by its old name) headquarters on António Maria Cardoso Street finally surrendered and the torturers and secret police joined Portuguese Legion members in Caxias jail.

However there were still 20 000 PIDE members at large. Through May and June some of the better known regime supporters were driven out of workplaces. On 2 June 500 Catholics met in Porto and declared the church should be purged, too — demanding the resignation of all the bishops in Portugal.

On 1 May 600,000 from a total population of one million took to the streets of Lisbon. Soares — returned from exile in France — spoke in the renamed 1 May Stadium with Alvaro Cunhal. What started as an anti-fascist military coup, which put in power a former fascist general, Spínola, who had fought for Franco during the Spanish civil war, had already gone far beyond what the coup leaders had envisaged.

The Socialists demanded an end to the colonial wars, a purge of fascists and democratic rights; the Communists simply demanded what the government had already promised. The CP was tailing the MFA, attempting to build their influence inside it. Outside the 1 May stadium all sorts of meetings and demonstrations took place: Trotskyist, Maoist; and in amongst them a sailors' band was marching.

The only group of workers on strike on the coup day itself were the 2000 metal workers at the Mague works. They were demanding a minimum wage of 6000 escudos (£100) per month. The management — not wanting to become a focus for the new movement — immediately settled the dispute, only to be denounced by the new government as setting an example which should not be followed.

Despite what the state wanted, in the next few weeks the first wave of strikes began. 4000 workers at a tourist complex in Troia struck; 1600 miners demanded a minimum wage; fishermen stopped work for their company. And occupations began: at Timex, 20km from Lisbon; at Firestone tyre factories across the country; and 8400 workers occupied at Lisnave, the giant shipyard south of Lisbon. The demands were gen-

Antonio de Oliveira Salazar



The Carnation Revolution



erally for better pay and a purge of PIDE informers. Importantly, the Lisnave workers had gone round their Communist union officials and elected a 50-person workers' committee to run their action.

On 21 May 20000 metal workers marched in Lisbon demanding better pay. Oil tanker workers took action; 5000 Carris transport workers stopped their busses. A golf club was occupied in the South and the workers declared it was open to everyone but the golf club's members.

At Timex, occupied for a month, workers expelled management and ran the factory themselves, demanding a 40-hour working week and selling the watches they made. Similar actions happened elsewhere and began to underline some of the problems of self-management under capitalism: at a French-owned textiles factory the workers decided not to sell the valuable stock because of the threat to close by the French owners; the workers were sure they could run the factory themselves and sell the suits they made, but needed access to markets abroad and capital.

The Timex strike was broken by the army, who moved in to protect the bosses' property. The army was also prepared to move against the postal workers. On 25 June 35,000 postal workers went on strike, for a pay rise to 6000 escudos a month (the government offered 4300). The Communist Party attacked the workers as irresponsible, and the CP-led union federation, Intersindical, refused support.

STRIKE

Again the workers had elected their own national strike committee that had gone round the CP-led union; the strikers also demanded "a strong and democratic trade union".

In Porto the CP organised a demonstration against the strike and their Lisbon leadership denounced the strike because it opposed the provisional government and benefited "fascism and reaction." The army had plans to take over the postal facilities, and jailed two cadets who refused orders which amounted to strikebreaking.

Faced with the threat of the army, the 260-strong strike committee called off the strike and settled for a small pay rise.

A minimum wage was brought in, but was only applicable to workplaces with more than six workers. Some small bosses sacked workers to bring the number below six.

And as the working class began to rise, it took all the oppressed with it. The Women's Movement marched. The "Movement of Revolutionary Homosexuals (Gays)" produced a manifesto. The prostitutes organised and declared their support for the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), denounced pimps and "Puritan pressures"; they declared that for the next year "all ranks below lieutenant would only be charged half price."

The occupants of the shanty-towns started to occupy the

large empty houses of the Lisbon middle class (although foreigners, especially the British in the Algarve, were reassured by the army that they would not be troubled by occupations.)

University students in Lisbon and Coimbra set up revolutionary student committees, and very many school students held regular mass meetings, led by "committees of struggle". School libraries were purged of fascist books. Students demanded right-wing teachers, or those suspected of informing for the PIDE, be removed. Attendance registers were abolished and pass marks were reduced to allow more students to get through their end-of-year exams. Books by Marx and Lenin went to the top of bestseller lists, with competition from American sex manuals.

The Communist Party's close alignment with the MFA was dictated by their goal of a CP government, in power through its control of the army, state machinery, unions, councils, media and economy. It meant the CP sided with the army's attacks on strikers. This party — despite its influence in the working class and despite its bravery under fascism — should not have been considered a left wing party at all. And much of the so-called "far left" were not genuinely left either; the Maoists were very visible on the streets but had little implantation in the working class, and their goal was Chinese-style totalitarianism.

The biggest Maoist group, the MRPP, denounced the CP as the main danger. It allied with the Socialist Party and even with the bourgeois right wing. (José Manuel Barroso, now European Commission president was a member).

The First Provisional Government cracked under the strain, in particular over colonial policy. The right, led by Spínola, was not willing to unconditionally relinquish control of the colonies. Following the collapse of the First Provisional Government the second was set up on 17 July with the CP frontman, Colonel Vasco Gonçalves, as Prime Minister. There were seven military in the government and eight civilians, including Soares and Cunhal. As the government attacked the working class, the right began to organise for a show-down.

In the summer of 1974 there were 400 industrial disputes including at the biggest enterprises in Portugal. Workers at the airline, TAP, had a history of militancy, even under the dictatorship. Three maintenance workers had been machine-gunned to death by the police during a dispute in 1973. A general workers' meeting (plenário) in Lisbon demanded a purge of fascists, in particular of the people responsible for calling the police the previous year. And the maintenance workers demanded a 40-hour week, and started to only work 40 hours; the CP denounced them as "disrupting unity." The banks and Boeing refused credit to TAP, which was very vulnerable to this sort of pressure.

Then the maintenance workers, denounced by the CP cell in TAP, struck, electing a strike committee from a plenário.

The CP Minister of Labour turned up and told the workers the army had surrounded the airport; and the CP cell called the strike a "provocation".

In response 4000 workers held a general assembly on 28 August, in defiance of a new set of anti-strike laws. A group of MFA officers walked into the meeting to loud applause. Then, in absolute silence, they announced the workers were being placed under military discipline. An old CP militant, ashamedly, then moved a motion that the strike be called off — to violent opposition. The military threatened to move in the army (Copcon, the Continental Operations Command) and — given the balance of forces (armoured cars, soldiers) — the workers agreed to return, but to "work to rule".

Copcon played a very significant role in the Portuguese events of 1974-5. It was a force set up by the MFA in July 1974 incorporating the units most loyal to the MFA, under the leadership of Otelo Carvalho. "Otelo", as he became known, was superficially ultra-left — and feted by the far left — but in fact he was bound up with the military establishment. Otelo Carvalho's Copcon had an increasingly radical reputation; but it also broke strikes.

The TAP workers fought on through September with Lisbon airport occupied by troops who were forbidden to talk to the workers. The workers' actions brought them in to conflict with the existing unions, inherited from the state-union fronts of the old regime. The army arrested several workers and there was a mass sacking of 200. The workers struck and walked out. Following a failed right wing coup attempt on 28 September the occupation was ended and 40-hour week gradually introduced with most workers getting their jobs back on condition that they abandon political activity.

The government attempted to stop the workers' self-activity with legislation. A law to ban political strikes, solidarity action and occupations, strikes in the armed forces, and strikes without 30-days notice was passed on 27 August. The law had been drafted with SP and CP help. In early August a new censorship board had been created by Spínola which had the power to fine and suspend publications. The MRPP's *Luta Popular* was suspended for "concrete ideological aggression."

The Lisnave ship workers also came — quite deliberately — into conflict with the anti-union laws. They had demanded the purge of various PIDE agents, and had been ignored. So on 12 September 1974, in defiance of the law, they marched: 6000 workers in boiler suits and hard hats, marching in tight formation behind banners that read, "Death to PIDE, Death to Fascism. Down with Capitalism!"

Otelo Carvalho, the left face of the MFA, sent Copcon troops to stop them. The workers faced the soldiers down, saying if the troops wanted to stop them they would have to open fire, and continued. The CP cell in Lisnave condemned the march as "adventurism" and claimed it represented "hostility to the government and disrespect for the democratic order. The consequence will be to provoke reaction."

SPINOLA

The right-wing coup attempt of 28 September was organised by Spínola and his supporters. He called for a march of the "silent majority", in Lisbon, in opposition to "extremist totalitarianism."

The left demanded the march — suspected to be a cover for a coup attempt — be banned, and mobilised against it. The left called people into the streets; Radio Renascença invited workers to picnics on the main roads. Barricades were set up including on the roads leading to Lisbon; SP and CP organisers and members joined the movement. Army units were on the move, although those on the streets were not sure what they were doing. It turned out some right-wingers were being rounded up by units loyal to the MFA. On the evening of 27 September 30 MFA leaders had met at the Cova da Moura military headquarters and made plans for the arrest of 78 prominent reactionaries.

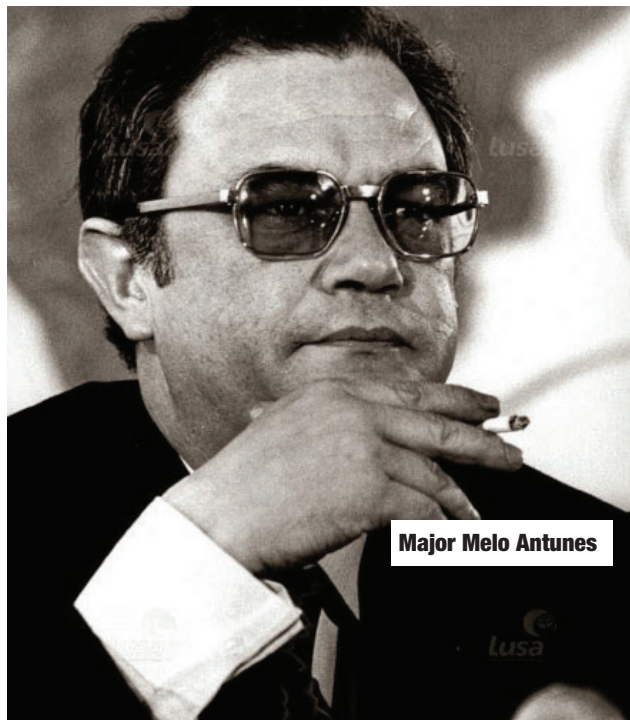
However, speaking on radio for the MFA, Spínola's right-hand man, Major Sanches Osario, declared the demonstration was going ahead and demanded the barricades be taken down. All morning the crowds protesting against the march increased in size. Eventually, at 1pm Spínola read a communique calling the march off. Two hours later 40,000 workers demonstrated in a massive victory parade. The right in the army, and in the country as a whole, had been defeated.

On Monday a haggard-looking Spínola went on television and resigned saying he "could no longer face the climate of anarchy where everyone made their own laws." He was replaced by General Costa Gomes, another figure, with a long history of work for the old dictatorship. A Third Provisional

The Carnation Revolution

TIMELINE

- 1974, 25 April:** coup by “Armed Forces Movement” (MFA) of rebellious officers overthrows the neo-fascist regime in power since 1926. The conservative General Spinoła appointed president
- 18 July:** Conservative “First Provisional Government” in office since April replaced by a Second Provisional Government headed by Vasco Goncalves (close to the Communist Party [CP])
- 28 September:** Spinoła attempts a coup, arresting Vasco Goncalves and others. Forced to resign; replaced as President by Costa Gomes, a milder conservative. Third Government formed (Goncalves again)
- 1975, January:** Government legislates for a single trade union centre (a policy favoured by the CP, which reckons to dominate it, and opposed by the SP and many of the revolutionary left)
- 1975, 11 March:** another coup attempt by Spinoła fails. He flees to Brazil (then under military dictatorship). A period of great ferment opens: nationalisations, land reforms, strikes, workers’ commissions, neighbourhood commissions
- 25 April:** Socialist Party and Communist Party get more than 50% in election for Constituent Assembly. Fourth Provisional Government formed (Goncalves again)
- 11 July:** SP resigns from Fourth Government.
- July-August:** Right-wingers attack trade-union and CP offices in the north
- 7 August:** Melo Antunes, main pro-SP figure in the MFA, and others, publish a social-democratic manifesto (“Document of the Nine”)
- 8 August:** Fifth Government formed (Goncalves again; no ministers with declared party allegiance, but CP-influenced)
- 25 August:** United Revolutionary Front
- 19 September:** Sixth Government, headed by MFA conservative Azevedo and with pro-SP and pro-PPD (liberal) majority
- 25 November:** coup by Eanes (MFA conservative). Sixth Government remains in power, but radicalised army units disbanded and officers jailed. Ferment subsides.
- 1976, 27 June:** Eanes elected president.



Government was formed, which was to last until the next attempt at a right-wing coup, on 11 March 1975.

A struggle between the CP and SP over control of the trade unions threatened the new government’s unity. The Socialists, without much implantation, were scared of total CP control — and they were right, the Communists were aiming to have monolithic control. The CP wanted the law to specify a single union federation, Intersindical, run by them.

Eventually, on 20 January after marches and counter marches, the CP got their way, but their domination was not uncontested. At workplace level a large number of committees had now been elected from plenaries. And in January 1975 a Federation of Workers’ Committees, Inter-Empresas, was founded, linking the committees at 24 of the largest enterprises.

NATO troops were due to land in Lisbon on 7 February for military exercises. Inter-Empresas called a march against NATO’s presence, and against rising unemployment. The Communist Party denounced the march and got a section of Intersindical to put out a statement saying the protest was, “yet another attempt to create confusion amongst the workers.” 40,000 workers marched behind a banner reading, “Redundancies are the inevitable consequence of the capitalist system. The workers must destroy this system and build a new world.”

Soldiers of the Light Artillery Regiment (RAL-1) had been told the protest was by the right, and similar in aim to the “silent majority” coup attempt. As the demonstration approached the men from RAL-1, the marchers chanted, “The soldiers are sons of the people!” The troops joined in, raising their fists to salute the protesters. Outside the Ministry of Labour, abandoned by its CP Minister, a worker from Efacec-Inel read out a manifesto, “The demands of the factories are increasing and the workers are beginning to relegate their union organisations into second place. The Workers’ Committees came into existence as a means chosen to further the class struggle.”

NATO troops were refused permission to land in uniform, and most of the soldiers spent a week on board ships off the coast.

Major Melo Antunes, a thoughtful, highly-political member of the MFA leadership, had a mildly social democratic economic plan agreed by the government. The bosses’ federation, CIP, backed the plan. The most radical section dealt with the expropriation of uncultivated land in private ownership. In fact, in many parts of the country, especially in the south, in Alentejo, where the Communists had a base and which had traditionally been radical, the agricultural workers had already occupied some of the big estates.

On 11 March, an oddly ill-prepared and badly-executed right-wing coup attempt flopped. Spinoła-supporting officers used a small number of planes and helicopters. They bombed the headquarters of RAL-1, and narrowly avoiding a massacre, killed a military driver.

Paratroopers sent by the right went to take over the RAL-1 barracks and were quickly faced with a unit prepared to fight and a crowd shouting, “The people are not with you!” The Paras realised they had been tricked, and the whole unit

went over to RAL-1.

The coup-plotters had expected support across the army but only the paratroopers and National Republican Guard (gendarmes under military discipline) had backed them. Thousands of workers left their factories and flooded the streets, putting up barricades. Armed workers searched cars at their checkpoints, and for three days the workers and the left controlled the streets.

At the funeral of the RAL-1 soldier who had been killed during the coup attempt hundreds of thousands of workers and soldiers marched. The RAL-1 declared, “Comrades, the soldiers are sons of the people. The soldiers and all the anti-fascist military know how to turn their guns against the bourgeoisie and against the fascist officers, and line up on the side of the people.”

On 28 November the workers had been desperate. Now they were euphoric.

On the evening of 11 March the MFA had met, and for the first time included sergeants and privates. One consequence of the coup was to solidify the MFA, which was now determined to stay in power, itself, rather than hand over control to elected politicians.

The army — acting under CP pressure and against the social democratic right in the MFA — immediately nationalised all the banks and insurance companies and again purged the armed forces. In mid-April electricity, oil and transport were nationalised. The nationalisations of 1975 left 80 companies fully state owned and another 140 with state participation. 90% of banking, most of energy, transport and communications became state owned. Land reform covered one million hectares, and 40,000 workers.

Spinoła fled, eventually to exile in Brazil. A right wing party, the Christian Democrats, was banned (as were the Maoist parties, MRPP and AOC).

ON THE LAND

Land ownership differed greatly: in the north peasants tended to rent land and work very small plots; in the centre and south enormous estates existed.

Everywhere agricultural production was inefficient, but the conditions of life led to very different political responses in different regions. In Evora, in the centre, 90% of the agricultural workers were wage earners. In Viana in the north, only 27% were wage workers.

The Fourth Provisional Government, in place after 11 March, changed the land laws to stipulate landowners had to give 18 years notice (previously it had been one year) to peasants. But that also reinforced the idea of land ownership.

Many of the land occupations took place in the south and centre, in Alentejo, and Ribatejo. The most noticeable fact was that the land was never broken up; land was to be worked collectively and owned by the village. In the north, however, the structure on the land and domination by the Church created a social base for the right.

The election was set for the anniversary of the coup, 25 April 1975. 12 parties had registered for the ballot. On the right of the spectrum were CDS, a Tory-type party, and the Popular Democrats (PPD), a mainstream Liberal-Social Democratic party. The Socialist Party (PS), founded in 1973 in exile, was led by the personally popular Mario Soares. Soares had been a CP member as a student; he had been repeatedly arrested for opposition activity, and as a lawyer represented Humberto Delgado’s family after Delgado was killed by the secret police.

The CP had only a weak organisation at the moment the dictatorship fell, with four functioning District Committees. Most of its leadership was in exile or jail. In April 1974 the CP had two or three thousand members. That rose to 14,000 in July, 30,000 in October and 100,000 in May 1975. At its first congress held under conditions of legality, on 20 October 1974, 52% of the 1000 Communist Party conference delegates were workers; 13% were women; nearly half were under 30.

The Socialist Party had 36,000 members in December 1974, and 80,000 a year later. The PPD had 11,000 in December 1974 and 21,000 a year later.

The main Trotskyist group was the orthodox, USec-affiliated, Internationalist Communist League (LCI). The LCI had some influence among school students and, later, in the rank-and-file soldiers movement, SUV.

The MFA, in contradiction to their original manifesto which promised a civilian-run democracy, attempted to turn the elections for the Constituent Assembly into an opinion poll. They put an ultimatum to the parties to sign a document giving MFA committees effective control of future governments for five years.

The Carnation Revolution

The CP signed immediately, the SP and PPD — unsure of their strength — signed under protest. An MFA leader then declared that allowing the formation of political parties had been “an error” which was impeding their work; the MFA declared that those dissatisfied with the political parties should leave their ballot blank, and that these blank votes would be taken as support for a MFA regime.

The Socialist Party, and parties to its right, often avoided rallies and meetings — they were alarmed by the possibility of far left violence against them.

However the election was a disaster for the Communist Party and the MFA, which had overestimated their strength. The Socialists won 38%, PPD 26%, CP 12.5%, CDS 8%, on a massive 92% turnout.

Polls had shown that the main concern of the electorate was the rising cost of living, provision of a national health service and proper pension scheme. The Socialist Party campaigned on these issues and emerged as the only real national party. The CP did well in the industrial belt around Lisbon, in Setubal, another industrial centre to the south of Lisbon, and the agricultural region of Alentejo where they had a base among agricultural workers. Together the PPD and CDS had a majority in the backward north, the Azores and Madeira. But the SP polled at least 20% in every region; Lisbon (46%) and Porto, the second biggest city, voted heavily for the SP. The CP took only 6% in Porto.

One million votes came from outside the country, overwhelmingly for the Socialist Party.

The biggest vote for the so-called far left was 0.8% (and one seat) for the Popular Democratic Union (UDP). The UDP, a regroupment of various Maoists, advocated a two-stage Stalinist revolution (democracy first, then a Stalinist state), a popular front, and a “government of national independence”.

The Socialist victory immediately put the government under strain. The MFA and CP had deliberately sought to concentrate all levers of power in their own hands. And Prime Minister and CP mouthpiece Vasco Goncalves declared, “The election will not decisively influence the revolutionary process.” In other words the military and CP would do their best to ignore the results. A few days later, on May Day, at a mass rally in Lisbon, the CP attempted to keep the Socialist Party out of the stadium. Socialist Party members forced their way in, chanting, “The people have voted, the Socialists have won!” and interrupting Vasco Goncalves’ speech. Soldiers eventually removed Soares from the stadium.

The CP also controlled many of the newspapers, and an MFA officer had control over television. On 9 July the MFA decided — contrary to its original manifesto — to institute a “revolutionary state”, devolving power to committees (while, in fact, keeping the central power for itself, as in Cuba, on which the plan was vaguely based); the Communist Party was ecstatic.

On 10 July the SP walked out of the government and Soares called on his members to mobilise against the threat of Eastern European-style dictatorship. 8000 members of left parties, led by soldiers of RAL-1, marched in Lisbon calling for the abolition of the Constituent Assembly, in an illustration of how ridiculous a section of the far “left” was, now effectively advocating a “benign” military dictatorship.

On 18 and 19 July the SP rallied in Porto and then Lisbon. In Porto 3000 SP members armed with clubs made sure that a Communist counter march could not stop them. Soares spoke to 75 000 supporters in Porto.

THE THEORETICAL PROBLEM FOR THE LEFT

Most of the far left believed that the Portuguese CP was a left wing party, a reformist socialist party. In the general confrontation between the Socialists and Communists, the left believed the CP should be backed as more left wing.

The CP did want more nationalisations than the SP, but that is no measure — in and of itself — of how left wing a party is. In fact the CP wanted nationalisations because it aimed to control the economy through control of the state.

The CP should be assessed according to the class struggle and its goals. The hard-line Stalinist CP was fighting for a CP/MFA government with a monopoly of power in every area of life. In the day-to-day struggles it defended the government against the working class.

The SP never joined in the sort of overt, anti-strike agitation the CP engaged in. The SP was right that despite its election victory the CP’s aim — and that of its supporters in the military — was to sideline it. Of course its leaders bent opportunistically to the mass movement, and faked. However, the SP was a mass Socialist Democratic party with a programme

far to the left of the current European Social Democratic parties.

The self-proclaimed Marxist groups to the CP’s left — the Maoists, guerrillaists, etc — were more militant than the CP against capitalism and the state. But militancy, in itself, is not a measure of Marxism. Other than (in its own weird way) the CP-phobic MRPP and some smaller groups, they made themselves satellites of the CP and military leftism. No trust, confidence or political support could have been given to any of the political strands which emerged in the MFA, part of the bourgeois state. And the far left failed here, too, expecting to be saved and defended by left army units.

At this point a confrontation over the control of the Socialist-owned newspaper *Republica* took place. It was to become an internationally-known symbol of the struggle between the CP and SP inside Portugal.

The *Republica* workers occupied aiming to turn the publication into a non-party paper which reported on working class struggles, but Copcon moved in and shut the paper at the management’s request. The paper reopened a month later, as a left-wing independent paper run by the workers (who were not CPers).

The SP blamed the CP, unjustly, for denying it the right to publish its views. And the SP used the issue to scandalise the Communists. And they were not wrong, overall, that the CP and its supporters in the MFA were intent of denying it power and were aiming for a CP/MFA monopoly.

Radio *Renascenca* had been the station which had given the signal to start the 25 April coup. When, in 1975, the workers at the church-owned radio occupied and began to run it themselves, in support of workers’ struggles, they received widespread support. The workers’ statement of 6 June includes, “The management says we are trying to silence the Church’s mouthpiece... If by that they mean we are trying to silence fascist voices, they are right.”

However Vasco Goncalves decided to hand back the radio station to the church. On 18 June 100 000 workers marched to back the workers’ committee at Radio *Renascenca*. The Lisnave and TAP workers said the station would only be returned to the Church “over our dead bodies”. The MFA’s Revolutionary Council found a way out by nationalising newspapers, radio and television networks.

THE FIFTH GOVERNMENT

The SP left the government, followed soon, on 16 July, by the PPD. The Fourth Provisional Government collapsed and the Fifth was formed.

The SP marched with 20,000 people demanding the resignation of Vasco Goncalves. Soares then became alarmed that the SP was fuelling a right-wing counter revolution and, tacking-back, stated, “We must not forget that without the MFA there would have been no 25 April,” adding that the Socialists were not a new “silent majority”.

Also on 16 July three tanks and armed soldiers joined a march by the federation of shanty town neighbourhood committees. This was the first time soldiers had participated in a popular demonstration in this way. The people chanted, “Workers of field and factory, soldiers and sailors, united we shall win.” The soldiers declared “The RAL-1 soldiers have come to support your struggle.” Marchers climbed on the tanks and continued through Lisbon.

The Fifth Provisional Government, again headed by Goncalves, was constituted on 8 August, but lasted only twenty-two days. The Fifth Provisional Government represented a superficial victory for the CP and the “left”.

On 19 July the Socialist Party was prevented from holding demonstration in Lisbon against the CP-led government. Soares claimed, “What divides us is not Marx or the construction of a classless society... What divides us is Stalin, the totalitarian concept of the state, the all-powerful single party.”

In the north, the Bishop of Braganca called a march attended by ten thousand Catholics who heard Mass, shouting, “Down with Otelol! Otelol to Mozambique!” On 11 June a grenade exploded in PCP offices in Fafe, near Porto. CP offices were destroyed in Agueda and Esmoriz. In July and August there were dozens of bomb attacks on left party offices in the north.

Of course the army remained a bourgeois army and the bulk of officers, although largely unorganised, were right wing. The MFA began to differentiate sharply on political lines: a Social Democratic group of “moderates”; a pro-CP group led by Goncalves; a group influenced by Cuban Stalinism around Otelol Carvalho, whose powerbase was in Copcon.

In early August a document was circulated from the moderate wing of the MFA, the Document of the Nine. It stated

that the nationalisations had gone too far and that the state was not functioning. The Nine argued that a totalitarian form of “socialism” should be rejected. In practice they were advocating normalisation, bourgeois democracy and social democracy.

The printing of money had led to an inflation rate of over 50%

At the end of August the Army’s Fifth Division — a propaganda unit — was closed down, which was a blow at the CP. Three days later the MFA replaced Goncalves as Prime Minister. By mid-September the military regions were all in the hands of the Group of Nine.

The Fifth Government resigned on the 9 September. The Sixth took office ten days later, under Admiral Pinheiro de Azevedo, a member of Spinola’s original government, and further consisted of four Socialist Party members, two PPD, one CP; the military seats went to supporters of the Nine. The CP had suffered major defeats and now made a “left” turn towards the rank and file organisations to try to press for its members to be reintegrated into the MFA and state.

THE HOT SUMMER

In June 1975 the first popular assembly met at the headquarters of the engineers’ regiment involved 50 neighbourhood committees and 25 workers’ committees.

Hundreds of workplaces were now under workers’ self-management — mainly as a defensive measure because they had not been paid, or the managers had walked out. Some self-managed enterprises received loans from the state.

During the summer, in the south and centre, the mass movement was growing and rapidly developing; the right was resurgent in the north. A strike wave on 2-5 July hit the telecommunications and airlines. Chemical workers struck in the north; Hotel workers struck. By now Inter-Empresa had split several ways, the victim of faction fighting. However, now various attempts took place to re-found federations of workers’ committees. Popular assemblies were held in various areas with delegates from housing, workers’ and soldiers’ committees attending.

In early September a small number of activists from far left groups set up a rank-and-file soldiers’ organisation, Soldiers United Will Win (SUV). SUV demonstrated in Lisbon on 11 September and held a much bigger demonstration on 26 September, when up to 120,000 marched, ending up outside a military prison where two soldiers had been locked up for distributing SUV leaflets.

Unit by unit the fight was fought out: right wing officers conspired and attempted to discipline and purge SUV soldiers; the soldiers stopped parades, demonstrated and held political meetings which challenged and disrupted normal military functioning. RASP, an artillery regiment near Porto brought civilians into the barracks and held a week-long political festival.

Aluta estimated that 20,000 guns were now in civilian hands; *O Seculo Ilustrado* put the number at twice that. One MFA officer handed over 1500 G3 automatic rifles to revolutionary left groups. Maoist groups fought gun battles in Lis-



Mario Soares

The Carnation Revolution



bon.

Military discipline was fragmenting. Copcon army units increasingly filled in for the GNR police force — intervening in domestic disputes; and, apparently, in one case, rescuing a cat.

Seeing its power slipping away, and increasingly isolated, on 25 August the Communist Party concluded an unusual political agreement with the far left. The MDP (close to the CP), the MES (Guevarists), the PRP, LUAR (guerrillaist-Third Worldists), the Maoist 1st of May group, and the orthodox-Trotskyist LCI signed up to a document that included political support for the Fifth Provisional Government.

Motivated by opportunism (that the CP would carry them towards power and working class influence), and political disorientation (that the CP was left wing) the revolutionaries backed a bourgeois military-Stalinist government. By signing, the far left made themselves official satellites of the Communist Party, which was turning back towards the mass movement with the intention of using its influence there to recapture and shore up its power in the MFA and state.

The pact broke down the very next day when a demonstration the Front had called ended in a squabble and a shambles. The CP left the alliance. But the FUR continued, opposing the Socialist Party and seeing it as a cover for the far right, and seeing the CP as preferable.

What was required was a bringing together of the various workers' committees — centrally, those rooted in the workplaces — and the creation of armed workers' militias responsible to the committees. If such a force could have been created, it would have been the basis for winning over rank and file soldiers' organisations, and the better officers, to the side of the revolutionary working-class movement. Such a body might then have been the basis for a rising, and a work-

ers' government.

A revolutionary socialist organisation with such a perspective would have fought for working class unity around a programme to extend the democratic rights, independent self-organisation and material gains of the workers' movement.

That would have depended on a clear understanding of the role of the military structure. Instead, illusions in the "left" of the MFA and CP continued; the myth of a long-term stable MFA-Povo (MFA-People) alliance persisted.

Following the 25 April coup many Portuguese units in the colonies had withdrawn to barracks, even when ordered to continue fighting. Some local commanders even struck local ceasefire agreements.

Guinea-Bissau, with a relatively small proportion of white settlers, and a liberation movement, PAIGC, that had already effectively beaten 150,000 Portuguese troops, became independent on 10 September 1974.

On 6 September 1974 an agreement with FRELIMO had been signed in Lusaka. Two days later reactionary white settlers took Mozambique's capital, Lourenco Marques. The rebellion was ended on 12 September by joint action by Portuguese armed forces and FRELIMO. Finally, in June 1975, after a period of provisional government, Mozambique won independence. Cape Verde became independent in July 1975.

Finally Angola became independent on 10 November 1975 (formally ratified in February 1976). The independence agreement had been signed with the MPLA, FNLA and UNITA, but quickly broke down as the contending parties fought each other for power. In both Angola and Mozambique serious resistance to independence came from white settlers. And both countries suffered decades of civil war, partly fu-

elled by the poisonous intervention of apartheid South Africa.

Portugal had scuttled and run. But from the armed forces' point of view their main issue with the old regime — the long running, morale-sapping colonial wars — had now been solved for good. One by-product of decolonisation was the return to Portugal of many tens of thousands of settlers, which boosted the Portuguese right.

TOWARDS AN END

The division between the CP (backed by the FUR) and the Sixth government and the SP/PPD was growing.

But this division was not between those for socialism and those not. The CP was manipulating the mass movement as a lever to retain power in the MFA and state. There was a general strike in Alentejo on 17 September in support of land reform; CP unions led the metal workers strike in mid-October.

On 15 October the government closed Radio Renascença; it was reopened again six days later following mass protest demonstrations. On 7 November the paras, acting under MFA orders, put a bomb in Radio Renascença and blew it up, putting an end to the voice of the far left on radio. The PS-PPD were also purging CP people from positions in

the various ministries.

9 November a large PS/PPD march took place in support of the Sixth Provisional government (the march was also backed by the CP-hating Maoists of AOC and PCP-ml). On the following Sunday the CP marched, with the parties supporting FUR, against the government. Both marches were of similar size, tens of thousands strong. Land occupations increased, with 600 000 hectares occupied in October and November.

On the far left there was serious confusion. The PRP (linked to Tony Cliff's SWP in Britain, then called IS), having sent its own armed wing underground after the government banned citizens carrying weapons (23 October), now called for armed insurrection. This group had experimented with building its own unions, then its own "soviets". It refused to participate in the elections, which it regarded as a bourgeois trick.

Unclear of what sort of government it wanted, with illusions in "Otelos" and the "left" officers of the MFA, the PRP declared, "the bourgeoisie promotes civil war to defend its interests. Happily in Portugal the right wing does not have an army. They rely on mercenaries with bases in Spain, or on the armies of the US and NATO." (From Phil Mailer's book, *The Impossible Revolution?*) As the next weeks were to show clearly, the bourgeoisie still had the officer corps of the armed forces and the MFA's "left" was an unreliable ally.

On 13 November the building workers called a strike. 30,000 marched to the Parliament in Sao Bento, Lisbon, and trapped the Ministers inside. The government called on Copcon to save them; Copcon troops turned up and refused to intervene.

The workers were demanding higher wages, nationalisa-

The Carnation Revolution

tion of the main sites and a collective contract. They refused to compromise, and when the Prime Minister told them he had to leave to attend an important meeting, they told him to stuff his meeting. At 1am in the morning the Prime Minister caved in and accepted all their demands.

The Socialists called for Otelo Carvalho to be sacked for Copcon's failure to defend the government. The bourgeois government could no longer govern, and something had to give.

On 20 November the MFA's council replaced Otelo with the moderate, Vasco Lourenco, as commander of the Lisbon region. The Socialist Party and PPD discussed the possibility of moving the Constituent Assembly to the north. And on the same day a manifesto appeared signed by officers called for the arming of the working class.

Officers at the Beirlos barracks promised to distribute guns to the workers ("Enough to arm a demonstration"). At the Tancos base many of the paratroopers' officers had walked out; the commander attempted to get the 1200 troops to go on leave and evacuate the base, which they refused to do, putting themselves under Copcon's authority.

Soares told a march on Sunday 23 November that he was not afraid of civil war and the crowd chanted, "Discipline! Discipline!" The next day, Monday, the Communist Inter-sindical unions called a two hour strike in the Lisbon industrial belt so the workers could discuss the situation. The SUV committee at Air Force Base 3 pledged support for the Paras at Tancos.

The paras occupied their bases at Montijo, Monet Real, Ota

and Tancos on 25 November as a force of Commandos began a right wing coup using the Paras' occupation as an excuse. Rumours spread of a Pinochet-style coup and that Otelo had been arrested. Obliging Otelo appeared and reassured a crowd that he was free, and everything was OK. By the end of the afternoon a few barricades were erected, but the overwhelming mood was apathetic.

The commandos pushed leftist troops out of a radio station they had occupied. The next morning the military police surrendered after a few shots were fired, and were packed off home on leave.

And the Nine, with military operations led by Lieutenant-Colonel Ramalho Eanes, found themselves in charge. They had only used a small number of troops and had met only slight resistance. A State of Emergency was declared.

The next day Copcon was closed down, and some of their officers were arrested, and on 27 November the Paras surrendered and left their occupied bases.

What can explain the lack of resistance? The Communist Party had taken a decision not to oppose the coup. In return it was not banned and even retained its place in the government. Melo Antunes declared, "The participation of the Communists is indispensable to the construction of a democratic and socialist Portugal." The far left groups, politically dependent on the CP, and with illusions in the "left" in the army, were clueless.

There had been no Pinochet-style coup, but a Social Democratic coup, which had stabilised bourgeois democracy, not destroyed it. The State of Emergency was lifted in early De-

ember. The army leadership reimposed discipline and raided various left groups and enterprises looking for weapons (they found few).

There was a purge of left-wing journalists, mainly replaced with Socialist Party and PPD editors and staff. Radio Renascenca was handed back to the Church.

Land occupations were effectively ended. Only four took place in the three months after the 25 November coup; 400 took place in three months before the coup. About a million hectares, or one fifth of the agricultural land, was under some sort of collective ownership. The state now aimed to turn the co-operatives into functioning capitalist concerns by imposing the market on their functioning.

Prices, which had been frozen after 11 March, were liberalised and on 1 January 1976 there were 40% price increases in food. In March 1976 *Diario Popular* reported that 1040 PIDEs had been freed since 25 November, leaving only 300 left in jail. Up until this point not a single case had been brought against a PIDE officer.

In the elections for the Legislative Assembly on 25 April 1976 the votes for the various parties remained quite similar to the previous year. The SP took 35%, PPD 24%, CDS 16%, CP (on a joint ticket with a smaller CP outrider, the MDP) 14.6%. The far left groups did very slightly better. The UDP took 1.7%.

In June Eanes won 61.5% in the vote for President, easily beating Otelo Carvalho with 16.5%. The revolution was over.

When the far left lined up behind the military

The ferment in Portugal reached its peak in summer 1975. The old top military command had been marginalised by the failure of its attempted coups on 28 September 1974 and 11 March 1975.

Power was in the hands of the loose-knit Armed Forces Movement (AFM), middle-rank officers, some close to the Socialist Party, some close to the Communist Party.

The Fifth Provisional Government, in office from 8 August to 19 September, was close to the CP.

Swathes of industry had been nationalised, and some was under workers' control. Workers' commissions and neighbourhood commissions flourished in the Lisbon area especially.

In the more conservative north, a right-wing campaign against trade-union and Communist Party offices had developed.

In the midst of this, on 25 August 1975, the main left and revolutionary groups, including the PRP (to whom the British SWP, then called IS, were close) and the LCI (Mandelite), cancelled themselves out by joining a "United Revolutionary Front" (FUR), with the CP and in support of the CP-influenced government.

The CP soon quit the FUR (the other groups in it objected to negotiations the CP had opened with the SP!) On 19 September the Fifth Provisional Government was replaced by a Sixth, led by José Baptista Pinheiro de Azevedo, a conservative within the AFM who would later join the Christian Democratic Party. The CP participated as a minority in the Sixth Government.

On 25 November, Ramalho Eanes, another AFM conservative, organised a coup in which more radical AFM officers were jailed and more radicalised army units disbanded. The Sixth Government, with CP participation, remained in office, but the revolutionary ferment was decisively damped down.

The article below, from *Workers' Fight* 108, 6 September 1975, was the comment at the time from the forerunners of *Solidarity* and *Workers' Liberty* on the "United Revolutionary Front".

In Portugal, where every party is "socialist" and "revolutionary", where even the leader of the main liberal-capitalist party declares himself a "Leninist", it is as obvious as it ever could be that simple leftwing good intentions are not enough.

No force or grouping is quite what it appears, and in any case it is likely to be different tomorrow from what it is today. To navigate a course to workers' power through this maelstrom requires the highest possible degree of political

clarity.

And if it is difficult to understand events and respond aptly on the spot in Portugal, it is doubly difficult to get a clear view from Britain. Yet in recent weeks *Socialist Worker*, the paper of the International Socialism group, has shown an extraordinary picture of confusion.

Column after column has been filled with hymns to the joys and beauties of revolution in Portugal; scarcely any attention is given to sober analysis of the problems.

In *Socialist Worker* of 23 August, they proudly boast that the PRP — the Portuguese group with which IS has links — helped to write the programme recently issued by Copcon, the internal security wing of the armed forces. On *Socialist Worker* of 30 August, that programme is referred to simply as "the revolutionary programme".

It is certainly true that the Copcon document's support for setting up popular assemblies has helped to advance the development of organs of workers' power in Portugal.

Nevertheless, if these Popular Assemblies are to go forward to workers' power, it is vital that they make a political break from left wing officers like Copcon commander Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho. Carvalho is to make the most revolutionary declarations one day, only to league with the right wing of the AFM the next day, as recently, for a brief period he attempt to combine with Major Melo Antunes and the "Group of Nine".

By helping to write the Copcon document which Carvalho endorsed the PRP were in fact just helping to give Carvalho a more presentable left-wing "face".

For the PRP to do this is logical. A PRP leader told a *Workers' Fight* reporter recently in Lisbon that he believed the Otelo had "kept faith with the revolutionary left". Even now, apparently, PRP members are saying that "Otelo" has assured them privately that he is still with the revolutionary left.

IS however, mumble occasionally in *Socialist Worker* about the need not to have illusions in "middle class officers" — which on other pages of their paper they spread those self-same illusions! What all this shows is that IS cares not two pence for political clarity, if there is a chance of doing a good "publicity job" for "revolution" and for IS.

Socialist Worker of 30 August hails as "historic" (no less) the "united front" between the Communist Party and various far-left groups that was formed last week. Now certainly revolutionaries in Portugal should try to form a united front against the right wing attacks on the CP: to hold demonstrations and rallies, and organise united vigilante squads on the specific slogan of defending the workers' movement against reaction.

Organs of “popular power”

Text edited from International-Communist League pamphlet, *The Revolutionary Left in Portugal* (1977)

Portuguese Trotskyism entered the country via Paris after a couple of Portuguese students had been influenced by the ideas of the USFI [mainstream orthodox Trotskyists led by Ernest Mandel] in 1968.

At the time Caetano was overthrown there were nine Trotskyists in Portugal. Now [1975] the number is probably 6-700. Of these 4-500 are in the LCI, the “official” sympathising section of the USFI, and the remainder are in the PRT. The PRT originally split from the other Portuguese Trotskyists encouraged by the American SWP.

The background to this split, and justification for the continued division, is unclear.

A major difference, however, emerged after 25 August when the LCI signed — together with six other groups, including the CP — the document of the Popular United Front (which became FUR). This decision was a grave error. The Front supported the programme of the Fifth Government of Vasco Goncalves (including its austerity programme) and the MFA-People alliance.

The LCI’s endorsement of the Front — no matter what reservations and comments it added to its signature — was an endorsement of class collaboration. To the PRT’s credit it

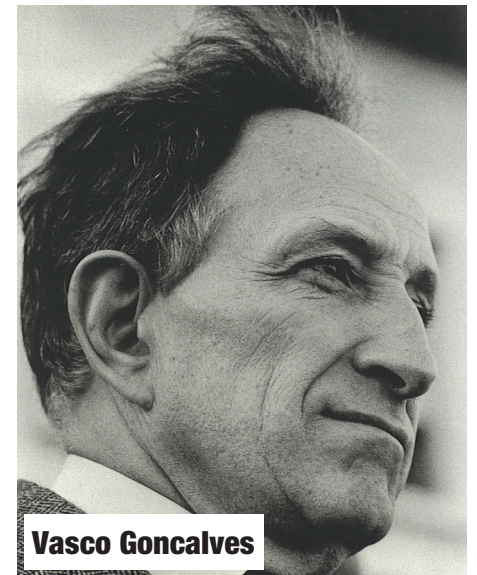
refused to join this ill-fated front with the PCP.

A short comment should be made concerning the Revolutionary Councils (CRTs) and the Popular Assemblies. At the time when these interviews [below] took place it was difficult to see which would emerge as representative organs of the working class. In the following months the Popular Assemblies emerged as the embryonic soviets of the Portuguese working class.

Popular Assemblies were advanced by the majority of the MFA in May and June 1975, as an alternative to the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs) proposed by the CP and the Revolutionary Councils (CRTs) promoted by the Proletarian Revolutionary Party (PRP) and Otelo Carvalho.

The MFA issued a document on 8 July 1975 calling for Popular Assemblies throughout Portugal based on already-existing workers’ committees and neighbourhood commissions. The document expressed the desire that these committees be controlled from above by the MFA leadership, and was vague about the timescale for setting up the “organs of popular power”.

However the working class took up the slogan of “popular power” and began creating Popular Assemblies of its own accord.



Vasco Goncalves

“We want a revolutionary transitional government”

Discussion with the Liga Comunista Internacionalista (LCI) on 9 September 1975.

The discussion started by asking why the LCI signed up to the Front document backing the Fifth government.

LCI: We want a revolutionary transitional government, not a right-wing one. We agree the programme was not completely correct, but it would have been dogmatic to split over it. A new document is being prepared which will exclude references [to support] the MFA as a whole and deny support to the government [this was published on 12 September]. The programme of the new Front is to develop and centralise the organs of popular power.

WF: What are your differences with the PRT?

LCI: There are many differences. The PRT have accused us of joining a popular front.

The PRT fought for the Constituent Assembly. This is a major centre for counter-revolution. The PRT fought for a SP-CP-Intersindical government. We wanted to show up illusions in these bodies, they reinforced them. The workers have lost their illusions in the anti-democratic Stalinist Intersindical. The CP has been unable to prevent a SP/MRPP coalition taking over important unions and removing them from Intersindical.

WF: The SP is fighting against Popular Power. What is happening to the SP’s base?

LCI: In Beja SP workers occupied the SP’s headquarters in protest against their reactionary policies. We try to use the organs of popular power to win over the SP workers. Also we supported the right of the SP, as a workers’ party, to march, and opposed the CP’s attempt to stop them.

The demand for the arming of the commissions is now very important. We do not believe, as some groups do (e.g. PRP-BR), in turning ourselves into a red battalion but rather in arming the organisations of the base.

The CP is now very weak. The far left has much more influence than its membership. It is possible, in one or two months that the relation of forces will change to the point that we are stronger than the CP.

WF: Is it true the CP has had to evacuate from the North?

LCI: It is impossible to operate openly in much of the North and Centre.

WF: Is it true that the Right is arming in the North?

LCI: The threat is shown by the removal of Corvacho as Commander of the Northern Military Region, after reactionary units had gone to the point of illegally putting themselves on alert to demonstrate against him. The PPD is threatening to arm 50,000 right wingers. This is largely talk, but it shows the way things are developing.

WF: Can the organs of popular power be a real alternative government within a few months?

LCI: They are not an alternative at the moment, which is why we call for a workers’ government of revolutionary unity, which would develop them. A Popular Assembly for the whole city is being set up in Porto. And a coordinating committee for the whole town exists in Coimbra.

“The working class is divided”

Discussion between the Partido Revolucionario dos Trabalhadores (PRT) and Workers’ Fight, 1 August 1975

WF: The MFA say they want to see Popular Assemblies set up across Portugal. The LCI is concentrating its propaganda around setting up of these assemblies, but the danger we see is of them being used as a power base for a populist military government, rather than a workers’ government.

PRT: We see direct democracy is fully developed in Copcon. The Assembly delegates of the Copcon units are elected democratically. They consist of 13 soldiers, 8 NCOs and 4 officers in each unit Assembly. These units (ADUs) generally support popular struggles and are the strongest guarantee we have against a right wing coup. We think that if the ADUs are connected to the workers’ and neighbourhood committees in the Popular Assemblies they will be an alternative state apparatus. The Popular Assemblies should be created and extended as soon as possible because they are potential organs of workers’ power.

WF: The party with the biggest electoral support, the SP, opposes these Assemblies. The working class is divided. How does the PRT think the split in the working class can be overcome?

PRT: We think if the ADUs impose the Popular Assemblies all the workers will be united and their local problems solved. We appeal to the CP and SP to present their own candidates for election in these assemblies.

WF: The forerunners of the Assemblies were the CRTs

which the PRP-BR has been very active in campaigning for. Would you say that the main trouble with the CRTs was that they were not based on workers’ struggles, but imposed from above?

PRT: Yes, this is so. The CRTs are mainly PRP. The headquarters of the CRTs is the same as that of the PRP. We insist the CRTs are linked to the popular assemblies.

WF: The PRP places great stress on the autonomous organisation of the working class. However they are weak when it comes to the question of slogans relating to the general administration of society. They have raised the slogan “Revolutionary Government”, but I have been unable to get any of them to say exactly what it means.

The LCI have called for a “Workers and Peasants’ Government”, but again this seems to have no clear content. The PRT has called for a CP-SP-Intersindical government.

PRT: That slogan was raised before we had made a study of the MFA. We have the task of splitting the MFA while continuing to argue for the workers’ united front.

WF: The demand, “Dissolve the Constituent Assembly” has been made recently by some of the revolutionary groups. What is the PRT’s position on this slogan?

PRT: It is a very sectarian and dangerous slogan. Two and a half million SP voters trust the Constituent Assembly to this day. And there has been no alternative to the Constituent Assembly.

WF: The slogan plays into the hands of the CP?

PRT: Yes, precisely that. The SP and PPD say the Constituent Assembly will solve all the problems because it represents the people’s vote. They say that the CP is against it because they are dictators. We say the CP and UDP can raise the problems posed by the Popular Assemblies inside the Constituent Assembly. The result will be no response from the Constituent Assembly. Then it will be time to call for dissolution.

WF: What is the size and influence of the PRT?

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PRT: [Our youth group] ASJ has about 1000 members, mostly in secondary schools in Lisbon. The PRT has 100-150 members, mainly in Porto and Lisbon. Of this 30-40 are worker militants. Our biggest base is in the Metro.

