

## Social Conflicts in the Portuguese Revolution, 1974–1975

Raquel Varela et Joana Alcântara

Volume 74, automne 2014

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1060924ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)

1911-4842 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Varela, R. & Alcântara, J. (2014). Social Conflicts in the Portuguese Revolution, 1974–1975. *Labour / Le Travail*, 74.

### Résumé de l'article

La révolution portugaise, populairement appelée « révolution des oeillets », qui a duré du 25 avril 1974 au 25 novembre 1975, est survenue dans un contexte des défaites militaires humiliantes aux mains des mouvements de guérilla paysanne dans les colonies portugaises de Guinée-Bissau, d'Angola et du Mozambique. Cependant, une analyse de quatre types de conflits sociaux – grèves; manifestations; occupations d'usines, d'autres lieux de travail et des services publics; et occupations de maisons vacantes – laisse penser que la lutte des classes au Portugal a été le moteur essentiel de cette révolution. La révolution est survenue au Portugal par le biais d'un mouvement ouvrier actif contre le fascisme dans un contexte de crise économique mondiale. Les travailleurs ont décidé à ce moment que le temps était propice à la démocratie.

## Social Conflicts in the Portuguese Revolution, 1974–1975

**Raquel Varela and Joana Alcântara**

### Introduction

IN THIS ARTICLE, WE SURVEY and analyze social conflicts during the Portuguese Revolution – the process popularly known as the “Carnation Revolution” that lasted from 25 April 1974 to 25 November 1975. We describe and analyze the principal social and workers’ movements, arguing that it was the dynamic of social conflicts that determined the institutional and governmental changes of the revolution and that these in turn affected continuing social struggles.

Our analysis focuses on four distinct types of social conflicts: 1) strikes; 2) demonstrations; 3) occupations of factories, other workplaces, and public services; 4) and occupations of vacant houses. We base our arguments on a wide range of sources, many of which have never been consulted, housed in Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom: the Hemeroteca Municipal de Lisboa, the Arquivo Histórico das Comisiones Obreras em Espanha (Fundação 1.º de maio, Madrid), the Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril, the Centro de Intervenção para o Desenvolvimento Amílcar Cabral, the historical archives of Portuguese Television (RTP), the archives of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, and the National Archives in London.

### The Last European Revolution of the 20th Century

ON 25 APRIL 1975, a coup led by the Movement of the Armed Forces (MFA) against the thirteen year old war in Portugal’s African colonies put an end to

the Portuguese dictatorship that had lasted for 38 years under the direction of António Salazar and, after 1968, of Marcelo Caetano. Defying the young military officers leading the coup who utilized radio broadcasts to urge the population to stay at home, thousands of people immediately took to the streets in the two principal cities of the country, Lisbon and Porto. In the latter, demonstrators congregated in the port area, shouting "Death to Fascism." In the capital city, Lisbon, protestors surrounded the government buildings in the Quartel do Carmo. Many others forced open the prisons of Caxias and Peniche and released political prisoners *en masse*. The political police apparatus, PIDE/DGC, was dismantled, censorship was abolished, and demonstrators attacked the offices of the regime's newspaper, *A Época*.

Three days later, on 28 April, poor residents of the Boavista neighborhood in Lisbon occupied vacant houses and refused to leave, despite intimidation by the police and the military. Bank workers almost immediately moved to control the exit of capital from the country and on April 29 established picket lines at entrances to financial institutions. On the same day, office workers occupied their union headquarters, expelling the leaders of their regime-controlled labour organization. The following day, various unions occupied the Ministry of Corporations and Security, which then became known as the Ministry of Labour. Construction workers dismissed their union leaders while public transit workers struck and a Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) was founded. Ten thousand students assembled at the Instituto Superior Técnico, the most important engineering university in the country.

The May Day demonstration became a national holiday, known as Worker's Day, and united half a million people in Lisbon. As Medeiros Ferreira shows, more than one million people listened to 200 speakers in the 100 different May Day demonstrations organized across the country.<sup>1</sup> The housing occupations continued while there were strikes and occupations of dozens of factories and workplaces in the first two weeks of May. Various demonstrations organized chiefly by the radical left condemned the colonial war in a series of May 1974 demonstrations. The Portuguese Revolution had begun, the last revolution of the 20th century in a western European country in the geographically strategic political space of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It came as a surprise to everyone.

The Portuguese Empire collapsed late, in 1974, after it had mobilized almost two million forced workers<sup>2</sup> (in South African mines and Angolan cotton plantations among others) and fought a bloody thirteen-year-old war (1961–74) to impede the independence of the Portuguese African colonies of Angola, Cape

1. António Medeiros Ferreira, "Portugal em Transe (1974–1985)," in José Mattoso, ed., *História de Portugal* (Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores, 1993), 35.

2. Basil Davidson, *Révolution en Afrique: la Libération de la Guinée Portugaise* (Paris : ed. Seuil, 1969); "Forced labour system in Portuguese Africa," London, October 25, s/d, Reuters in *Anticolonialismo internacional*, 1961–63, CIDAC, H34–5.

Verde, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. Overall, the country's ossified political and economic structure would lead to the most important social rupture in postwar European history: the MFA coup unleashed a social explosion so deep and lasting that until today historians have not been able to completely account for the thousands of diverse mobilizations that emerged across the country in the first weeks of the April–May 1974 upheaval.<sup>3</sup>

Suffering from a brutal colonial war and acute limitations on social mobility, the country could offer little to its youth. Indeed, a million and a half people emigrated from Portugal, especially to Central Europe, between 1960 and 1974.<sup>4</sup> The Empire, collapsing on so many fronts, left the Portuguese state close to military and financial collapse until a movement of military captains initiated a coup that ended the colonial war. The overwhelming support for the end of the war, and the possibility for social, political, and economic change is reflected in the fact that there was little resistance to the coup; only four deaths resulted when a relatively isolated instance of violence erupted as political police were surrounded by demonstrators and soldiers at their headquarters on António Maria Cardoso Street in Lisbon.

We argue that the Portuguese Revolution had four determining characteristics that help explain the wide scope of the social rupture. Even though it occurred in a small country, the 1974–75 struggle represented an unprecedented moment of workers' control and disruption of the accumulation process in the context of mid-1970s Europe. To appreciate what was at stake, it is important to recognize specific features of the revolutionary conflict:

1. It was a process born of the military defeat of a regular army by revolutionary guerilla movements supported by the peasants of Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique.
2. This defeat combined with the gravest economic crisis of capitalism in the postwar period initiated in 1973.
3. It was marked by the role of the workers' movement as the central protagonist.
4. It reflected the specific characteristics of the Portuguese workers' movement, distinguished by its youth (the great mass of young peasants who moved to the city in the 1960s), its political disorganization and lack of established unions, and its concentration in the industrial belt in the capital Lisbon. The absence of free and democratic trade unions, the Achilles' heel of the Portuguese workers' movement during the

3. In the survey we organized with Alejandro Lora and Joana Alcântara, we registered hundreds of meetings in the first week after the coup, but it was based solely on the principal newspapers leaving out various other regions of the country and probably hundreds or thousands more small companies.

4. António Barreto, "Mudança Social em Portugal: 1960–2000," in António Costa Pinto, ed., *Portugal Contemporâneo* (Lisboa: D. Quixote, 2005).

dictatorship of the New State, was a motivating factor in the radicalization of the revolution; the lack of such organizations in the majority of the country's factories and companies led to the spontaneous opening of spaces for the emergence of democratic rank-and-file workers' commissions.

The fall of the regime would reveal a European colonial country with a social structure that combined budding industrial development, a ruling class that was taking the first steps toward internationalization, and a workforce maintained through low salaries, ignorance, and backwardness. Portugal was seen as a type of "Atlantic Albania" where

divorce was suppressed, where (many) books, films and songs were prohibited, where the arts were censored, where social communication was muzzled, where many children walked around shoeless, where the majority of the population did not have a refrigerator, telephone or bathtub, where you could not tell jokes about the authorities or criticize the powerful, where you did not have the right to demonstrate or strike, where you needed a license to own a lighter or a transistor radio, where agriculture was operated by medieval ploughs and animal traction, where road traffic was crawling with wagons and ox carts, where ready-to-wear clothes were almost non-existent, where Coca-Cola was contraband, where the political police used torture in prisons, where there were no highways nor ... elections.<sup>5</sup>

This was a country where 30 per cent of the population in the capital city was illiterate, there was no universal suffrage, and no system of equitable social welfare. Even going to the doctor required a paternalistic and commercial relationship with charities controlled by the Church. Cruz Oliveira, nominated as minister of health soon after 25 April, was proud to have ended the dependence of hospitals on charities, the practice of charging a fee for family members to visit relatives in the hospital, and the selling of blood to needy patients: "Blood is not to be sold or bought, it's given!"<sup>6</sup> Finally, even taking into account countries such as Greece and Spain, Portugal was at the top of the list for the lowest wage rates in Europe.<sup>7</sup>

For these reasons listed above, 25 April was the most important date in Portugal in the 20th century. It ended one country and inaugurated another. This "other country" was captured by film director Sérgio Tréfaut, who utilized original footage from other foreign directors and photographers from the Magnum photographic agency who visited Portugal "in search of the revolution." They revelled in depicting soldiers who wore beards and demonstrated on the streets, recognizing that the images of the Portuguese Revolution represented the "world turned upside down."

5. Editorial, revista *Visão*, Especial 25 de Abril, 15 de abril, 2004: 1.

6. Interview by the author, 24 February 2012.

7. António Barreto and Clara Valadas Preto, *Portugal 1960/1995: Indicadores Sociais* (Mirandela: Público, 1996).

## Social Conflicts in the Portuguese Revolution

THE PORTUGUESE REVOLUTION was marked by the centrality of a strong workers' and social movement affecting all sectors of Portuguese society, especially the working class. Beyond traditional industrial and rural workers, the Portuguese Revolution was characterized by highly radicalized social conflicts (strikes, demonstrations, and occupations) involving students, workers in the modern service sector, employees in the informal sector, women, sections of the middle class, and the rank and file of the armed forces. The new social movements – formed by ecologists, students, and feminists – also played an important part, although they would be secondary in the general scenario of conflicts marked by the preponderance of organized workers. Social conflicts in Portugal in 1974–75 were noticeably national in scope, occurring in all cities and rural areas. In those two years, there were 858 separate conflicts in companies and factories, 300 of which occurred between May and June of 1974.<sup>8</sup> With the exception of July and August 1974, every month during that time witnessed at least 100 conflicts. According to Muñoz, the majority of social conflicts were organized by the workers' movement: 19 per cent in the textile sector, 15 per cent in machine production and among metal workers, 9 per cent in construction and public works, and 7 per cent in the chemical and food processing industry. Conflicts erupted particularly in the large industrial belts of the three largest cities, Lisbon, Porto, and Setúbal, with emphasis on the capital city, which accounted for 43 per cent of all conflicts.

Beginning in the 1970s, an intense historiographical production that lasted for ten years critically analyzed the Portuguese Revolution from the perspective of the centrality of the workers' movement, social classes, and their leaders. This interpretative writing included the still impressive studies of Santos et al., Dows, Mailer, and Hammond, all of whom focused on the social history of the workers' and residents' commissions.<sup>9</sup> One of the first social scientists to attempt to understand the regime changes of Southern Europe was Nicos Poulantzas,<sup>10</sup> whose theories were later developed by Loren Goldner, who focused on the division of the diverse sectors of the Portuguese ruling class such as the commercial bourgeoisie and an internationalized and financial ruling fraction.<sup>11</sup> More recently, H. Chilcote studied the relationship between

8. Duran Muñoz, *Contención y Transgresión. Las Movilizaciones Sociales y el Estado en las Transiciones Española y Portuguesa* (Madrid: CPPC, 2000).

9. Maria de Lurdes Santos et al. *O 25 de abril e as Lutas Sociais nas Empresas* (Porto: Afrontamento, 1976), 3 volumes; Chip Dows, *Os Moradores à Conquista da Cidade* (Lisboa: Armazém das Letras, 1978); John Hammond, "Worker Control in Portugal: The Revolution and Today," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 2 (December, 1981): 413–453; Phil Mailer, *Portugal: The Impossible Revolution* (Oakland, CA: PM Press 2012) [1978].

10. Nicos Poulantzas, *Poder Político e Classes Sociais* (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1976).

11. Loren Goldner, *Ubu Saved from Drowning: Class Struggle and Statist Containment in Portugal and Spain, 1974–1977* (Cambridge MA: Queequeg Publications, 2000).

Portugal and the colonies, the power of the Portuguese state, and the political factionalism, which weakened the left during the revolution.<sup>12</sup>

From the 1990s onward, various studies were published on the revolution that focused on the representative subjects of social classes, such as books by Medeiros Ferreira<sup>13</sup> and Josep Sanchez Cervelló<sup>14</sup> as well as Maria Inácia Rezola's *Os Militares na Revolução de Abril. O Conselho da Revolução e a Transição para a Democracia em Portugal (1974–76)*<sup>15</sup> (*Soldiers in the April Revolution. The Revolutionary Council and the Transition to Democracy in Portugal*), and Tiago Moreira de Sá's *Carlucci vs. Kissinger*.<sup>16</sup> This historiographic current has made important contributions on the MFA and the international context of the revolution, but it has also simultaneously revealed a bias toward the study of elites, almost erasing social and workers' movements from the analysis. For their part, political scientists influenced by the theories of Philippe Schmitter<sup>17</sup> and António Costa Pinto<sup>18</sup> tend to view the revolution exclusively through the conceptual lens of "transition." Theories of transition to democracy are often teleological – they assume that the outcome of the revolutionary process opened by a military coup on 25 April 1974 would necessarily be representative of democracy, which was consolidated from late 1975 with the counterrevolutionary coup of 25 November 1975. This approach eliminates the history of the revolutionary process itself by failing to explain its development and analyzing no more than its final result.

Our study is inspired by a social history perspective of the revolution based on the concept of "dual power" (workers' and residents' commissions on the one hand and the state on the other) and the tensions between these power centres. It is opposed to the hypothesis defended by Sousa Santos<sup>19</sup> of a state divided in two, between a socialist project and a capitalist project. We reinforce

12. Ronald Chilcote, *The Portuguese Revolution: State and Class in the Transition to Democracy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010).

13. Ferreira, "Portugal em Transe (1974–1985)."

14. Josep Sánchez Cervelló, "El Proceso Democrático Portugués (1974–75)" in Hipólito de la Torre, ed., *Portugal y España en el Cambio Político (1958–1978)* (Mérida: UNED, 1989), 149–166.

15. Maria Inácia Rezola, *Os Militares na Revolução de abril: o Conselho da Revolução e a Transição para a Democracia em Portugal* (Lisboa: Campo da Comunicação, 2006).

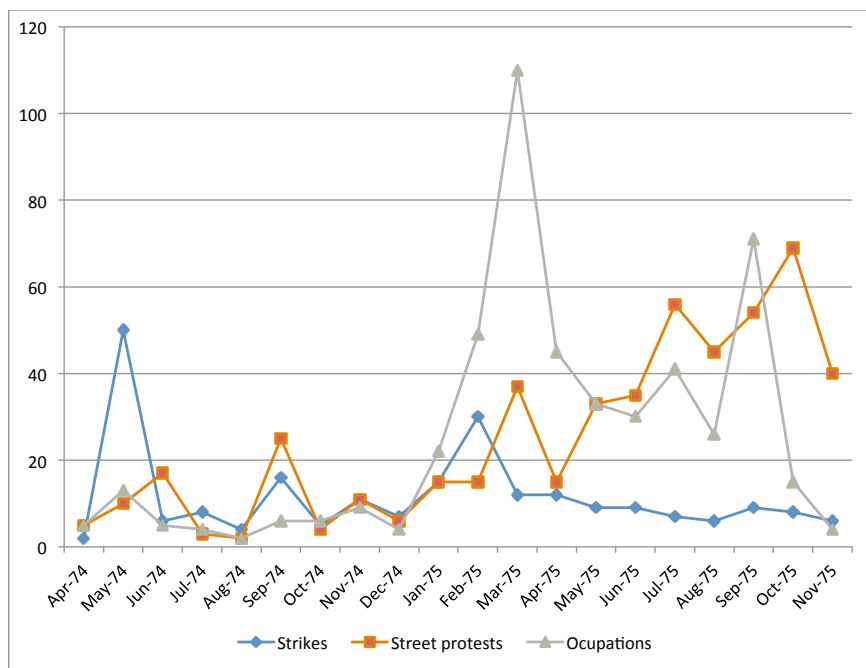
16. Tiago Moreira de Sá, *Carlucci vs. Kissinger* (Lisboa: D. Quixote, 2008).

17. Philip Schmitter, *Portugal: Do Autoritarismo à Democracia* (Lisboa: ICS, 1999).

18. António Costa Pinto, "Saneamentos Políticos e Movimentos Radicais de Direita na Transição para a Democracia, 1974–1976," in Fernando Rosas, ed., *Portugal e a Transição para a Democracia* (Lisboa: Edições Colibri/IHC, 1999); António Costa Pinto, "Political Purges and State Crisis in Portugal's Transition to Democracy 1975–76," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43, 2 (2008): 305–332.

19. Boaventura Sousa Santos, "A Crise e a Reconstituição do Estado em Portugal. 1974–1984," *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 14 (November 1984): 7–29.

**Graph 1 – Social Movements in the Portuguese Revolution, 25 April 1974 to 25 November 1975.**



Compiled by data from Raquel Varela with Joana Alcântara and Alejandro Lora, "Projecto História das Relações Laborais em Portugal e no Mundo Lusófono" PTDC/EPH-HIS/3701/2012

the hypothesis that the social revolution was defeated, not by the absence of forces, but by the inability of the workers' and social movements to coordinate their struggles at a national level against the state, a deficiency reinforced by the absence of a united front between the parties and organizations of the left. This argument is developed more fully in the book by one of the present authors, *A História do Povo na Revolução Portuguesa (1974–1975)* (*A History of the People in the Portuguese Revolution 1974–1975*),<sup>20</sup> but in this article we focus specifically on the nature and characteristics of social conflicts.

A survey of strikes, occupations (workplaces and housing), and demonstrations shows that social conflicts peaked following the events of 25 April 1974, again from February 1975, and finally from August 1975 onward.

Graph 1 represents a quantitative expression of social conflicts divided into three types: strikes, demonstrations, and housing and workplace occupations. Our qualitative analysis highlights strikes, the movement of housing occupations and social struggles against the closing of factories, and in support of

20. Raquel Varela, *A História do Povo na Revolução Portuguesa* (Lisboa: Bertrams, 2014).

workers' control. Workers' control refers historically to similar experiences, as in Petrograd in 1917 and Italy in 1919–20, in which workers do not exercise self-management of the company. Instead, the company is run by its owners under workers' control. Workers' control is a process of dual power. This particular phenomenon is distinguished from self-management (where workers become their own bosses) and co-management (where workers participate, usually through the unions, in the management of companies and/or factories in partnership with the employers and/or the state). During the Carnation Revolution, a significant number of strikes involved the direct questioning of power within the workplace, management, and the ownership of factories and companies; frequently, this resulted in occupations and, in some cases, the "sanitation" or purging of workplaces by the kidnapping of bosses and administrators.

The second half of May was marked by the radicalization of social conflicts. The first provisional government was formed in mid-May 1974, a popular front with the participation of communists, socialists, and liberals. Despite successive appeals by the Portuguese Communist Party for the working class to support this government, nothing calmed the explosion of social conflicts. A government decision on 24 May to approve a minimum monthly wage of 3,300 *escudos* fell well short of that demanded by workers and provoked even more strikes and workplace occupations. The majority of the workers' movement demanded minimum monthly wages above 4,000 or even 6,000 *escudos*.<sup>21</sup>

In Table 1, we provide statistics based on Santos et al.<sup>22</sup> related to strikes from 25 April to 1 June 1974. In just five weeks, there were 97 strikes and 15 threats to strike, more than had occurred in any previous one-year period, including the peak year of 1969 in which there were 100 strikes or threats to strike in total. The majority, 58 strikes, occurred in industry, and there were occupations of workplaces in 35 of these strikes. In four of the work stoppages, there were kidnappings of bosses or appropriation of equipment.

Research by Maria de Lurdes Santos et al.<sup>23</sup> demonstrates that the majority of demands in these strikes revolved around wage increases, minimum wages, access to company profits, and the right to thirteenth and fourteenth monthly salaries. In Portugal, wages are paid monthly. The thirteenth monthly payment is paid as an extra monthly wage for holidays, which is the equivalent to one calendar month or 22 labouring days, normally in the summer. The fourteenth monthly payment is – or was – paid at Christmas. In 40 per cent of the cases, aspects of control of the company were demanded. In almost 50 per cent of the strikes studied, there were calls for purges, that is, the firing of bosses, managers, and administrators with links to the fascist regime.

21. Francisco Rodrigues, ed., *O Futuro era Agora* (Lisboa: Dinossauro, 1994).

22. Maria de Lurdes Santos et al. *O 25 de abril e as Lutas Sociais nas Empresas*.

23. Maria de Lurdes Santos et al. *O 25 de abril e as Lutas Sociais nas Empresas*.

Maria Luísa Cristovam published a comparative study of strike demands in 1979 – after the end of the revolution – addressing the strikes in 1974 and 1975. She concluded that during the two years of the revolution between 15 per cent and 22.7 per cent of strike demands were related to control and power in the workplace and the administration of the company, while in 1979 only 3.7 per cent of strikes centred on such considerations of power in the workplace.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in the 1974–75 strikes related to wage increases, almost 40 per cent of the total number of strikes exhibited a profoundly egalitarian character, with demands for equal increases for all workers, reduction in the range of wage levels, and constitution of a national minimum wage.<sup>25</sup> New demands typical of revolutionary periods arose such as equal work, equal salary, and the abolition of privileges in the workplace.

Examples of such strike processes are varied. In May 1974, the 2000 workers at Timex, an American watch factory located on the southern margin of the Tejo River in Charneca da Caparica, presented 23 demands that included, among others, paid holidays, reduction of the workday, compensation for sickness, and abolition of any type of performance bonus. They ended their list of demands with the following:

22. The maximum salary for all workers [including managers] at Timex will be 16,000 escudos. All salaries higher than this figure will be frozen until they are affected by the new [salary] grade.

23. There will be a general increase in salaries when the workers and the Commission decide it is necessary according to rises in the cost of living and the level of inflation.

Note: The workers also wish to demand a daycare centre (...)

The measures presented will enter into effect functioning in an unequivocal form and as clearly expressed by the workers of Timex from 9 a.m. on 27 May 1974.

When the deadline is reached, if these measures mentioned in the 23 points have not been enacted, the workers at Timex reserve the right to a collective, dignified and civic reaction.<sup>26</sup>

One type of strike that arose in this period was the solidarity strike, which the government would prohibit in the Strike Law of August 1974, alleging the defence of the “national economy.” Beyond the symbolic strikes of August 1974 (at the newspaper *Jornal do Comércio*, the airline TAP, and the Lisnave shipyards), there were also solidarity strikes. They emerged above all against companies in the same corporate economic group or in companies in the same economic sector such as the press, transportation, and municipal construction. Yet, solidarity strikes also occurred in distinct companies and among different professional groups in the same company. An example of this was in

24. Maria Luísa Cristovam, *Conflitos de Trabalho em 1979. Breve Análise Sociológica* (Lisboa: Ministério do Trabalho, 1982), 74.

25. Cristovam, *Conflitos de Trabalho em 1979*, 76.

26. “Caderno reivindicativo dos trabalhadores da Timex Portugal, Lda” in Maria de Lurdes Santos et al. *O 25 de abril e as Lutas Sociais nas Empresas*, 161–164.

Table 1 – Strikes in Portugal between 25 April and 1 June 1974.

Forms of Struggle				
	Threats to strike	Strikes	Workplace occupations	Kidnapping of bosses or equipment
Industry	8	42	26	4
Gas, Electricity, Water, Transport, Commercial, and Communications	6	15	8	
Banks, Insurance, Services	1	1	1	
TOTAL	15	58	35	4

Maria de Lurdes Santos et al. *O 25 de abril e as Lutas Sociais nas Empresas*

May 1974 when 350 metal and concrete workers at the shipyards of Alverca-Intento in the industrial zone of Vila Franca de Xira, north of Lisbon, struck their employer. Soon after, administrative workers in Lisbon, Revim, Porto, and Portimão in the same company paralyzed activities, elevating the total number of workers on strike to 700. The solidarity strikers declared, “No return to work if the company does not correspond to their desire for a salary increase.”<sup>27</sup>

On the very same day, fare collectors and bus drivers in the João Belo company in the south of the country stopped collecting tickets in “virtue of the firm not respecting until midnight last night demands for monthly salary increases to 8,000 and 7,000 escudos respectively.” In this case, transit workers showed solidarity to the public at large.<sup>28</sup>

It is important to emphasize that in these strikes during the revolution, the poorest and most oppressed sectors of the working class participated fully. In Mirafleres Industrial Park, 800 construction workers, half of whom were African immigrants from Cape Verde, struck on 14 May 1974. Their list of demands was detailed: “Minimum monthly salary of 6,000 escudos, 40 hours of work in a 5-day week, 30 days of 100 per cent paid holidays, right to strike, Christmas bonus paid 8 days before, classification of all employees with the obligation to immediately integrate them in the union as effective members.”<sup>29</sup> Workers in the Mirafleres complex earned 2,600 escudos per month before the strike. As in other strike mobilizations, the workers noted explicitly that they had been “inspired by the process of the workers of Torralta (Troia)” and

27. *Diário Popular*, 14 May 1974, 23.

28. *Diário Popular*, 14 May 1974, 23.

29. *Diário Popular*, 14 May 1974, 23.

that they aimed “to spread the strike movement to other companies in the sector, notably in the Algés zone.”<sup>30</sup>

The central role of workers’ movements in the Portuguese Revolution is not only confirmed by the impressive numbers of participants and actions but also by the dynamic of conflicts. Workers suddenly questioned the hierarchical structures of the factory and workplace, went beyond strictly economic issues, and directly confronted the productive mechanisms of the capitalist mode of production. The majority of strikes were considered “wild,” were voted on in democratic assemblies of workers, and directed, for the most part, by workers’ commissions that arose spontaneously in the political space created after 48 years in which democratic workers’ organizations were prohibited. They were organized mainly outside of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and the Socialist Party (PS) – both of which formed part of the government – and in the absence of unions, which only officially arose after these actions by the workers’ commissions.

Paradoxically, the main weakness of the Portuguese workers’ movement during the decades-long dictatorship – the absence of the right to democratically organize – became its main force during the revolutionary years of 1974–75. In impeding workers’ organization and in the attempt at the capitalist modernization of the country, without the threat of social revolution experienced during the essentially unstable Republican regime of 1910–26, the Portuguese bourgeoisie built up its own political and economic authority, but it also created the very social force that would threaten its power. The coup occurred in the context of a vacuum of organization which allowed the rare and immediate emergence of rank-and-file organizations – first the workers’ commissions, later residents’ committees, and finally the soldiers’ commissions – that quickly fanned out across the country in the first weeks after the coup.

The majority of strikes in 1974–75 were organized by the workers’ commissions, led by democratically elected leaders subject to recall at any moment, resembling in many aspects the Italian and Hungarian workers’ councils of 1919–20 and 1956, respectively. On 25 and 26 April, workers went to their jobs elated with the end of the dictatorship but with little sense of what would happen next. As tens of thousands of workers arrived at hundreds of different workplaces, as the newspapers amply confirmed in the first days of the coup, the nature of the social turmoil, labouring people, and their supporters met and avidly discussed politics in a country where a popular saying was “You never discuss religion nor politics.”

Who were these people? They certainly included industrial and service workers, as well as students. What were they talking about? In the first place, “support for the Junta of National Salvation and the MFA for having overthrown fascism.” Gradually, social groups began to raise a series of demands

30. *Diário Popular*, 14 May 1974, 23.

related to their own particular situations. Organizations arose as a necessity, with no defined interlocutors with the exception of workers in large industrial and communications enterprises who had already established democratic unions before the coup. As Miguel Pérez, a scholar of the workers' commissions, writes,

The Workers' Commissions were affirmed as the essential structure of the organizations of workers. Arising in the heat of struggle, in assemblies with workers presenting their demands, they appeared as a natural form to overcome a very particular union situation and became a part of the traditional repertory of forms of working-class struggle. It is a proven fact that in the process of struggle that we analyzed the old corporate union structures had a limited role, acting as the leader in only two occasions. These cases, that of the Textile and Metal Workers, were in two sectors where unions already existed with a strong tradition of struggle and with opposition leaderships who enjoyed the confidence of workers.<sup>31</sup>

Pérez further argues that in 1976,

[In regard to] the number of commissions, the only reliable study is that done by the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) cited by Álvaro Cunhal in the Report to the VIII Congress of the Party. There were 1,250 CTs [Workers' Commissions] in the country as a whole (excepting the districts of Braga and Bragança), about half in the Lisbon district. According to these data, the PCP line dominated in 56% of them and unitary proposals with the participation of the PCP in another 26%. Other authors (P. Robinson, P. Mailer) suggest even higher numbers [of workers' commissions] oscillating between 2,500 and 4,000, probably because they referred to moments before November 25, 1975....<sup>32</sup>

We should also highlight the issue of justice in relation to the dictatorship. In the strike wave of the first few months of the revolution, a crucial demand was the refusal to work with administrators or managers who had denounced workers to the political police. Such "sanitations" or purges were acts of vengeance for the humiliation and fear caused by such people, the importance of which was borne out by the number of purges and even strikes and workplace occupations that began with calls for the firing of administrators linked to the old regime. The very term *saneamento* (sanitation) in Portuguese does not literally refer to a purge, but has positive, hygienic connotations.

Political purges climbed to 20,000 people in the nineteen months of the revolution (see Table 2). They occurred in companies that constituted the vertebral column of the workers' movement: naval industries, air transport, and communications, but were also common in hundreds of small companies in employment sectors like laundering and tailor/seamstress shops. In February 1975, official sources counted 12,000 people who had been suspended or fired from their previous positions by legal or illegal means. These *saneamentos*

31. Miguel Pérez, "Contra a Exploração Capitalista. Comissões de Trabalhadores e Luta Operária na Revolução Portuguesa (1974–75)," Master's Thesis, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, August 2008, 47; Miguel Pérez, "Comissões de trabalhadores," in *Dicionário de História da Revolução* (Porto: Figueirinhas) in press.

32. Miguel Pérez, "Comissões de trabalhadores."

were largely prompted by workers' commissions and developed against the official and more moderate recommendations of the PCP and the PS.<sup>33</sup> Such purges rippled throughout various social sectors, with a particularly strong presence in the universities and schools.

The following example from the postal and communications sector is indicative of the larger movement:

For more than an hour, in the front of the administrative building of the CTT (on São José street) employees of this public company demonstrated in mass yesterday demanding the firing of the administrative corps from the old regime. Maintaining themselves in the interior of the building, the administrators only left after a military force came to get them.<sup>34</sup>

Another case, which had its hilarious moments, occurred in The Telephones of Lisbon and Porto (TLP). The TLP had been formed in 1968 after the end of the concession of the Anglo-Portuguese Telephone Company and was responsible for telecommunications services in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto. Filmed in its entirety by RTP – the public television network – the confrontation between labour and capital unfolded with a vehemence that also managed to convey uncertainties of a new situation that might provoke laughter. Surrounded by many spirited workers who circled the administrative building, a manager, facing the insults and foul language of the crowd, tried to give an interview but was interrupted by a worker who told the reporter, “Interviews given by these fascist sirs are very dubious.” The manager responded softly that this “was the first time that they called me such a thing.”<sup>35</sup>

The settling of scores with the old regime also resulted in the reintegration of those who were politically persecuted during the dictatorship. In May, workers in the financial sector demanded the rehiring of “fired bank workers.”<sup>36</sup> Less than one week later, various plenary meetings at the universities – where the extreme left constituted a vanguard and counted on thousands of activists and sympathizers – promoted the readmission of professors and students expelled during the fascist regime. On 29 April 1974, a meeting of the Council of the Faculty of Letters presided over by one of the most distinguished Portuguese geographers, Professor Orlando Ribeiro, decided “to propose the immediate cancellation of all pending disciplinary processes and the reintegration of all students affected by such sanctions.”<sup>37</sup>

The majority of purges after 25 April 1975 were decided by workers' and/or residents' commissions, in general assemblies of students or schools, and

33. Pinto, “Saneamentos Políticos e Movimentos Radicais de Direita na Transição para a Democracia, 1974–1976,” 32.

34. *República*, 4 May 1974, 1.

35. “Cerco aos TLP,” 1974, Arquivo da RTP, accessed on January 10, 2013. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4mSP--gyYw&list=PLEF504D728EFCCA3C>.

36. *Diário de Lisboa*, 12 May 1974.

37. *República*, 4 May 1974, 2.

Table 2 – Political purges in the revolution (private and public sectors).

Total number of persons suspended or fired (by legal and illegal means)	
April 1974 to February 1975	12,000
March 1975 to November 1975	8,000
<b>By sector</b>	
Armed Forces (April to September 1974)	60 generals, 103 Navy officials, 300 other officials of various ranks
Public Sector Workers (April to December 1974)	4,300
Ministry of Justice (April 1975 to the middle of 1975)	42 judges
Ministry of Education	Setting for the majority of spontaneous purges. All university rectors and directors were fired by the Junta for National Salvation.

Pinto, "Saneamentos Políticos e Movimentos Radicais de Direita na Transição para a Democracia, 1974–1976"

in most cases were voted on in open plenaries. Almost all of those purged had links to the regime and were often police informants, the famous *bufos* (snitches) who were easily and clearly identified. In the great majority of these cases, the government and the company administrations reacted quickly to ratify the decisions of the workers. The same workers who showed themselves willing to negotiate complex and long-ranging agreements, even, for example, wage and salary demands beyond the norm, always remained firm in not accepting the employment or presence of *bufos* in locales where they worked, lived, or studied. This empirical fact suggests interesting future avenues of research on the weight of moral questions in labour relations and social and political conflicts.

## Housing Occupations

DIRT ROADS, POTHOLES, CHILDREN PLAYING on the street, shacks crammed together – this scenario describes the Quinta das Fonsecas, but it could be any other shantytown neighbourhood in Greater Lisbon or Porto. The massive proletarianization of the 1950s and 1960s, essential for the growing industrialization of the period (and partially resulting from the mechanization of agriculture<sup>38</sup>), was accompanied by an impressive population movement from the country to the city and an increase in the economically active population. This resulted in large residential areas of poor workers known as the “shack neighbourhoods” (shantytowns) with poor urban services and amenities. Even

38. João Castro Caldas, *Terra e Trabalho* (Oeiras: Celta, 2001).

before 25 April, the public exposure of such poverty – even when many of these neighbourhoods were located far from the central zones of the cities – had a political impact. “It was a small hell of isolation, discomfort, lack of hygiene, in short, an abandonment,” as one reporter from RTP would later say on a visit to Quinta das FONSECAS.<sup>39</sup> Only 40 per cent of the country’s residents enjoyed indoor plumbing while shantytowns lacking basic sanitary conditions proliferated in the peripheral areas of Lisbon and Setúbal. In Porto, poor neighbourhoods were known as “islands,” a traditional form of housing that the poorest families were relegated to since the first surge of industrialization of the city. The precariousness of such shantytown housing was brutally exposed on 25 November 1967 when flooding caused hundreds of deaths.<sup>40</sup>

The residents’ commissions also arose out of the basic necessity to guarantee decent housing among the poorest workers. The first occupation movement surged in Porto with the takeover of vacant public housing previously distributed by local municipalities only to those loyal to the regime or those who bribed officials to secure shelter. After 25 April, the movement quickly spread to the neighbourhoods of Chelas, Relógio, Casalinho, Curraleira, Caxias, and Oeiras in the greater Lisbon region, and eventually to Setúbal and other neighbourhoods in Porto. Maria das Dores, an itinerant street peddler, was involved in the occupations in Chelas:

If you had seen the dung heap of the shack where I lived with water and slime leaking everywhere...We needed at least a house to live in, we’re not going to live all our lives like pigs in a sty. Is it right for my children to sleep in the same bed as I? Is it right to have such misery?<sup>41</sup>

At least a quarter of the Portuguese population lived in such conditions, but even established and relatively stable working-class neighbourhoods were distinguished by inadequate roads, deficient plumbing and sewage, and the lack of basic services such as pharmacies. There was also scandalous speculation and subletting in the housing market for the few available vacancies, practices that would generate popular protests during the revolution.

The 1965 Law of the Land<sup>42</sup> guaranteed the private appropriation of land and set off a process of super-appreciation of land values. Before this period, the difference in value accrued when a rural, agricultural lot was urbanized and remained in the hands of the state through a tax. With the great movement from country to city, the Salazar government opened up a new space for business through the “private capture of surplus values”<sup>43</sup> in land, an

39. Noticiário Nacional, September 9, 1975, Arquivo da RTP.

40. Miguel Pérez, “Comissões de moradores” in *Dicionário de História da Revolução* (Porto: Figueirinhas) in press.

41. *Diário de Lisboa*, 20 May 1974.

42. Lei dos Loteamentos (D.L. 46673), 1965.

43. José Carlos Guinote, “Urbanismo e corrupção: as mais-valias e o desenvolvimento urbano” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Edição portuguesa, 6 August 2008.

Table 3 – Monthly housing rental prices in Setúbal 1970–75.

	1970	1975	Per cent increase
2 bedroom	1,330 escudos	3,160 escudos	137.6
3 bedroom	1,540 escudos	3,730 escudos	142.2
4 bedroom	1,870 escudos	4,500 escudos	140.6
Average increase per room			142.9

Chip Dows, *Os Moradores à Conquista da Cidade* (Lisboa: Armazém das Letras, 1978)

extraordinary privatization initiative in the European context that massively increased housing costs. It was not construction costs that boosted housing prices but land values. As Pedro Bingre do Amaral affirms, “Considering that Portugal since 1970 has experienced at least four decades of urban expansion – more than 60 per cent of buildings in the country are less than 40 years old – urban land values have not ceased to increase between 1965 and 2005.”<sup>44</sup>

The result of the appropriation of surplus land values was speculation, illustrated in Table 3, which in the case of Setúbal, the third largest city in the country, saw a 140 per cent increase in housing rents from 1970 to 1975.

The revolution stopped this process of land speculation and housing price increases through the emergence of “dual power” expressed through the housing occupations and the construction of residents’ commissions that arose in the first days after the coup and quickly spread. In the following section, we survey housing occupations in 1974–75, as well as the vacant units that were later used to shelter families and house cultural centres, party headquarters, and workers’ and residents’ commissions.

As Pérez has demonstrated, the residents’ commissions were normally launched through the organization of an assembly or plenary of local residents in a determined area, usually on the initiative of groups of residents who were activists or linked to left-wing parties. These first meetings elected a commission and mounted an organizational structure, approving a list of demands that were most urgent to local residents.<sup>45</sup> The residents’ commissions were organizations of “local decision-making” that acted as a parallel power to the municipal governments that were being reconstituted at the same time. The latter were dominated by the PCP and its front organization, the Portuguese Democratic Movement/Democratic Electoral Commission (MDP/CPE). Indeed, despite the pressure of their allies in the PS,<sup>46</sup> the PCP resisted throughout

44. Pedro Bingre do Amaral, “Análise das relações da política de solos com o sistema económico,” *Preparação da nova lei do solo, Documento Técnico DGOTDU 5/2011*, Direção-Geral de Ordenamento do Território e Desenvolvimento Urbano (Portugal 2011).

45. Pérez, “Comissões de moradores.”

46. On the dispute between the PS and the PCP around the question of municipal governments,

this whole process the introduction of independent elections at the municipal level. In any case, the cities had little power in the area of housing, and frequently there were heightened tensions between local governments and the residents' commissions. The new municipal governments ended up serving in the recomposition of the overall state apparatus and as a source for recruits and financing for the principal political parties (above all the PS and the PCP).

The majority of the demands raised by the residents' commissions were of an immediate and basic nature: the right to housing (maintaining residents in the same neighbourhood), infrastructure, child care, and basic sanitation. The commissions were organized by neighbourhood on a political and not necessarily an administrative basis,<sup>47</sup> uniting forms of solidarity and conflicts that revolved around everyday lives outside the workplace.

The occupations began among public housing estates whose scarce distribution of houses was subject to corruption. From the middle of 1975, however, the occupations were directed at empty houses and began to question the price of rents, arguing for limits on rents based on the average workers' salaries.

There were various forms of the coordination of residents' commissions, but these were the first organizations of dual power to organize among themselves even before the workers' commissions developed forms of regional, sectoral, and national coordination.<sup>48</sup> Between January and March of 1975, due to the increase in occupations and the growing crisis of the state, the first coordinated organizations emerged: on 13 December 1974, Porto residents created the Central Commission of Residents' Commissions of Public Housing of Porto. The Inter-Commissions of Poor Neighbourhoods and Shantytowns of Lisbon was formed in January 1975 and was comprised of eighteen residents' commissions; in Setúbal, the Inter-Commissions of Shantytowns was established in February 1975. By March 1975, there were 57 separate residents' commissions in Lisbon, mobilizing thousands of residents.

As with all phenomena of dual power in revolutionary situations, the development of residents' commissions was punctuated by struggles for leadership associated with specific political programs. It is difficult to know exactly which were the most mobilized sectors and which political parties were most influential, but there certainly was a struggle between the more institutionalized sector linked to the state – the Service of Local Follow-Up Support (SAAL) is a reflection of this – and other areas more closely aligned to forms of dual power that questioned the very system of land ownership. However, the SAAL also integrated many of the most radical residents' commissions, which often experienced ups and down in terms of popular mobilization. Based on the existing sources, it is difficult to delimit precisely the degrees of radicalism of

---

see Raquel Varela, *A História do PCP na Revolução dos Cravos* (Lisboa: Bertrand, 2011).

47. Pérez, "Comissões de moradores."

48. Pérez, "Comissões de moradores."

the movement. Pedro Ramos Pinto calculates that one third of the commissions adopted truly radical stands.<sup>49</sup>

The government reacted to the occupations with threats. Newspaper headlines declared, "More abusive occupations of houses will not be admitted by the Junta of National Salvation."<sup>50</sup> Yet the population continued to disobey. One representative of the residents of a Lisbon neighbourhood with 400 shanties lacking water and electric light delivered the following letter to the Junta of National Salvation:

The people who occupied the neighbourhood of the Salazar Foundation consider this occupation an act of justice since every worker has the right to housing and to not live in miserable shacks at the same time as those who do not work live in luxury and opulence.

Construction of houses should be reinitiated.

Construction of drains, drinking water and, finally, in order of priority, electricity by the company, should be initiated by the Municipal government.<sup>51</sup>

The residents' movement acted both in the occupations of houses and around the question of rental prices. From May 1975 onward, housing activists in Setúbal generalized a campaign to impose a maximum price of 500 escudos for a one-bedroom apartment (at this time, the monthly minimum wage was 4,400 escudos). This struggle involved more than 1,500 families and resulted in the formation of a broad-based Council of Residents that would call private property into question. On 1 September 1975 this council, composed of tens of thousands of workers organized by workers', residents', and soldiers' commissions, approved one of the most radical demands in the struggle for decent housing, directly challenging the Land Law of 1965. The following was included in the approved proposal:

1. Nationalization or municipalization of urban land with the socialization of the large and medium-sized companies of civil construction. These nationalizations will be done without any compensation.
2. Total elimination of new licenses for luxury constructions.
3. Immediate development of social housing construction.
4. Immediate socialization of housing with the exception of family-owned houses.<sup>52</sup>

These more radical proposals would not be enacted, but there was a decrease and then a freeze in rental prices. The government soon legalized the majority of the occupations.

49. Pedro Ramos Pinto, "Urban Social Movements and the Transition to Democracy in Portugal, 1974–1976," *The Historical Journal*, 51 (No. 4 2008): 1025–1046.

50. *Diário Popular*, 11 May, 1974.

51. *Diário Popular*, 10 May 1974.

52. Dows, *Os Moradores à Conquista da Cidade*, 50.

## Self-management

“WHO NEEDS BOSSES?”<sup>53</sup> was a frequent question posed in January 1975. Nine months earlier, the question would have been considered heresy. The idea that the factory or company could be organized by the self-management of workers – or from April 1975 onward the question of complete workers’ control of the factories and workplaces – would have appeared to many workers as an impossibility before the revolution.

The Sousa Abreu textile factory was occupied in September 1974. The history of the Sousa Abreu occupation is representative of all occupations in the period. Yet in this case, the determinant issues would be layoffs and the galloping rate of unemployment that increased from 40,000 in April 1975 to 100,000 in December 1975.<sup>54</sup> Daily newspapers contained entire sections called “Work” that detailed the “fight against layoffs” (such coverage in the newspapers was abandoned in the 1990s and replaced with sections designated “Economics” and later “Economics and Business”).

With the threat of layoffs due to companies withdrawing capital and dismantling their plants, unionized workers often picketed and occupied the factory to guarantee their jobs and to ensure that the boss did not abscond with the machinery. In unorganized factories, the absence of hierarchical structures and leadership associated with traditional unions meant that workers often decided to proceed with the means at hand: they met in the factory and began to discuss and debate. Almost spontaneously, they would decide to elect representatives and form a workers’ commission.

At the Sousa Abreu factory, labour was confronted with the necessity of organizing its workplace and deciding on whether to follow what workers did in other factories and companies. The presence of a union may well have guided them somewhat, but the process of self-realization was paramount. On 30 July 1975, the public television network RTP visited the factory for a detailed story.<sup>55</sup> The video reveals the dynamics of plant occupations during the Portuguese Revolution. A smiling woman worker with a strong northern Portuguese accent explained for the camera how she did her job, where the thread came from, detailing the nature of the labour process. “I work here in the loom,” she says with an open smile, slightly embarrassed by being filmed. Another factory operative says that the idea to occupy the factory came from the union: “the president of the union, knowing that the [factory] would close, told us to occupy the installations because if not the boss would take away the raw material and would not pay overdue salaries nor severance.”

In July 1975, the following notice was posted at the factory entrance: “Work is not a commodity, it’s a right. We want to work to live and not live to work. For

53. *Esquerda Socialista*, 14 January 1975.

54. Eugénio Rosa, *A Economia Portuguesa em Números* (Lisboa: Moraes Editora, 1975).

55. Programa “Temas e Problemas,” 30 July 1975, Arquivo da RTP.

the capitalist, the worker is a machine. The capitalists are only interested in the workers because they produce profit...Against exploitation, right to work!"<sup>56</sup>

Everything began in earnest on 8 September 1974. When they learned of the layoffs, workers met at the factory, occupied it, and called a general assembly for 15 September when they elected three members for a workers' commission. Clara, a factory operative, told her story to the reporters: "In the beginning it was complicated. [pause] We were few, on the first night were very few. But we gradually increased, even gathering workers from other factories. We occupied the factory on September 8 and began to work starting on the 16<sup>th</sup>."

The philosopher Jean Paul Sartre, along with his companion, the feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, both of whom at the time were strongly influenced by Maoist ideas, were part of the multitude of painters, intellectuals, film makers, and photographers who visited the factory. Others who came included the journalist and writer Vázquez Montalban, the future Nobel laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and the Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado, who travelled throughout Portugal in 1974–75. After his March 1975 tour of the Sousa Abreu factory, where he witnessed the functioning of the workers' commission, Sartre wrote,

The thing that most interested me was certainly having visited the self-managed factory Sousa Abreu. It's a factory of about 30 textile workers. The workers were abandoned by the boss for six months and the greatest part of the factory equipment, except for the machines, was taken away by the boss to mount a factory on another site.

They were therefore alone, and decided to continue to work by self-managing themselves. They continued the jobs that they did before and the same workers continued who worked there before, with the exception of the secretaries and, evidently, the boss and a few workers who left of their own free will. Even so they increased production relative to the last period of the bosses since the factory was in crisis and full of debts.

A group of three to six workers was constituted to make general decisions. These decisions were made in the following way: the less important decisions were made by the group in question; the more important decisions were taken by an assembly of the whole factory which met and consulted about the decisions to be taken.<sup>57</sup>

Another heralded occupation, in which self-management was also introduced, occurred at the Sogantal factory. Owned by the French group A. Lammont, the plant produced track suits. It had been characterized in the period before April 1974 by low salaries and the absence of a union, factors contributing to what was described as a "very repressive work environment with traces of paternalism."<sup>58</sup>

The occupation at Sogantal began in May 1974. The women factory workers began to reduce the pace of work as a form of pressure to achieve their demands

56. Programa "Temas e Problemas", 30 de julho de 1975, Arquivo Histórico da RTP

57. Revista *História*, April 2004.

58. Pérez, "Contra a Exploração Capitalista. Comissões de Trabalhadores e Luta Operária na Revolução Portuguesa (1974–75)," 47.

against the company: one month of paid holidays; wage parity among various sectors of the factory; and increases for all workers of 1,200 escudos monthly. The company management reacted by closing the factory at the end of May. The workers immediately responded by demanding that the Ministry nationalize the factory and that the state pay their wages.

On 13 July, the administration and its Portuguese representative abandoned the installations. The factory was in the hands of the women operatives, who continued to work and sell the track suits they produced to schools and sympathetic unions. They received the support of parties and groups on the extreme left such as MES and the MRPP, as well as the local section of the PS and the Textile and Clothing Union of the South. Cultural icons including the popular musician José Afonso who endorsed the Sogantal women operatives.

There was total surprise at midnight on 24 August when the manager, Pierre Lardat, invaded the factory with a group of two dozen men and tried to seize the machines. Workers and supporters reacted furiously, battling the intruders. They forced open the entrance to the company and kept the boss and his men inside the factory. The Republican National Guard (GNR) found it difficult to calm the situation. Eventually, “the company intruders abandoned the factory protected by troops and booed and insulted by the demonstrators.”<sup>59</sup> From that point on, the factory was under the complete control of the workers, as self-management took a more aggressive turn:

From this point (August 24) we began to sleep inside the factory...We picketed while some workers remained in the factory and others went to sell the production to diverse companies and offices in various parts of the country. We published notes to divulge our struggle and due to this we were supported by diverse unions. It generated solidarity such that, even though they didn't need track suits, many people bought our product to help us. And all this money together was enough to pay our salaries. We managed to maintain the factory for more than a year, and meanwhile the self-management scheme was promoted to good effect, that is, other companies gave us work and we utilized materials to produce.<sup>60</sup>

According to a count made by the Confederation of Portuguese Industry (CIP) and systematized by the historian Miguel Pérez, “24 company occupations were registered in the last trimester of 1974 and 83, 55 and 14, respectively, in the first three trimesters of 1975.”<sup>61</sup> These are numbers that deserve to be analyzed with some caution since other sources show that the totals were much higher; many companies with five, twelve, or twenty workers were not registered by the CIP. Yet, there is an evolution in the number of occupations from July 1974 to March and April of 1975. After this period, many of the occupations were officially recognized by the state, adopted self-management

59. Pérez, “Contra a Exploração Capitalista. Comissões de Trabalhadores e Luta Operária na Revolução Portuguesa (1974–75),” 98–100.

60. Pérez, “Contra a Exploração Capitalista. Comissões de Trabalhadores e Luta Operária na Revolução Portuguesa (1974–75),” 98–100.

61. Pérez, “A mobilização operária anticapitalista na Revolução de 1974–75,” 6.

(frequently in conjunction with the state), and some arrived at a situation of workers' control, more likely to be realized within nationalized companies. In the private sector, metal working firms seemed particularly prone to be the site of self-management and workers' control.

Between 1974 and 1978, 626 companies were reconfigured along self-management lines; in addition, 319 cooperatives formed.<sup>62</sup> Occupations of companies and factories by workers were characterized by four determining developments:

1. Resistance to the decapitalization of companies threatening layoffs in the context of the worst economic crisis in the postwar period and an escalating rate of unemployment.
2. The absence of solid representative structures of workers with a defined hierarchy (unions) leading to the existence of a vacuum of power that created spaces for the emergence of rank-and-file workers' commissions.
3. The limits to the repressive power of the state in defence of private property due to the general crisis of the state and the revolt in the Armed Forces.
4. The existence of political groups with revolutionary programs, that is, an encounter between "utopia" and "history" through the impressive influence of leaders with Marxist ideas. Such figures, regardless of their different political currents, could be found in the universities, professional schools, and other educational and artistic milieu. They were, in general, strongly influenced by May 1968, the Cuban Revolution, and the Cultural Revolution in China. Such groups and their leaderships were theoretically "prepared" for revolution, or to be more realistic, enthusiastically "desired" revolution.

## Agrarian Reform

THE THEME OF AGRARIAN REFORM has produced the greatest number of studies in the historiography of the Portuguese Revolution. Scholars have focused on the geography, the chronology, the scope, the general politics of agrarian reform, and, especially, the dominant role of the PCP that organized the process. Highlights in this literature include the studies of Oliveira Baptista,<sup>63</sup> the agronomist and minister of agriculture in the fourth and fifth provisional governments in 1975; works by António Barreto, the sociologist and Minister of Agriculture for the PS in the first Constitutional Government who was responsible for the so-called Barreto Law<sup>64</sup> that began the process

62. Comissão Coordenadora das Empresas em Autogestão, *A Realidade da Autogestão em Portugal* (Lisboa: Perspetivas e Realidades, s/d).

63. Oliveira Baptista, *Portugal 1975. Os Campos* (Porto: Afrontamento, 1978).

64. Law n. 77/77, September 29, was approved in the Assembly of the Republic on August 10,

of dismantling agrarian reform; and research by Constantino Piçarra, who studied agrarian reform in the district of Beja, where the majority of land occupations occurred in 1974–75.<sup>65</sup>

There was frenetic activity on the land after the April coup of a kind that had not been seen since a wave of struggles in 1962.<sup>66</sup> The policy of the state, initially without a minister of agriculture and counting on a mere secretary, was directed by Esteves Belo and aimed to establish an efficient profit-producing capitalism on the land.<sup>67</sup> Yet, the state confronted massive resistance in the agricultural lands in the south of the country: demonstrations, strikes, and economic sabotage forced the government to seek out social peace, to intervene in conflicts, to implement legislative reforms enacted in October and November 1974, and, above all, through Law Decree 660/74 of 25 November 1974, to partially guarantee work for rural labourers. According to Constantino Piçarra, this dynamic generated a strong consciousness that agrarian reform was the only means of securing the stability of employment. Baptista wrote “situations related to unemployment, many times associated with the inefficient economic use of the land or still overdue salaries or attempts at decapitalization are at the base of the occupations.”<sup>68</sup>

Barreto shows that the first sporadic occupations occurred in November 1974. More occupations followed in January 1975, but still at a slow pace. Nonetheless, by February, seven times more land was occupied than in January.<sup>69</sup>

The great surge of occupations began in September 1975, when 60 per cent of all occupations occurred (see Table 4), leading to the consecration of what was known as the “Collective Units of Production” (UCP). The political principle that was the objective of the movement after ample debate was “to divide the workers on state land” instead of dividing the land by workers. Under this formula, agrarian reform was accomplished in Portugal under the direction and coordination of the PCP. The creation of the UCPS and the struggle for their financing was one of the concrete measures won by the PCP in their mobilizations during the fourth provisional government between September and October 1975.

---

1977 with votes in favour by the PS, the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) and the Democratic and Social Centre (CDS) with votes against by the PCP and the Popular Democratic Union (UDP).

65. Constantino Piçarra, *As Ocupações de Terras no Distrito de Beja. 1974–1975* (Coimbra, Almedina, 2008).

66. António Barreto, *Anatomia de uma Revolução. A Reforma Agrária em Portugal* (Lisboa: Europa-América, 1987).

67. Piçarra, *As Ocupações de Terras no Distrito de Beja. 1974–1975*.

68. Baptista, *Portugal 1975. Os Campos*, 25.

69. Barreto, *Anatomia de uma Revolução. A Reforma Agrária em Portugal*, 215.

Table 4 – Land occupation movement in the rural south, 1975\*.

Phases of the occupation movement	Beja (1) Area occupied in hectares	Évora (2) Area occupied in hectares	Portalegre (2) Area occupied in hectares	Alentejo (1) (total) Area occupied in hectares	Zira (2) (total) Area occupied in hectares
Ist Phase To 31/07/75	30,783	53,461	40, 144	124,338 (12.7%)	156,353 (13.5%)
2nd Phase 01/08/75– 30/09/75	53,915	213,098	9,910	276,923 (28.1%)	309,338 (26.6%)
3rd Phase 01/10/75– 31/12/75	233,420	164,232	183,857	581,509 (59.2%)	696,743 (59.9%)
<b>Total</b>	318,118	430,791	233,911	982,820 (100%)	1,162,434 (100%)

Constantino Piçarra, *As Ocupações de Terras no Distrito de Beja, 1974–1975*; Afonso Barros, *Do Latifúndio à Reforma Agrária: o caso de uma freguesia do Baixo Alentejo* (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1986)

\*Separate figures are given for Beja in Alentejo as well as the total area occupied for the Alentejo region. Figures are also included for the areas occupied in the districts of Évora and Portalegre as well as the totals for Zira (Zone of Intervention of the Agrarian Reform) of which they formed part.

In 1975–76, this agrarian reform increased the permanent number of hired workers from 11,100 to 44,100. The number of eventual jobs went from 10,600 to 27,800. Rain-fed cultivated land increased from 85,000 hectares before the occupations to 255,000 hectares one year later. Irrigated lands grew from 7,000 to 16,000 hectares. The number of tractors employed on the land rose from 2,630 to 4,150 and harvesting machinery from 960 to 1,720.<sup>70</sup>

Taking into account all the difficulties, especially the lack of access to financing, this was certainly the most important agrarian reform in the history of Portugal, provoking a central, yet partial, change in the mode of production:

70. B Oliveira Baptista, “O 25 de abril, a sociedade rural e a questão da terra,” in *O País em Revolução*, J. M. Brandão de Brito, ed., (Lisboa: Editorial Notícias, 2001), 183.

the maximization of employment substantially increased production, bringing cultivation to thousands of unused lots. This process also occurred in combination with advances in land rental politics, the extinction of free land concessions, and the devolution of common lands.

## Conclusion

TODAY, THERE ARE MANY MORE SOURCES on the Portuguese Revolution than were available and scrutinized in the 1970s, when the first studies of the workers' movements in this era of Portugal's history were published. The central question, however, is not the availability of sources, but how historians have interpreted the events. As Eric Hobsbawm argues in his essay on "History from Below,"

Many sources for the history of popular movements were only recognized as such because somebody asked a question and afterwards desperately searched for some material – any material – to respond to it. We cannot be positivists, believing that the questions and the answers naturally arise from the material studied.<sup>71</sup>

To investigate and understand the Portuguese Revolution on the basis of the social history of the workers' movement, the backbone of the revolution, in the words of Chris Harman,<sup>72</sup> is an option that in itself derives from a choice: the acceptance of the relative autonomy of theory, that is, the assumption that the documents do not "speak for themselves," as positivists would suggest or as postmodernists sometimes postulate. In other words, the historian begins with a theory to verify, ascertaining if it conforms or not to reality, aiming to explain historical developments, and elaborate on the factors that contributed to how events and processes unfolded.

The Portuguese Revolution was born out of the entrails of the military defeat of a regular army by guerilla movements supported by the peasants of Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique. This defeat, combined with the worst crisis in the history of postwar capitalism, beginning in 1973, set the stage for an intensification of class struggles. The workers' movement thus became a central actor in this moment of potential social transformation as the mid-1970s developed in a unique context of revolutionary possibility. To understand the revolution from a historiographical point of view implies recentring it in its real dimensions, that is, recuperating, investigating, knowing, cataloguing, and interpreting the myriad social conflicts that comprised the revolutionary process. This recentring also demands that we see *social subjects* (classes and their fractions) as the protagonists as opposed to approaches that see history through the prism of *representative subjects* (elites) that obscure social development and excise collective conflict from the historical process.

71. Eric Hobsbawm, *Sobre História* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1998), 220.

72. Chris Harman, *A People's History of the World* (London: Bookmarks, 1999).

In centring our analysis on social conflicts and on the relationship between the stability of the state and workers' and social movements (anchored in a non-restrictive notion of class as all those who live from work), we identify four periods which are central to understanding the Portuguese Revolution in 1974–75:

- a. Between April and September 1974, the revolution was distinguished by waves of social struggles in Portugal and in the colonies, including strikes or threats to desert by demoralized troops. In conjunction with the opposition of the MFA to continuing a debilitating thirteen year war in Portugal's African colonies, these insurgencies finally led to the fall of Spínola in September 1974. After this period, the popular front strategy of the PCP and the MFA, which dominated the third provisional government (a Popular Front government with social democratic, communist, and armed forces representation), aimed to stabilize the spreading workers' and social movements. This whole period was characterized by the conquest of democratic freedoms, by the permanence of social mobilization where the strike was the determinant form of action, and by the beginning of struggles against layoffs.
- b. Between September 1974 and February 1975, a second revolutionary period was marked by the struggle against layoffs that resulted in the generalization of workplace occupations and the formation of workers' commissions as a parallel form of power to the state. Factory and company occupations obliged the state to mobilize capital to maintain production, deepening the economic crisis.
- c. From February 1975 to September 1975, the period of workers' control was consolidated. The PS tried, through self-management and by reinforcing electoral legitimacy (elections for unions, regions, and municipalities, and the politics of convoking a Constituent Assembly) to subvert workers' control. The majority of the extreme left supported workers' control while the PCP attempted to counter it through nationalizations of companies and the militarization of popular movements with its manifesto "Document of the People-MFA Alliance." All governmental parties tried to end workers' control through the politics of the "battles for production," "reconstruction politics," and "national unity." Frustrated by their lack of success, in August these forces formalized the necessity for a rupture in the ailing government. Workers' control in this period would be characterized by the birth of embryonic structures of national coordination of organs of workers' and popular power such as the Revolutionary Committee of Workers, Soldiers and Sailors, the Committee of Struggle of Setúbal, the Coordination of Workers' Commissions in Metalwork, and the Workers' Commissions of the Industrial Belt of Lisbon. The coalition government formed in August

1975 – the fifth provisional government during the revolution – fell on September 19.

- d. September to November 1975 was a period of revolutionary crisis known as the “political-military crisis,” that is, the historical period of the revolution in which the workers take power or a coup ends the revolutionary process. This period was marked by the refusal of the bourgeoisie to accept what was expropriated from them, leading to a possible civil war. The state was unable to govern due to the strikes, demonstrations, and occupations, which defeated all their legislative and political measures. Dual power was generalized at all levels.

We consider that the revolutionary crisis only began in September 1975 since the crisis of the MFA, a phenomenon of the summer, resulted in a situation of dual power within the Armed Forces. The PS, allied with the right and the Group of Nine (moderate anti-socialist military leaders), decided to organize a coup to end the revolutionary process. The PCP tried to mobilize agrarian reform and (possibility) the independence of Angola under the leadership of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). The revolutionary left in the Armed Forces was based on the generalization of dual power within the military barracks, reflecting a general transformation of society. Neither they nor the organizations of workers’ and popular power were centralized enough at the national level or had a coherent political project sufficiently strong to organize “soviets” capable of resisting a coup. Thus, the revolution was defeated with the coup of 25 November 1975 when the only force with national power – the trade union federation *Intersindical* dominated by the PCP – failed to resist.