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From Anti-Colonial Revolutions to Revolution in the Metropolis

Raquel Varela

This article both describes and theorises the origins and course of the Portuguese revolution of 1974. It argues that it was intimately related to the anti-colonial revolution in the Portuguese African colonies of Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique both because the Portuguese Imperial structure that constituted a unity that once undermined in the colonies was rocked in the metropolis, and because of the military experience of a 13 year war. The primitive accumulation in the colonies required a dictatorial regime in the heartlands of the empire. The super-exploitation of the colonies needed the Salazar regime in Portugal itself. The latter slowly provided access to the basic elements of a contemporary existence but saw to it that working class and opposition organisations like unions were avoided or incorporated. When the revolution broke out on 25 April 1974, the moderating role of the unions was correspondingly absent. The article describes the unfolding of the revolution itself and shows the importance of control from below with workers’ commissions, and other forms of workers control, as well as the conjuncture of the global capitalist turning point with the defeat of the regular army in the colonies. It describes the course of the revolutionary years to the point of counter-revolution, bringing in the radical reforms in agriculture and industry.

Keywords: Dual Power; Social Revolution; Workers’ Commissions; Forced Labour; Stalinism; Counter-revolution

‘This is the people, this is the people, this is the people!’ Saint Benedict Square, 13 November 1975. It was here that the Constituent Assembly and the government were held hostage, surrounded by a mass of almost 100,000 people, the majority construction workers. The scenario is almost unreal: it was Europe, in sunny Lisbon, the disproportionately large capital of Portugal, the last colonial empire in history. If it were not for the helicopters, the hostages in the Saint Benedict palace, including the Prime Minister, would not even have received food or blankets. Outside there was a
gigantic demonstration of workers who elbowed each other and literally stood on top of each other on the palace steps with red flags and banners, yelling slogans.

Suddenly, a cement truck entered the square and crossed the mass of demonstrators who surrounded the Assembly and, with smiles and raised fists, they moved aside to let it pass. On top, there were two men. One of them wore jeans and an open shirt, had a cigarette in his mouth and smiled triumphantly for the crowd. With one hand on the cement mixer and the other raised, he yelled along with the other demonstrators: ‘This is the people! This is the people! This is the people!’¹

When he decided to suspend government functions on 20 November 1975 one week after the siege of the Constituent Assembly, Admiral Pinheiro de Azevedo, the Prime Minister of the VI Provisional Government—a government of class collaboration—(at the end of 16 months of revolution, five governments had already fallen), in his forthright and indiscreet style, confessed that the very state had been destabilised. Visibly irritated, he responded to a journalist’s question on the military situation: ‘The situation, as far as I know, is the same: first, [democratic] plenaries [of the soldiers] are held and afterwards orders are followed!’²

This was a classic situation of dual power—those at the top ‘could no longer continue as before’ and those below ‘no longer wanted to’. Indeed, the undermining of state and political power was symbolised by the physical besiegement of the government buildings. This was probably the moment at which the Portuguese Revolution came closest to insurrection, that is, the moment in revolutions in which the conquest of the state, under the leadership of workers, is possible.³

Go to Pidjiguiti, Guinea–Bissau, a Portuguese colony on the coast of West Africa, 16 years earlier. The colony was served by the merchant marine in the port of Bissau and alongside the port of Pidjiguiti for fishing boats and navigation within Guinea. On 3 August 1959 workers in the General Workshops began a strike that spread throughout the docks of Pidjiguiti. Among others, sailors who worked in cabotage services, such as those in the Casa Gouveia company, linked to the powerful CUF group (Companhia União Febril), the largest Portuguese industrial conglomerate, participated in the strike. The Portuguese authorities responded to the strike with brutal repression, as the Franciscan priest Pinto Rema reported:

Those revolting had paddles, sticks, iron bars, stones and spears. The two sides in confrontation did not cede, did not talk. In the first encounter, the two police chiefs, Assunção and Dimas, were savagely attacked after they had fired in the air. 17 guards were wounded in this skirmish. The police lost their self-control and began to shoot to kill in force without any consideration. In the end there were 13 to 15 dead spread out on the docks of Pidjiguiti. More bodies of sailors and

stevedores were dragged away by the waters of the Geba river, we don’t know how many. The historian Dalila Cabrita Mateus recounts that this was the strike that influenced the PAIGC (the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde) in an important party meeting to adopt an armed struggle strategy based on the peasantry:

A confidential report from this meeting, the ‘most decisive’ in the history of the PAIGC according to Cabral [a key guerilla leader], shows that the passage from nationalist agitation to a strategy of struggle for national liberation was prepared here, adopting three important deliberations: first, the shift of activity to the country, mobilizing the peasants; second, preparation for the armed struggle; third, the transfer of a part of the party leadership to the exterior.

The occupation of Saint Benedict Square in Lisbon was recorded by Robert Kramer for the film, Scenes of the Class Struggle. Member of an American Trotskyist political group, Kramer came to Portugal in 1975 to experience the Revolution as did thousands of young activists from all leftist political tendencies, including Maoists and followers of Che Guevara, who were known at the time as ‘Third Worldists’. The Revolution would be done without deaths in the metropolis and for this reason it infatuated the world. ‘I know that you are partying, man’, sang Chico Buarque, one of the most famous artists of MPB (Brazilian Popular Music) in a Brazil that still lived under the boots of a military dictatorship. This ‘party’ led many, precipitously, to speak with hindsight of a ‘revolution without deaths’, forgetting that the party in the metropolis came at the price of 13 years of horror in the colonies.

Portugal was the empire that most used various forms of forced labour in the most systematic way and for the longest time. Widely denounced in the press and by international agencies, forced labour brought with it all the ailments of the society of which it was part: poverty, non-existence of social mobility, family break-ups, mere subsistence agriculture, extreme income inequality (see Table 1) and a racist political police. As Dalila Cabrita Mateus exclaimed: ‘The PIDE [political police] in the colonies did not hassle whites, it only hassled blacks’. This polarisation contributed to transforming the majority of the peasant population into fearless supporters of the liberation movements.

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6 That is, linked to the anti-colonial revolutions.
7 Chico Buarque, ‘Tanto Mar’ (Song), 1975. The Brazilian military dictatorship governed the country from 1 April 1964 to March 1985.
Faustino and Chibilite, members of a mutual association for the Makonde people, insisted during the midnight hours of 11 June 1960 that they wanted to speak with the Portuguese authorities to negotiate the return of Makondes\(^{10}\) to Mozambique from Tanganyika,\(^{11}\) where they had achieved better rights. They would have returned with ‘\(uhulu\), that is, the power to live in freedom without forced labour\(^{12}\). For four days they pressured the Portuguese authorities and were soon followed by a growing number of men, women and children ‘on feet or bicycle’ who joined them in the territory of the Makondes. By the morning of 15 June, there were already 5,000 people participating in the protest. It is worth emphasising that almost 60 per cent of the salary of the Makondes who were forced to work in the gold mines of South Africa was directly delivered in gold to the Portuguese state. The state paid a part of the salaries of the workers in local money with the remainder going directly to the coffers of the metropole.\(^{13}\)

In response to the demands of the Makonde, the authorities responded on 15 June with a flurry of bullets, leaving 14 dead according to an official report and 150 according to Frelimo (the Mozambique Liberation Front), in what would become known as the Mueda Massacre: ‘After this, the Makonde wanted to wage war, showing themselves ready to follow Frelimo when the war was unleashed on September 25, 1964’.\(^{14}\)

In February 1961, the Portuguese Army reacted to a strike of cotton workers in Lower Cassange with the napalm bombing of the population. Situated in the north of Angola, this area was a cotton monoculture exploited in monopoly fashion by Cotonang, a company financed by Portuguese and Belgian capital: ‘The revolt was openly declared on January 4 when the foremen of Cotonang were held captive in the area controlled by the traditional regional authority Quivota about 10 km from the post of Milano … it was followed by a threat from the population that they would

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\(^{10}\) The Makonde is a Bantu ethnic group living in southeast Tanzania and northeast Mozambique, especially on the Mueda plateau.

\(^{11}\) Tanganyika in East Africa was a British colony whose name came from Lake Tanganyika, which formed its western border. It was a German colony between 1880 and 1919. After the First World War, it became a British colony until independence in 1961. In 1964, it was united with another ex-British colony, the Zanzibar Archipelago, to form the United Republic of Tanzania and is a member of the British Commonwealth.


attack anyone who forced them to work in the cotton fields and state services or pay the annual tax. Production was stopped for one month.

Constituting numerous groups, the rebels assaulted official and private installations, damaged roads, bridges and rafts, and destroyed a Portuguese flagstaff, but did not kill any Europeans. In more distant areas, such as in the posts of Luremo, Cuango and Longo, they were multiple instances of burned cotton seed hummocks, ripped-up registers of the native population and other signs of hostility. Gatherings of the population not only became more frequent, but more threatening. This was despite Cotonang showing its apprehension with the development of the revolt and European merchants making multiple calls for armed intervention to end the uprising.

It is always difficult to hear the first shot of a war. Yet historians are compelled to investigate such histories even when the task is difficult. How many times have the roots of social explosions remained subterranean for a long time? Many authors situate the beginning of the colonial war in Angola on 4 February 1961 when the MPLA (the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola) attacked the prisons in Luanda. However, 4 Februaryannot be explained without studying the massacre in Lower Cassange that Dalila Mateus classifies as a ‘general rehearsal for the colonial war’.

In the Lower Cassange massacre, 10,000–20,000 peasants were killed. From then on nothing would be as it was before. Portugal would confront a 13-year war of resistance that began at this moment.

Forced labour in the Portuguese Empire would last until 1974. As the workers were rooted to the land and labour was scarce, the only way to put people tied to subsistence production on the land to work in the mines of Mozambique or the cotton plantations in Angola was to make it compulsory. A fundamental characteristic of the Portuguese Empire, the historian Perry Anderson wrote, was forced labour. He baptised this ‘ultracolonialism’. Basil Davidson notes that there were a total of 2 million and 94 thousand forced labourers (among the condemned, the contracted and migrants) in the Portuguese Empire. Without forced labour, there would be no New State in Portugal.

This form of accumulation by exploitation could not exist without a dictatorship, suitably efficacious to generate a workforce and impede production stoppages or the struggle for wage increases. It was ‘primitive accumulation of capital’ in the words of Karl Marx in one of the best-known chapters of *Capital*, that is, it was a typical

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16 Freudenthal, op. cit., p. 263.
The process of the dispossession of the peasants, forcibly torn from their lands. The accumulation (in gold!) was directly transferred to the coffers of the metropolis and ended up financing the big conglomerates that were at the forefront of the modernising march of Portuguese capital, accomplished under the boots of the Salazar dictatorship. Since this modernisation was delayed, the proletariat had already been sufficiently developed to not accept modernisation without the explosion of social conflicts, as had been demonstrated during the Republican period (1910–1926). In short, the dictatorship was necessary to accumulate capital through the disciplining of the workforce.

The New State—the Bonapartist dictatorship that lasted from 1930 to 1974—aimed for the controlled incorporation of the proletariat in public life, slowly giving the working class access to education, healthcare, etc., and thus generating consensus, but also using coercion (dictatorship) when necessary. For instance, the core of the union movement—the best and most combative leaders—had either been eliminated or incorporated by the Republic. This proletariat that submitted itself to and accepted the New State was politically decapitated; there was also a whole rural world with support for the state, but without its own organisations. This explains the incorporation of the proletariat into the political order, guaranteeing the social sustenance of capitalist modernity. Together with these developments, there was a process of exodus—and rural expulsions—as well as urbanisation which from the 1950s onwards and especially in the 1960s witnessed the peasant masses migrating to the city. A considerable part of these agrarian migrants were miserably poor, but they encountered in the city a combination of social mobility, employment and consumption that acted as a social ‘elevator’.

Cheap raw materials arrived from the colonies: while they were produced with low labour productivity, they were also profitable since they were based on cheap labour costs, conceptualised as super exploitation, an equilibrium that was sustained in turn by low wages in the metropole. The colonies were also a social escape valve, offering social mobility to those who, rather than going to France to work in Renault factories, preferred to be small proprietors in Angola even if they had to comply with the barbarity of the colonial endeavour and public deference to the PIDE political police, for example, when an agent entered a hotel or a public place in Africa colonised by Portugal.

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21 The concept of overexploitation of labour was defended by the Brazilian Ruy Mauro Marini in the late 1960s and 1970s in a body of work that included *Diáletica da Dependência* (1973). For Marini, the national bourgeoisie of the peripheral countries became minority shareholders with transnational capital and divided the surplus value generated internally with them. To compensate for this lower participation in the distribution of accumulation, the national bourgeoisie used extraordinary mechanisms for exploitation of the labour force, aimed at raising the surplus value extracted from work, leading workers, among other things, to exhaustion. For a recent adaptation in English, see Amanda Latimer, 'Superexploitation, the Race to the Bottom and the Missing International' in S.M. Bà and I. Ness(eds) *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

In fact, the regime may be characterised as unequal and combined, merging primitive accumulation with advanced capitalism. Raw materials were imported, for example, from South African mines with an apartheid labour regime while cutting-edge engineering from Sweden—the vanguard of social democracy and the welfare state—was used to manufacture motors for the Lisnave shipbuilding firm in Portugal. The newly built ship that left the dockyards for the Tejo River, with all the pride of its workforce, many of whom were refugees from the poor region of Alentejo, brought with it progress, but also all the human disgraces that comprised the model of modern capitalist accumulation. Thus, underdevelopment was part of the very advance of this regime; modernisation incorporated economic, political and social backwardness.

This polarisation transformed the majority peasant population into fierce supporters of the liberation movements, a fact that accounts for both their force and the weakness of the Portuguese Army, leading in the last instance to the very coup by young military officers on 25 April 1974. It was from the colonies and not from the centre, from the periphery to the metropolis, that freedom eventually came. As the Third International predicted, it was a transposition of anti-colonial revolutions to the central metropolis. Everything was certainly delayed in the Portuguese case owing to the weak character of the bourgeoisie and a fragile state. Vietnam was influential for the civil rights movement and Watergate as was the Algerian War for May 1968, but the French and American ruling classes, especially the latter, were able to control the advance of the working classes.

In 1975, the Portuguese bourgeoisie fled, some of them actually leaving the country, during one of the strongest processes of workers’ control in history in a small Western European country. US President Gerald Ford said that it could transform the whole Mediterranean ‘in a red sea’ if the Francoist regime in Spain or the dictatorship of the coronels in Greece could not manage successful transitions. This alteration in the forces of power could even have had an impact on England in the 1970s since its first neoliberal efforts were delayed for a decade due to the crises in the south of Europe.

The fall of the regime in Portugal resulted in a European colonial country with a social structure that combined vibrant industrialisation and a ruling class that took the first steps toward internationalisation with a people maintained by low wages, ignorance and backwardness. One commentator opined that Portugal at the time was a type of an ‘Atlantic Albania’ where:

Divorce was suppressed, where (many) books, films and songs were prohibited, where the arts were censured, 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

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23 The theory of unequal and combined development was developed by Trotsky. In particular, see História da Revolução Russa (São Paulo: Sundermann, 2012).

24 Lisnave, for example, belonged to the powerful Companhia União Fabril (CUF) which was founded in the 1960s by Portuguese, Swedish and Dutch capital.
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.25

This was a country where 30 per cent of the population in the capital city was illiterate, where there was no universal suffrage, no system of universal social welfare, where 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 visiting relatives in the hospital and the selling of blood for needy patients: ‘Blood is not to be sold or bought, it’s given!’26 Finally, even taking into account countries such as Greece and Spain, Portugal was at the top of the list for the lowest salaries in Europe.27

The date 25 April 1974 was the most important date in Portugal in the 20th century for these reasons. It ended one country and inaugurated another. This ‘other country’ was the kind expression of the film director Sérgio Tréfault who directed a film using original footage from other foreign directors and photographers from the Magnum photographic agency who visited Portugal ‘in search of the revolution’ where soldiers wore beards and demonstrated on the streets. The force of the Portuguese Revolution has also been singularly important as a counterpoint to the Chilean example. Indeed, the former has been widely forgotten in the academic milieu since it has always been better to highlight bloody defeats such as the Pinochet coup in Chile rather than the partially victorious revolution in Portugal.

The French conservative poet, Paul Valéry, said that politics was the art of preventing people from busyng themselves with what is their own business. A revolution is exactly the contrary. It is that extraordinary moment when people decide to take their own lives in their hands: when they decide where and how they will work, who they will accept as leaders, where they will live, what schools in which their children will study. Thousands, millions of people who live from their labour who for years, sometimes for decades, accept everything that is decided by others are suddenly transformed from one moment to another, deciding for themselves. This is a difficult, but beautiful birth. The renowned photographer Sebastião Salgado once said that the biggest difference in Portugal before and after April, 1974 was the happiness of the people!

The empire collapsed late, but its ossified structure resulted in the most important social rupture in post-war European history: the social explosion that followed the

26 Interview by the author, 24 February 2012.
coup by the Movement of the Armed Forces (MFA) was so deep and lasting that until today historians have not been able to completely account for how many workers’ actions there were in the first week since there were hundreds, maybe thousands, of diverse mobilisations that emerged across the country.

Anachronistic, suffering from a brutal colonial war and the freezing of social mobility, the country could offer little to its youth. Indeed a million and half people emigrated from the country, especially to Central Europe, between 1960 and 1974. The Empire led the Portuguese state close to military and financial collapse until a movement of military captains initiated a military coup that ended the colonial war.

On 24 April 1974, around 10 p.m., Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho arrived at the Command Post of the Armed Forces, a prefabricated shed situated in the north of Lisbon in the I Engineering Regiment of Pontinha. The small windows were covered with grey blankets so that the lights would not raise suspicions. The scenario was sparse: there were four wooden desks, a few telephones and a map with the position of the military units. There were also six men—the Lieutenant Coronels Nuno Fisher Lopes Pires and Garcia dos Santos, the Majors Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho, Sanches Osório and Hugo dos Santos and the Lieutenant Captain Vítor Crespo—aide by Capitain Luis Macedo. Their plan for a military coup was above all based on army units, which divided the national territory in two—north of the River Douro would be under the command of Eurico Corvacho and the ‘rest of the country’ would be under the command of Otelo. The tension was high in the Command Post. In the previous month, a frustrated coup attempt had led to the imprisoning of some soldiers from the movement and, after all, the regime, this dictatorial ‘long night’, had already lasted 48 years.

At 12:20 a.m. the password for the revolt was broadcast: it was the song by José Afonso, ‘Grandola, Vila Morena’ on the radio programme Limite of Radio Renascença. This song would become the musical symbol of the Revolution, among other reasons, for its lyrics allusion to ‘fraternity’, ‘equality’ and the land ‘where it is the people who give the orders’. At 3 a.m., when there was almost no transit on the roads, the military columns began to move. Soon after, the MFA took control of RTP, the public service broadcasting organisation, the Portuguese Radio Club, the National Broadcaster, the headquarters of the Military Region of Lisbon and the headquarters of the Military Region of Porto.

28 In the survey, I organised with Alejandro Lora and Joana Alcântara, we recorded 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.


30 The Marines and the Paratroopers did not adhere to the coup, but refused to act against the MFA. The Air Force was neutral yet a group of its officers took part in the occupation of operations of the Radio Club. Victor Crespo, a Lieutenant Commander in the Navy, tried unsuccessfully until the last minute to convince the Marines to join the coup.

31 ‘Long night’ was the metaphor used by the writer and revolutionary Victor Serge to describe German fascism and the Second World War.
Around 3 a.m., the Command Post intercepted the following conversation between the Minister of the Army, Alberto de Andrade e Silva, and the Minister of Defense, Silva Cunha. Andrade e Silva told Cunha: ‘I ask that you do not worry since everything is fine and there is no problem at any point in the country’.\(^{32}\) Andrade e Silva was as distant from reality as the Russian Tsarina in 1915: when the Duma was dissolved, she limited herself to only write in her diary of the ‘delicious swims in the sea’, the hunts and the taste of her tea.\(^{33}\) Or as distant as the editorial in the French newspaper *Le Monde* on the eve of May 1968 that proclaimed ‘France is boring!’\(^{34}\)

At 4 a.m. control of the airport was the last objective of the MFA—it took longer than expected since the forces of the EPI (Practical School of Infantry) of Mafra, a town one hour outside of Lisbon, had become lost on the way. Yet Captain Costa Martins had already successfully bluffed the forces at the Aerodrome Base I that they were surrounded, stopping all traffic in Portuguese air space at 4:20 a.m.

The best-known column of the military coup was commanded by Captain Salgueiro Maia. His function was not to take over military units, but above all to attract the units loyal to the regime to the Terreiro do Paço on the banks of the Tejo River in the centre of Lisbon. A little after 1 a.m., Salgueiro Maia woke his troops up in the Practical School of the Calvary in Santarém and ordered them to take up their formation. Here he gave a speech which has become famous:

> There are various forms of states: the socialist states, the capitalist states and the state we are in. Now, in this solemn night, we are going to end this state. So that anyone who wants to come with me, we go to Lisbon and finish it. This is voluntary. Who does not want to leave is not obliged and can stay here.\(^{35}\)

Every soldier volunteered.

When large crowds of people arrived at the National Republican Guard headquarters at Carmo where the dictator Marcelo Caetano and his cabinet were taking refuge, Lisbon and, soon after the whole world, rejoiced. Everything was filmed and today there are hundreds of hours of footage in the archive. Marcelo Caetano, Salazar’s successor, begged the revolting soldiers to at least appoint a general to power, demonstrating that the longest European dictatorship of the 20th century had come to a humiliating end.

Basil Davidson, one of the most prominent historians of Africa and a lover of this tormented continent, was in Angola in the 1950s where he witnessed the terrible conditions of forced labour. He would later write a humble balance of anti-colonial struggles in Africa:


\(^{34}\) ‘France is boring’ was an expression that became famous from an article by Pierre Viansson-Ponté in *Le Monde*, 15 March 1968.

\(^{35}\) Leiria, op. cit.
People even talked of a ‘new Africa’ and yet it did not sound absurd. A whole continent seemed to have come alive again, vividly real, bursting with creative energies, claiming its heritage in the human family.\(^{36}\)

This humanity was also present in the people of Lisbon, who could celebrate 25 April as the day of liberation from 48 years of dictatorship, the ‘initial, entire and clean’ day in the word of the Portuguese poet, Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen.

**The First Revolution of the 21st Century?**

The Portuguese Revolution had four determining characteristics that can help us explain the wide scope of the social rupture. Even though it occurred in a small country, it represented an unprecedented moment of workers’ control and disruption of the accumulation process in the context of mid-1970s Europe:

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 occurred simultaneously with the gravest economic crisis of capitalism in the post-war 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 dictatorship of the New State, was a motivating factor in the radicalization of the Revolution since the lack of such organizations in the majority of factories and companies in the country led to the spontaneous opening up of spaces for the emergence of democratic, rank-and-file workers’ commissions.

The Portuguese Revolution was marked by the protagonism of a strong workers’ and social movement that affected all sectors of Portuguese society, especially, but not only, the working class. Beyond traditional industrial and rural workers directly linked to the production of value, the Portuguese Revolution was characterised by highly radicalised social conflicts (strikes, demonstrations and occupations) involving students, workers in the modern service sector and employees in the informal sector as well as the ample participation of 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 organised workers.

Social conflicts in Portugal in 1974–1975 were also noticeably national in scope, occurring in all cities and rural areas. In these two years, Muñoz registered 858 separate conflicts in companies and factories, 300 of which occurred between May and June of 1974. With the exception of July and August 1974, every month in these two years witnessed at least 100 conflicts each. According to this author, the majority of social conflicts were organised by the workers’ movement: 19 per cent in the textile sector; 15 per cent in machine production and metal workers; 9 per cent in construction and public works; and 7 per cent in the chemical and food processing industry, among others. Conflicts sprung up 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.

A survey of the strikes, occupations (workplaces and houses) and demonstrations shows that the absolute and evolutionary pattern is, however, distinct. Social struggles peaked following the events of 25 April 1974, again from February 1975 (therefore there was an explosion of social conflicts before March) and finally from August 1975 onwards.

These social conflicts may be divided into three types: strikes, demonstrations and housing and workplace occupations that involved 3 million people organised in organisms of dual power—residents’ commissions, workers’ commission and soldiers’ commissions. My qualitative analysis to follow highlights strikes, the movement of housing occupations and social struggles against the closing of factories and in favour of workers’ control.

If a strike always objectively questions the private ownership of the means of production—since it is a collective action organised as an expression of the contradiction between capital and labour, that is, it questions who is in control of the company, the workers or the bosses—then from a subjective point of view strikes in Portugal since the beginning of the New State rarely signified a conflict against capitalism. The demands were almost always economic. However, during the Carnation Revolution between 25 April 1974 and 25 November 1975 this situation was altered with a significant part of strikes involving subjective 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.

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39 There were strikes that questioned the New State regime (e.g. the strikes against electoral fraud in 1958 after the campaign of Humberto Delgado), but they never questioned the nature of the capitalist state.
The second half of May was marked by the radicalisation of social conflicts. The First Provisional Government was formed on 16 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 May 24 to approve a minimum monthly wage of 3,300 escudos, which fell well short of that demanded by workers, provoked the eruptions of even more strikes and workplace occupations. The majority of the workers’ movement demanded minimum wages above 4,000 or even 6,000 escudos.

In the five weeks between 25 April and 1 June 1974, 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 in total 100 strikes or threats to strike. The majority, 58 strikes, occurred in industry and in 35 of these strikes there were also occupations of workplaces. In four of the work stoppages, there were kidnappings of bosses or equipment.

Research by Maria de Lurdes Santos et al. demonstrates that the majority of demands in these strikes revolved around wage increases, minimum wages, participation in company profits and the right to 13th and 14th monthly salaries. 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.

Maria Luísa Cristovam published a comparative study of strike demands in 1979—after the end of the Revolution—and of the strikes in 1974 and 1975. She concluded that during the two years of the Revolution between 15 and 22.7 per cent of strike demands were related to control and power in the workplace and company while in 1979 only 3.7 per cent of strikes centred on management questions. Moreover, in the 1974–1975 strikes related to salary increases, 39.8 per cent of the total number of strikes was distinguished by a profoundly egalitarian character with demands for equal salary increases for all workers, reduction in the range of salary levels and constitution of a national minimum wage. 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 de 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:

42 Maria de Lurdes Santos et al., O 25 de abril e as Lutas Sociais nas Empresas, 3 vols (Porto: Afrontamento, 1976).
44 Ibid., p. 76.
22. The maximum salary for all workers [including managers] at Timex will be 16,000 escudos. All salaries lower than this figure will be frozen until they are affected by the current [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 May 27, 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.45

One of the types 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 most emblematic strikes of August 1974 (such as 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 civil construction, for example. Yet solidarity strikes also occurred in distinct companies and among different professional groups in the same company. An example of this was in May 1974 when 350 metal and concrete workers at the shipyards of Alverca-Intento in the industrial zone in Vila Franca de Xira, north of Lisbon, struck against their employer. Soon after, administrative workers in Lisbon, Revim, Porto and Portimão in the same company paralysed activities, elevating to 700 the total number of workers on strike. The solidarity strikers declared: ‘No return to work if the company does not correspond to their desire for a salary increase’.46

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’.47

It is also important to emphasise that in these strike movements during the Revolution the poorest and most oppressed sectors of the working class also participated. In Miraflores 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% paid holidays, right to strike, Christmas bonus paid 8 days before,

46 Diário Popular, 14 May 1974, 23.
47 Ibid.
classification of all employees with the obligation to immediately integrate them into the union as effective members.48

In this company, construction workers earned 2,600 escudos per month before the strike. It is worth noting that they were also explicitly ‘inspired by the process of the workers of Torralta (Troia)’ and that they aimed ‘to spread the strike movement to other companies in the sector, notably in the Algés zone’.49

In the first months of the Revolution—and since the impression was generalised we have access to hundreds of thousands of written sources, images, murals, photographs and films—we should also highlight in the context of the workers’ movements the question of justice in relation to the dictatorship. In the strike wave of the first few months of the revolution, a primordial 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 and this is 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 connotations related to hygiene, health and cleanliness.

Political purges affected 20,000 people in the 19 months of the revolution. They occurred in companies that constituted the spinal column of the workers’ movement—naval industries, air transport and communications—but also in hundreds of small companies such as workshops, laundries, tailors’ and seamstresses’ shops. In February 1975, less than one year since the dictatorship was deposed, official sources counted 12,000 people who had been suspended or fired from their previous positions by legal or illegal means against the official moderate recommendations of the PCP and the PS.50 Articulated by workers’ commissions in the majority of cases, such demands multiplied throughout various social sectors with the strongest presence in the universities and schools and less expressive in the Justice system. 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.51

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
51 República, 4 May 1974, p. 1.
The settling of scores with the old regime also resulted in the reintegration of those who were politically persecuted during the New State dictatorship. In May, the bank workers demanded the readmission of ‘fired bank workers’. Less than a week later, various plenary meetings at the universities—where the extreme left constituted a vanguard and counted on thousands of activists and sympathisers—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 the most distinguished Portuguese geographer, Professor Orlando Ribeiro, decided ‘to propose the immediate cancellation of all pending disciplinary processes and the reintegration of all students affected by such sanctions’.

The philosopher Jean Paul Sartre along with his wife, the feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, both of whom at the time were strongly influenced by Maoist ideas, were part of the myriad painters, intellectuals, film makers and photographers—including the journalist and writer Vásquez Montalban, the future Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez and the Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado—who visited Portugal in 1974–1975. Sartre would bequeath a testimony in March 1975 after his visit to the Sousa Abreu factory where he witnessed the functioning of the Workers’ Commission:

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.

Between 25 April 1974 and 1978, there were 626 worker-controlled companies and 319 cooperatives.

In 1975–1976, the changes in agricultural policies that would be known, as a whole, as 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

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52 Diário de Lisboa, 12 May 1974.
53 República, 4 May 1974, p. 2.
54 Revista História, April 2004.
55 Comissão Coordenadora das Empresas em Autogestão, A Realidade da Autogestão em Portugal (Lisboa: Perspetivas e Realidades, s/d).
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 increased from 2,630 to 4,150 and the number of harvesting machines from 960 to 1,720.\textsuperscript{56}

Taking into account all the difficulties of such reforms—the majority after all only came to fruition at the end of 1975 and still suffered from lack of access to financing—this was certainly the most important agrarian reform in the history of Portugal, provoking a crucial, yet partial, change in the mode of production: the maximisation 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. Profits were reduced owing to these policies, but not the wealth produced by those who were now workers in cooperatives and collective units of production.

The development of workers’ control after February 1975 is one of the factors that explains the nationalisation of Portuguese banks and the big companies owned by them. In the Portuguese case, it was not limited to nationalisation, but involved an actual expropriation since there was no compensation. The nationalisations and the political crisis after 11 March 1975 would breathe new life into the movement for workers’ control since various companies from the largest economic sectors under workers’ control were also nationalised.

What began on 25 April as a coup was the seed for a social revolution (that would transform production relations), initially launched as a democratic political revolution (which would change the political regime). This democratic revolution did not wait for the election of a Constituent Assembly: in a few days or weeks, the political regime of the dictatorship was completely dismantled and replaced by a democratic regime. It was the last European revolution to call into question the private ownership of the means of production, resulting in the transfer, according to official statistics, of wealth from capital to labour in the order of 18 per cent and permitting the right to work and salaries above that required for biological reproduction (above that of ‘working to survive’) as well as universal and egalitarian access to education, healthcare and social security.

The extent of the division of society into classes and awareness of this division in 1974 and 1975 had a historical dimension. Workers saw themselves as such and were proud of it. The word ‘socialism’ was trivialised since a belief in the possibility of change was widespread. García Márquez landed at Portela Airport on the first day of June 1975, from Rome: ‘I had the feeling of being able to live again the youthful experience of a first arrival. Not only for early summer in Portugal and the smell of seafood, but also by the winds and the air of a new freedom that breathed everywhere’. García Márquez described Lisbon—which he called ‘the largest village in the world’—through the intense social life and the socialising that was lived in it, a

militant city, a city that did not sleep: ‘Everyone talks and no one sleeps, at four in the morning on Thursday there was not a vacant taxi. Most people work without schedules and without breaks, although the Portuguese had the lowest wages in Europe. They schedule meetings for late at night, offices keep their lights on until the midnight hours. If anything could wreck this revolution it would be the electricity bill’.57

Manuel Vazquez Montalban was in Lisbon just after the coup. A future writer of world renown, at the time he wrote chronicles for TeleExpress in Barcelona when Spain was still suffering under the Francoist dictatorship: ‘Paco Ibañez, Patxi Andion and a new Catalan song are present on radio and television and the same is true of Spanish politicians and democratic intellectuals who flock to Portugal powered by a slogan: “This is the first revolution that we can go to by car”. If leisure tourism was one of the first sources of foreign exchange in fascist Portugal, political tourism will replace it in the democratic Portugal … the hotels are filled with voyeurs of freedom’.58

It was probably one of the rare moments in the history of the country (it also happened to sectors of the labour movement during a part of the First Republic), in which large swathes of workers were proud to be so. That is, there was a social force to impose a culture that would question the hegemonic ideology of the worker as someone who works because there are others—very smart—who manage production for them: the ideology of ‘companies create jobs’. This was totally reversed in the Revolution: workers attained the cultural centrality that corresponded to their economic role.

The Victory of the Anti-colonial Revolutions and the Myth of the ‘Revolution without Deaths’

After successive preliminary meetings and a final meeting yesterday afternoon at the Faculty of Sciences, attended by Angolans and others from the colonies who live in Lisbon, as well as numerous progressive young students, participants of the meeting went to the House of Angola [government colonial office], whose premises were occupied. Later a military force arrived and after learning of the reasons for the occupation, withdrew. United in general assembly, the Angolans elected a provisional leadership commission and approved a motion of support for their brothers, who with arms in their hands, were fighting colonialism, associating this salutation, not only with the MPLA, but with all movements in the colonies fighting for independence.59

In these months many other anti-colonial protests arose in the form of general assemblies, demonstrations, occupations and protests when soldiers were embarking for the colonies. They were essentially led by far-left groups and students.

57 Diário de Notícias, 3 May 2013.
The independence of the colonies was eventually achieved through the intersection of various factors that included the crisis in the army, reflected in the divisions among generals, the refusal of officials to continue the war and the demoralisation of the soldiers, whose deaths continued to occur after 25 April in areas where the war continued. The political crisis fed the military crisis and vice versa. In the international context of the Cold War, the capitalist countries and the USSR took advantage of opportunities to directly exploit the colonies without having to split the share of profits with Portuguese capital. However, it was not by chance that there was a combination of social struggles in the metropolis, such as the strikes that weakened the government that were not directly related to the colonial wars, and the protests that directly questioned the colonial war, largely organised by students and the extreme left. Moreover, it is also necessary to discuss the strikes and work stoppages in Angola and Mozambique in this period, so often forgotten, which served as examples for other workers in the region, including South Africa.

A wave of strikes arose in May 1974 in companies and sectors of public administration in Angola and Mozambique in the cities of Luanda, Lobito, Lourenço Marques, Beira and Vila Pery.

Rail traffic on the Benguela line from Lobito to the border is completely paralyzed (...) The Railway Workers’ Union ordered a strike of all employees of the Benguela Railway Company in order to force the achievement of a collective bargaining agreement for which the railway workers have fought for a long time.

This strike, in addition to affecting the Angolan economy also equally affects neighboring countries, in particular Zaire and Zambia.60

The mythical Benguela railway linked the port of Lobito in the Atlantic to the interior of the country. Construction began in 1899 by the also legendary explorer Cecil Rhodes at the beginning of the colonisation of the interior of the territory. He died in 1902 and the line would be completed by his friend Robert Williams in 1929. It proved to be very profitable since it was the shortest way to bring the mineral wealth of the Congo within the African continent to the Atlantic and then through the maritime trade routes to Europe.

However, the strikes were not confined to the transport sector. On 15 May 1974 in Lourenço Marques, Mozambique the workers of the daily newspaper O Diário also went on strike as well as suburban transport workers, who threatened to stop production if the ‘immediate resignation of the management’ was not undertaken.61 Two days later, the city faced a general strike situation. The tugboat workers of the port at Lourenço Marques, who worked up to 24 hour shifts without overtime pay, struck on 17 May. Workers at the Machava cashew factory refused a salary increase from 37 to 45 escudos. They demanded 200 escudos. At the Colonial Rubber Factory, where average salaries were 800 escudos, the workers demanded an increase to 2500

60 Diário Popular, 29 May 1974, p. 11.
escudos. On the same day, the railway lines between South Africa, Rhodesia and Swaziland were closed owing to a strike by 3000 railway workers.62

In Lobito, the workers at the Sorefame company struck and remained in the workplace, demanding 'better wages and better working conditions'.63 Luanda also seemed 'to be on fire'. Rosa Coutinho, the newly appointed president of the Governing Board of Angola, took some time to realise where the violent unrest had come from: 'The first reaction that I found in Luanda was the expulsion of the canteen owners from the slums. Luanda looked like it was on fire. Houses were burned. The revolt of the people against the small merchants created problems later because they no longer had supplies'.64

Canteens during the colonial regime were controlled by white or black settlers. Most of them were informants for the PIDE since a political police permit was necessary to have a canteen: 'The degree of exploitation was such that sugar was not sold by the pound, but by the spoon ... even sewing thread was not sold by spools, but by the meter'.65

The struggles of the emerging labour movement in the colonies joined other long-standing strains of the regime in Portugal in relation to the anti-colonial revolutions. The most obvious was the refusal to go to war. Fernando Cardeira, an official deserter who lived in Sweden, spoke to PAIGC Radio during the dictatorship: 'I appeal especially to those who know me best, the officers who were my students in Mafra ... I speak to you to tell you, once again, that this is a criminal war in which you participate. It is a war against a people fighting for their independence and freedom'.66

The number of Portuguese military personnel per capita in the colonial wars was only surpassed by that of the Israeli armed forces. Yet in 13 years nearly 200,000 men failed to report for enlistment. In a study by the General Staff of the Army, desertion from military service was massive and growing: in 1961 the percentage of absentees was 11.6 per cent; in 1962 it had climbed to 12.8 per cent; in 1963, it amounted to 15.6 per cent; in 1964 it rose to 16.5 per cent; between 1965 and 1968 it was around 19 per cent; and between 1970 and 1972, it had reached 21 per cent.67 The main reason for desertion was the refusal to fight, more or less politicised, and also the alternative of emigration as Europe at the time was ‘calling’ workers from the South to work in industrial reconstruction and development after the Second World War.

The historian Rui Bebiano recounted what he witnessed in 1970 during the screening of the militaristic film ‘The Green Berets’ with John Wayne: the movie goers united in a cry of ‘Down with the colonial war’. He also remembered: ‘The huge

63 Diário Popular, 29 May 1974, p. 11.
64 Dalila Cabrita Mateus, Memórias do Colonialismo e da Guerra (Lisboa: Edições Asa, 2006), p. 150.
65 Ibid.
ovation for the bassist Charlie Haden at the Cascais Jazz Festival in 1971 when he dedicated the “Song for Che” to the struggle for the independence of the colonies from Portugal, something which incidentally earned him an immediate expulsion from the country.68

Charlie Haden, one of the most famous American bassists, known for his melodic bass lines, founded the Liberation Music Orchestra with Carla Bley in 1971. Their first album dealt with the Spanish Civil War. His courage in Portugal led to his arrest by the PIDE at the airport; he was released through the intervention of the US embassy, and then in the United States, he was questioned by the FBI.

The revolution was determined by the intersection of anti-colonial struggles and the eruption of struggles in the metropole. The situation in the metropolis reinforced the legitimacy of the liberation movements in the colonies and precipitated their independence in a short time (within 19 months all the former colonies would become independent).

As Kenneth Maxwell argues, what occurred in Lisbon, Luanda and Maputo was indissociable:

The crises which moved Portugal decisively to the left also moved Portuguese Africa equally decisively toward independence. They appeared as a series of sometimes lengthy struggles in which political tensions in Portugal, developments in Africa, and external pressures combined to force major confrontations. During these crises, the most politically sophisticated Portuguese were well aware of their underlying causes. But also never did these surface in the Portuguese press, and even when they did it was mostly by insinuation. Only when the crises were over and the consequences patent—the resignation of Premier Palma Carlos on June 9 and the appointment of General Coronel Vasco Gonçalves in his place; the resignation of General Spinoza on September 30 and his replacement by General Costa Gomes—were any of these crises publicly discussed by outsiders. No one involved, however, ever doubted that the shape and content of the political future of Portugal and the achievement of independence in the colonies were intimately linked. The outcome of the struggle in one sphere would help to consolidate victory or bring defeat in the other.69

However, history is not memory; it is necessary to record it.

In Portugal today, next to the Belem Tower, the symbol of the ‘Discoveries’ and the beginning of the formation of the Portuguese Empire, stands the National Monument to the Overseas Fighters, a memorial in the shape of an arrow pointing to Africa. On 10 June, a national holiday that celebrates the day of Portugal, Camões and the Portuguese Communities (until 25 April 1974 it was known as the ‘Day of the Race’) ex-combatants meet and, with the support of state institutions and the conservative parties, pay homage to those killed in combat in the colonial war.

68 R. Bebiano, O poder da imaginação: Juventude, rebeldia e resistência nos anos 60 (Coimbra: Angelus Novus, 2003).
If investigators researched the history of the colonial war, using some of the most serious and rigorous sources such as *The Colonial War* by Aniceto Afonso, they would find the death toll in the Portuguese Army (and the brutality of their actions, such as the use of napalm on civilians) but they would have no certainty about the number of dead guerrillas in the liberation movements or even civilians. According to the General Staff of the Army, 8,300 Portuguese soldiers died in service in Guinea, Angola and Mozambique. Yet it is very difficult to know the number of dead on the side of the liberation movements, because this work has not been done by historians of Africa. We also know very little about the ‘destruction and dislocation of the material and symbolic structures of African societies’. However, according to international studies directed by Ruth Sivard, three to five times as many guerrillas died than Portuguese soldiers and ten times as many civilians, so the most optimistic numbers for the total number of victims exceeds 100,000 dead.

It would be inappropriate to verify this lack of references to the victims as merely a symptom of statistical uncertainties on the casualties of the anti-colonial armies since the historiography of the war is not limited to affirming this question, but assumes that the colonial war was a ‘less intense’ war, with few deaths, a supposedly ‘low cost conflict’. This omission contributes to the spread of the myth, probably still dominant in Portuguese society, that the Portuguese built a revolution ‘without deaths’ ‘peaceful’, almost an extension, though not direct, of the country of ‘kind customs’ that the propaganda of the Salazar government promoted. This research option, which artificially separates the revolution from its main cause and disaggregates the dead who fought the Portuguese Army from the seeds of revolution, leads to the construction of a false memory. It is thus not a history of the revolution and war.

In the 1970s, it was common to refer to the struggle of the colonial peoples as ‘anti-colonial revolutions’, as all the liberation struggles of the postwar period were called. This terminology has now been marginalised in favour of ‘colonial war’. This shift devalues the mass peasant and popular mobilisations against the Portuguese colonial empire. These mobilisations did not translate into street demonstrations or attacks on ‘winter palaces’ since the guerrilla support base was a peasant and dispersed population, and in some cases their own villages were destroyed by napalm and their populations relocated in villages controlled by the army. In addition, there was a ban on gatherings or demonstrations both in the metropolis and in the colonies. Yet the mobilisations did translate into widespread peasant support for the guerrillas (in fact, similar to what happened in China, Cuba, Vietnam and Indonesia,
and even in the anti-Nazi resistance in France or Yugoslavia), without which the guerrillas would not have survived.

Working against the current, one of the historians who stresses the qualitative importance of anti-colonial resistance, is Dalila Cabrita Mateus in her book, _The PIDE-DGA and the Colonial War_. For example, in Mozambique the political police acknowledged that subversive networks had reached an ‘impressive vastness’ and that it was ‘impossible to root out an evil whose genesis is a population persuaded in favor of subversion’.77

From a study of the morphology of the political police in the colonies as well as using African sources and a number of interviews with guerrillas, Dalila Mateus has also demonstrated the brutality of the crackdown on the guerrillas, providing a surprising scenario for those studying the performance of the PIDE in the metropolis, which was seen as ineffective despite its strong repression against members of the Communist Party. In the colonies, it was also brutal, arresting and torturing thousands of combatants with broad support among the white settlers, a network of information and surveillance essential to aid to war and close links with the military commands. It was, above all, extremely effective: ‘The violence of the Colonial Act was the sap that fed the brutality and crimes of the PIDE/DGS, which in Africa practiced mass repression and had a major role in the colonial war’.78

When studying historical possibilities, with analyses of probabilities, power relations and diverse variables, we cannot be teleological. What might have been was not. It was not a transition. It was not a revolution without deaths. The regime lost the war. The guerrillas resisted. And all this was done by a combination of innumerable factors that go far beyond the number of rifles and the theatre of war (a curious word as if the war was a theatrical act).

Indeed, the main causes for the defeat of the regime were the support of the majority of the peasant population of the colonies for the independence struggle and the backing in the metropolis from the mid-1960s onwards by young people did not want to die in war and those most politicised young people who deserted and became activists against the war. The officials stopped believing in military victory and the demoralised soldiers who were in the colonies after April 1974 refused to fight. The crisis in the Army was of such a size that it was the mid-level officers who prevented the state from collapsing and ‘falling into the street’. There was clearly a classic situation of dual power, in which the power of the state, guaranteed mainly by the MFA, was shared with another parallel power (the rank and file in in the factories, companies and neighbourhoods), but only until September 1975, the moment at which the crisis of the MFA led to dual power shared as well by the soldiers in the lower branches of the military.

In the midst of this complex chessboard, the famous image of the carnation in the muzzle of the gun was not merely symbolic; it reflected the profound disruption of

76 Mateus, _A PIDE-DGS e a Guerra Colonial_, op. cit.
77 IAB/TT, _Arquivos da Torre do Tombo_, Arquivos da PIDE, cited in Mateus, op. cit., p. 196.
78 Ibid., p. 420.
the military hierarchy. Vera Lagoon, one of the most controversial journalists of the period, described in a chronicle entitled ‘Gossip’, this reversal of military values under the impact of the Revolution:

We passed a soldier entirely covered with flowers. From the back to the chin. White flower pots at his waist. And jasmine in the muzzles of rifles … The floral soldiers were accustomed. Since April 25 we have been accustomed to many things. Freedom, for example. But uniformed police in dark blue and red carnations still surprise us. Yet Republican guards with red carnations still surprise us.79

The regime did not know how to find a neocolonial political solution that would take charge of the economic interests of its class fraction, which ended up in the hands of its mid-level military officers. Caetano was beleaguered after hearing Captain Salgueiro Maia on the megaphone saying he was going to attack the Carmo Headquarters, pleading with him to at least let him hand over power to a general.

Despite the immense effort of a 13-year war, the economic groups that were the heart of the regime were forced to leave the colonies. In fact, many left in the dead of night, expelled and afraid. They returned a few years later to ‘do business’, this time with the elite of the systems installed in the colonies, the one-party regimes led by former guerrillas.

**The Democratic Counter-revolution**

The liberal thesis that ‘representative democracy, based on the choice of representatives through free elections, did not appear on November 25 …’. Its most decisive victory occurred months before, in April, in the elections to the Constituent Assembly’ is not empirically verifiable. Democracy began on 25 April 1974 and not on 25 April 1975. It began with endless hours of meetings where ordinary people intervened on labour issues, production, housing and management and voted by show of hands in committees with representatives who were revocable at any time if they disrespected the results of the plenaries that enjoyed wide participation. Never before had so many people decided their own futures as in 1974 and 1975. Attempts to control the state apparatus by the Communist Party (PCP) in the IV Provisional Government and by the Socialist Party (PS) in the VI Provisional Government had no connection with the democracy that existed in the companies and factories and grew throughout 1975, calling into question measures by governments that were never elected. State and Revolution did not go hand in hand. The Revolution and its conquests did not depend on the control of the state apparatus by the PCP or the PS, but on the creation of an alternative power at the bottom of society in workplaces, neighbourhoods and military barracks.

The regime fell with no one to defend it except the hired gunmen of the political police, but not because we were on the boat of a progressive bourgeoisie who fought a decadent government dominated by old generals. There was no one to support it

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because the agent of transformation from the anti-colonial revolution to the revolution in the metropolis had been the army, the muscles of the regime (which, in fact, explains the low level of repression of the Counter-Revolution for 19 months). They had unknowingly transported the anti-colonial revolution in Africa to the social revolution in the metropole, a hypothesis curiously raised by the leaders of the Third International and until then not verified, even considering that May 1968 was also the result of the defeat of France in Algeria. This phenomenon occurred in Portugal nearly perfectly.

We need to understand this complex fact of our history: the military that made 25 April was the same that made the war. Yet when they entered into rupture with the regime’s policy and staged a coup, another country began. This was because history, precisely because it is driven by social subjects in conflict, conscious or not, does not allow people to move forward knowing exactly where they are going or where they will stop. Time did not stop with democracy and the end of the war because the clock started at an accelerated pace towards the social revolution, the last in Europe in the 20th century to question the private ownership of the means of production and in which the industrial working class played a determinant role.

The greatest proof of the existence of a revolution in Portugal in 1974–1975 is found curiously in what the counter-revolution accomplished. It had to accept pay rises, purges, vacations and holiday pay, maternity leave, universal healthcare and education. There had to be an unwavering agreement between the Socialist Party, the Church, the MFA, the entire right-wing. It required massive transfers of money from the European Community; the threat of US military intervention; and an agreement between the USSR and the PCP that Portugal was in NATO and on the side of Europe that the Yalta agreements decided were under the control of Washington. The division of tasks in the control of revolutions carried out by both the USSR and the United States was indispensable. It was necessary for the PCP to participate in all of the organs that rebuilt the state in crisis, channelling the power of the masses to the provisional governments and the MFA. The famous People–MFA alliance was never more than telling the masses to confide in the reconstruction of the bourgeois state through the part, the MFA, that was in crisis. Even so, it took 19 months to defeat the Portuguese revolution.

It was the last revolution of the 20th century, but also somehow the first revolution of the 20th century in Europe because it occurred during the context of the weakening of Stalinism and the fact that it was based on workers’ control in the large urban factories. It was a Revolution in the metropole, not a peasant revolution, in a complex European urban setting.

What is most impressive from the point of view of social and workers’ movements in the Portuguese revolution is not their number, which, of course, relevant, but their dynamics. Suddenly, this dynamic permitted the questioning of the foundations of the industrial hierarchy, going beyond the appearance of freedom in the sphere of the circulation of capital and dragging down the productive mechanisms of the capitalist mode of production. The strikes that occurred were mostly of the ‘wildcat’
type, decided in democratic workers’ assemblies and led, in most cases, by workers’ commissions, which arose spontaneously in the vacuum created by over 48 years of dictatorship in which workers’ organisations were banned. Moreover, they were formed outside the Communist Party and the Socialist Party—both of which were part of the government—and the trade unions, which would only be constituted in the majority of cases during and after the Revolution.

Paradoxically, the main weakness of the Portuguese workers’ movement during the 48-year dictatorship—the absence of the right to democratically organise—became its main force during the revolutionary years of 1974–1975. In impeding workers’ organisation in the attempt at the capitalist modernisation of the country, without the threat of social revolution experienced during the essentially unstable Republican regime of 1910–1926, the Portuguese bourgeoisie built up its own political and economic authority, but it also created its own martyr in 1974. The coup occurred in the context of a vacuum of organisation that allowed the rare and immediate emergence of rank and file organisms—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.

In the first week of May, the newspapers dedicated entire pages to the positions taken by the workers’ collectives, those for and those against determined proposals. The disorganisation of the working class, created by the repression of dictatorship, was, in fact, one of the factors accounting for the weakness of the state in 1974 and 1975 and the concomitant strengthening of dual power. The organisational vacuum was a disruptive factor in the state that gave way to the workers’ commissions. Compared with Spain, where Comisiones Obreras were already well established when the transition process was opened, Portugal had only a small union embryo, which left room for the workers’ commissions. Yet their inability to organise themselves tightly in a nationwide structure, a unifying ‘soviet’, hindered their resistance to the counter-revolutionary coup of 25 November 1975.

The Revolution, this historical adventure in Portugal in 1974–1975, was defeated during its insurrectionary moment, the ‘final assault’ of state power, which led some to question whether there had been a revolution—a theoretically weak argument in that victory or defeat of a revolutionary process does not imply that the process did not exist.80 Interestingly, it was very much a revolution that threatened economic power more than the state.81

The counter-revolutionary coup of 25 November 1975 was democratic and did not result in a military dictatorship, although it was also rooted in the military sector. This thesis—that of the democratic reaction—is founded on deeper empirical evidence, in our opinion. The coup restored discipline in the armed forces, ensured the stability of institutions, maintaining the rule of law, a parliament, free elections, the rights and freedoms of citizens. However, contrary to what is argued by Rosas and

80 Arcary, As Esquinas Perigosas da História. op. cit.
also Boaventura de Sousa Santos, representative democracy, for us, was not the extent of the revolution, but a break with the revolution and a regime based on the continuity of capitalist modernisation. Every revolutionary process is a tragic refutation of the gradualist thesis that diminishes the importance of rupture, of insurrection, in the strategy of the anti-capitalist struggle. The interpretative perspective that views the Portuguese revolution as a long process of extending democracy, of the accumulation of forces and rights and the convincing of or neutralisation of social enemies without the maximum severity of the assault on power, is not based on a consistent historical foundation. After November 1975, with the destruction of dual power in the military, the process slowed down yet there was irreversible stabilisation of the liberal democratic regime. The opportunity had been lost.

That opportunity: today, with the welfare state crisis accompanied by the erosion of representative democracy, the end of the social pact, massive proletarianisation of broad middle sectors and the ruin of others, an international context marked by the end of Stalinism and a deep economic crisis marked by deflation in Europe and crisis and divisions within the Portuguese bourgeoisie, another 25 April is another open historical hypothesis. It would be different, but in a country with 47 per cent of the population poor and 80 per cent of workers—90 per cent of the workforce—only earning wages sufficient for biological reproduction, it increasingly seems more like a revolution that would be ‘impossible, until it becomes inevitable’.

Today, with the full implementation of the counter-cyclical measures to deal with the economic crisis after 2008, this revolutionary past—when the poorest, weakest, most fragile, frequently illiterate, dared to grab life in their hands—is a kind of historical nightmare for the current Portuguese ruling classes. So much so that they insisted that the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of revolution in 2014 would only be held on 25 April, forgetting that that day was merely the first in the most historically surprising 19 months in the history of Portugal. And, next to Vietnam, Portugal was the country that was most covered by the international press at the time because the images of people in the shantytowns smiling with open arms alongside bearded and cheerful young soldiers filled the people of Spain, Greece and Brazil with hope. They witnessed the joy of the majority of those who lived here. One of the characteristics of the photos of the Portuguese revolution is that people are almost always smiling. It was not by chance that Chico Buarque sang: ‘I know you are partying, man’.

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