

# Fifty years since Portugal's Carnation Revolution

Paul Mitchell  
24 April 2024

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Portugal's Carnation Revolution. Following a military coup on April 25, 1974, which overthrew the Estado Novo regime founded by fascist dictator António Salazar, a mass movement of the working class erupted, leading to a state of dual power and threatening revolution. Workers demanded not just an end to fascism, but an end to capitalism and a transformation to socialism.

Had the revolution succeeded it would have delivered a mighty blow to international capital and inspired revolutionary movements throughout Europe and the world.

But instead, the survival of capitalism was ensured by the treachery of social democracy (the Partido Socialista Português, PS) and Stalinism (the Partido Comunista Português, PCP), aided and abetted by various pseudo-left organisations that acted as secondary agencies of imperialism. Many of these organisations would later coalesce into the Left Bloc (Bloco de Esquerda, BE).

The revolution was among the most advanced expressions of the explosive international class struggles which erupted over a seven-year period beginning with militant student protests and a two-week general strike in France in May-June 1968. Fascist regimes in Spain and Greece were toppled and the Heath Conservative government brought down by a miners' strike in Britain. Mass opposition to the Vietnam war, major industrial battles and a mounting political crisis in the United States led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon.

The article presented below was published to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Carnation Revolution. It explains how the PS and the PCP, assisted by pseudo-left groups that served as appendages to the main labour bureaucracies, were responsible for its defeat.

The working class has paid a bitter price for the preservation of capitalist rule in Portugal and internationally, suffering three decades of assaults on its living standards and social rights.

None of the fundamental problems associated with capitalist exploitation and deepening social inequality have been resolved. The greatest horrors of the 20th century—world war, genocide, and the prospect of nuclear holocaust—are re-emerging and being normalised, with the NATO powers waging a proxy war against Russia, backing Israel's genocide of the Palestinians, and preparing both a regional war against Iran and to take on China.

Fascistic and authoritarian movements are again part of the political landscape around the globe, actively promoted by the ruling elites. In Portugal the far-right populist Chega party, the political heir of Salazar formed just five years ago, became the third largest party in the country in last month's election.

The fact that the main political gains from the intensifying economic crisis and rapidly deteriorating living standards are being accrued by the extreme right is the product of the political suppression of the working class by social democracy, Stalinism, the pseudo-left and their absolute opposition to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

Since 1975 all these tendencies have moved inexorably to the right.

Social democracy has severed any remaining links to reformism and enforced austerity. Following the counter-revolutionary restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union, the political remnants of Stalinism have themselves become open defenders of capitalism. The pseudo-left have responded by creating various "left populist" parties in alliance with Stalinist and social democratic tendencies, such as the Left Bloc.

While spouting anti-capitalist rhetoric, both in opposition and in government, BE, Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain have brutally enforced the interests of the ruling class.

Today, as during the Carnation Revolution, the pseudo-left does not speak for the working class, but for layers of the affluent middle class in academia, the professions and the union bureaucracy, concerned above all with preserving their own privileged existence as defenders of the profit system.

Mobilising the working class against war, genocide, and far-right authoritarianism requires building a new, Marxist, revolutionary internationalist leadership in the working class. It necessitates the arming of workers, especially the younger generation, with the essential lessons to be drawn from the historic struggles of the working class. The political basis for such a struggle is the unbroken continuity of the International Committee of the Fourth International's (ICFI) defence of Trotskyism.

This edited version of the three-part series on the Carnation Revolution, written by Paul Mitchell and originally published on the *World Socialist Web Site* on July 15, 16 and 17, 2004, is an essential element in the political education of the revolutionary cadre tasked with finally putting an end to imperialist barbarism.

\*\*\*

This year [2004] marks the 30th anniversary of Portugal's Carnation Revolution. Following a military coup on April 25, 1974, a mass movement of the working class erupted. The ruling elite was able to prevent revolution by using the services of the Socialist Party (PS—Partido Socialista Português), Portuguese Communist Party (PCP—Partido Comunista Português) and the pseudo-left groups.

A key role in those events was played by Mário Soares, leader of the PS during the revolution and president of Portugal from 1986 to 1996. Speaking earlier this year [2004], Soares warned that Portugal was today a country exhibiting "a strongly unequal system of distribution of wealth" and facing "an atmosphere of open protest and even social and political tension."

Portugal is still one of the poorest countries in Europe.

Soares continued, "Once again, Portugal finds itself in a profound crisis in which certain elites are at a loss to understand what is the right path to take. The overwhelming majority of Portuguese feel viscerally the inequality and tragedy of rising unemployment in a society in which the horizon is being obscured."

In the face of the call by José Manuel Durao Barroso, the Social Democratic Party (PSD) prime minister, for the Portuguese people to forget the revolution and celebrate Portugal's "evolution," Soares is

concerned that the ruling elite should remember the lessons of 1974. He is warning that the aggressive privatisations, labour reforms and welfare cuts (started under his own presidency) and the reassertion of Portugal's imperial past and influence by support for the war on Iraq could provoke another social explosion.

## The roots of the revolution

The 1974 revolution was ultimately shaped by Portugal's belated historical development within internationally developing capitalism and imperialism.

From the fifteenth century Portugal had built up a colonial empire, resulting in a privileged elite that had little productive activity. With the development of its imperialist rivals, particularly Britain, Portugal's colonial possessions were threatened. The Peninsular Wars (1807-1814), when Napoleon attacked Spain and Portugal and indebted Portugal to Britain, had weakened Portuguese colonialism still further. Brazil became independent in 1822 and troops were needed to protect Portugal's remaining colonies from its rivals.

Through the "Anglo-Portuguese Alliance," Britain came to dominate Portuguese trade. Sections of the small bourgeoisie were ruined, and industrialisation remained slow. Their discontent sparked the great liberal struggles of 1810-1836, but the main result was the breakup of a few large landed estates. The Portuguese monarchy was finally deposed by the revolution of 1910.

The period after the 1914-1918 First World War was one of enormous crisis for global capitalism. This instability was reflected in Portugal, which saw eight presidents and 45 governments between 1910 and 1926—the period of the First Republic.

At the end of the war, only 130,000 out of Portugal's population of 6 million worked in industry, mainly in small workshops. As in Russia, the working class was extremely militant, carrying out a general strike in 1917 and provoking two states of siege. In 1921, the Portuguese Communist Party was formed.

Instability and the threat of a revolutionary movement of the working class led to the right-wing coup of May 28, 1926. Two years later, António de Oliveira Salazar, an economics lecturer, was appointed finance minister and then prime minister. In direct response to continuing working class struggles that peaked in a five-day insurrection in 1934, Salazar declared his "Estado Novo" corporate state.

Only the official fascist party was legal—the National Union (UN—União Nacional) later renamed the National Popular Action Party (ANP—Acção Nacional Popular).

Independent trade unions and strikes were outlawed, and workers were forced into state company unions or *sindicatos*. Salazar established strict censorship and created a secret police, the PIDE (Polícia Internacional de Defesa do Estado), which would arrest or kill opponents.

The most important function of Salazar's regime for Portugal's ruling elite was to prevent any struggle by the working class crystallising at home and opposition developing in the colonies. However, the restricted national nature of Salazar's proscription could not insulate the country from the world economy. Much of its production depended on world demand, and it had to import many of its finished goods. During the 1960s, foreign investment in Portugal trebled, mainly from the United States, but it resulted in an extreme concentration of wealth.

By 1973, there were some 42,000 companies in Portugal—one third of them employing fewer than 10 workers—but about 150 companies dominated the entire economy. Most were related to foreign capital, but headed by a few very wealthy Portuguese families (Espirito Santo, de

Melo, de Brito, Champalimad). The de Melos' monopoly company Companhia União Fabril (CUF), for example, owned large parts of Guinea-Bissau and produced 10 percent of the gross national product.

Despite this industrialisation, a third of the population still worked as agricultural labourers, many in large estates or *latifundia*. An estimated 150,000 people were living in shanty towns concentrated around the capital, Lisbon. Food shortages and economic hardship—wages were the lowest in Europe at US\$10 a week in the 1960s—led to the mass emigration of nearly 1 million people to other European countries, Brazil and the colonies.

The 1960s also saw the emergence of liberation movements in the Portuguese African colonies of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. Fighting three guerrilla movements for more than a decade drained the Portuguese economy and labour force. Nearly half the budget was spent on maintaining more than 150,000 troops in Africa. Compulsory military service lasting for four years, combined with poor military pay and conditions, laid the basis for grievances and the development of oppositional movements amongst the troops. These conscripts became the basis for the emergence of an underground movement known as the "Movement of the Captains."

The continuing economic drain caused by the military campaigns in Africa was exacerbated by the world economic crisis that developed in the late 1960s.

Through the 1944 Bretton Woods Agreement, US imperialism had been forced to rescue its European and Japanese rivals from collapse out of fear that this would produce a social revolution.

Under American auspices and backed by US economic and military might, a number of agencies were set up such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), through which the economy was pump-primed by massive injections of capital in the form of loans.

The cornerstone of the monetary system that represented this international order was the fact that the dollar was fixed at a guaranteed rate of US\$35 to one ounce of gold. However, in the long term, the US could not sustain the role of financing the world economy. The US balance of payments deficit increased, exacerbated by the war in Vietnam, whilst gold reserves declined. Unable to maintain the convertibility into gold, President Richard Nixon withdrew the dollar from the gold standard on August 15, 1971. The breakdown of the Bretton Woods Agreement produced spiralling inflation followed by the most severe recession, in 1973-1975, that the world had seen since the 1930s, as well as an enormous development of the class struggle in country after country.

The revolution in Portugal should have developed as part of a general European and world struggle for socialism by the working class. But instead, the survival of capitalism was ensured by the treachery of social democracy and Stalinism, aided and abetted by the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left.

## Preparations for a coup

Faced with uprisings in the colonies and a wave of strikes in Portugal, the military chiefs moved to safeguard capitalism and stop the offensive by the working class and peasants.

In February 1974, General António de Spínola, the army's second in command and a director of two of Portugal's leading monopolies, including CUF, published *Portugal and the Future*. The book criticised the African policy of Salazar's successor, Marcello Caetano, and called for cultivating a moderate black elite who could be split away from the nationalists. Caetano banned the book and dismissed Spínola and the commander of the army, General Costa Gomes, who had authorised its

publication.

That same month, an abortive revolt took place at Caldas da Rainha in the north. A manifesto from the Movement of the Captains dated March 18 congratulated Spínola and Gomes and expressed full support to the troops at Caldas da Rainha, saying, “Their cause is our cause.”

The leaders of the Movement of the Captains discussed the manifesto with Spínola and Gomes and planned a coup for April 25, 1974.

On that day, the Armed Forces Movement (MFA—Movimento das Forças Armadas), as the Movement of the Captains was now known, announced it had decided to “interpret the wishes of the people” and overthrow Caetano. In fact, Caetano himself asked Spínola to prevent the country from “falling into the hands of the mob.” The result was the formation of the National Salvation Council (JSN—Junta da Salvação Nacional), composed entirely of high-ranking military officers, with Spínola as president.

Spínola intended to limit the coup to a simple *renovação* (renovation), but the coup immediately brought the masses onto the streets demanding further change. Angry crowds demanded *saneamento* (reckoning) with officials and supporters of the old regime, and several members of the PIDE were killed. Workers began taking over factories, offices and shops, and peasants occupied farmlands. Half a million marched through Lisbon a week later on May Day. The revolutionary atmosphere spread through the armed forces, with soldiers and sailors marching alongside the workers, carrying banners calling for socialism.

Previously banned parties emerged from underground or exile, including the PCP led by Álvaro Cunhal and the PS led by Mário Soares. The more far-sighted members of the ruling elite knew the vital role these parties would be required to play to prevent the development of revolution.

One of the most important questions of the revolution concerned the nature of the MFA and its “armed intervention” unit, the Continental Operations Command (COPCON—Comando Operacional do Continente), composed of 5,000 elite troops, with Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho as its commander.

The MFA cultivated the concept of the “alliance of the MFA and the people.” The PS, PCP and pseudo-left groups never challenged this gross lie. Instead, the PCP declared the MFA was a “guarantor of democracy” and developed close relations with Carvalho, General Vasco Gonçalves and other members of the Junta.

Only the International Committee of the Fourth International and its Portuguese supporters, the League for the Construction of the Revolutionary Party (LCRP), called for the PCP and PS to break from the bourgeois parties, the state machine and MFA. It demanded the dissolution of the army and the creation of workers’, peasants’ and soldiers’ soviets in opposition to the MFA and its proposals for a Constituent Assembly.

## The First Provisional Government

Spínola appointed the First Provisional government on May 16 1974, consisting of seven military ministers and two seats each for the PCP, PS and semi-fascist Popular Democratic Party (PPD, Partido Popular Democrático). The PPD was founded shortly after the revolution and its leader Francisco de Sá Carneiro, who had been a deputy in Caetano’s government, accepted the inclusion of the PCP in the Provisional Government knowing the vital role it could play in policing working class opposition.

Throughout the revolution the PCP clung to the state apparatus through the MFA, thereby tying the working class to the ruling elite.

To enforce labour discipline and implement the austerity programme in

the MFA’s “battle for production”, PCP leader Álvaro Cunhal was appointed a minister without portfolio and the PCP’s Avelino Gonçalves became minister of labour. The PCP was to occupy this post in subsequent provisional governments too, exhorting workers to “Save the National Economy” and condemning any manifestation of independent activity by the working class.

The PCP was also part of the MFA’s governing council.

The MFA emerged as the most important decision-making body in the country. The leadership of the MFA rested with the Council of Twenty, whose decisions usually required ratification by the 240 delegates comprising the General Assembly. The Council of Twenty included the president and the six other members of the JSN, the five military ministers (the prime minister, two ministers without portfolio, and the ministers of the interior and of labour) and Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho the commander of COPCON “armed intervention” units. Throughout the revolution the leaders of COPCON promised they would “eventually” arm the working class, but their real role was to prevent the development of popular vigilance groups or workers’ militias.

The MFA’s political programme called for the creation of a provisional government that would organise elections for a Constituent Assembly tasked with drawing up a constitution.

The MFA’s rise to prominence can be attributed to the PCP, which promoted the concept of “the alliance of the MFA and people” and glorified so-called leftist military generals like Carvalho and Vasco Gonçalves. The PCP stated, “The MFA is the motive force and guarantee of our revolution ... the PCP holds that the alliance between the popular movement and the MFA is a necessary and decisive factor for the establishment of a democratic regime, a prime guarantee of the development of the revolutionary process.”

At the time of the April coup the PS numbered no more than 200 people. By the following year it had grown to 60,000 members—mainly white-collar workers and professionals. Its growth can be put down to the actions of the PCP and pseudo-left groups and the support it received from the Western powers.

The PCP strengthened the right wing in Portugal by splitting the working class with their collaboration with the MFA, seizing the PS’s paper *República* and physically attacking PS meetings. By denouncing workers’ strikes, calling for a monolithic union under its control and supporting the MFA’s military dictatorship, the PCP allowed PS leader Mário Soares to pose as a more radical, democratic, and even more Marxist than the PCP’s Cunhal.

The Western powers were alarmed that Portugal—a founding member of the NATO pact—confronted a revolution. US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger told Soares that he faced being the “Kerensky [the Russian leader whose short-lived rule preceded the Bolshevik Revolution] of Portugal.” The result was an influx of foreign financial aid to the organisation, particularly from the British Labour Party and French Socialist Party. In February 1975 Edward Kennedy attended a round table discussion with the PS leaders.

The first PS congress in December 1974 received fraternal greetings from social democratic parties from around the world. The guest speaker was Santiago Carillo, the leader of the Spanish Communist Party.

## The Anti-Strike Laws

Following the coup, strikes hit all sectors of the economy. Workers set up committees that demanded a minimum wage, the arrest of fascist sympathisers, workers’ control and socialism. On May 15 1974, 8,400 workers occupied the Lisnave shipyards. Timex workers struck on June 3,

continuing the struggle started in November 1973, and two weeks later 25,000 CTT workers went on strike, paralysing the post and telephone services. Newspapers were taken over and the manifestos of the parties filled their pages.

The former corporate unions, which the PCP had taken over through its Intersindical union federation, denounced the strikes as “irresponsible” and their demands as “impossible” and organised a demonstration in Lisbon against them. The army was used to break up the strike at Timex and protect the factory and its machinery. The broadcast of a cultural festival in which the theatre group Comuna attacked the Catholic Church was switched off on the orders of “higher authorities”.

The Confederation of Portuguese Industry (CIP, Confederação da Indústria Portuguesa) warned that the working class actions were “dangerous to the national economy.” The CIP called in public for a Western-type democracy, but many of its members also funded fascist parties and organisations, including the one founded by Salazar himself—the Christian Democratic Party (PDC). The de Melo family’s CUF monopoly bankrolled the Democratic and Social Centre party (CDS—Centro Democrático Social, forerunner of the right-wing Popular Party that is in today’s coalition government).

The CDS was founded by Freitas do Amaral, former adviser to Caetano and supported by the Catholic Opus Dei. However, these organisations had no popular support. The first CDS congress in January 1975 had to be abandoned because of riots outside. Further congresses were held in secret.

On August 27, the provisional government introduced an anti-strike law that the PCP and PS helped draft. Strikes were only allowed if they were deemed to be “in the spirit of the Programme of the MFA”. All strikes had to have ballots and a 30-day cooling off period. No strikes were allowed in the essential services and political or solidarity strikes and occupations were banned. The next day army units including COPCON surrounded Lisbon airport, which the workers at the state airline Transportes Aéreos Portugueses (TAP) had occupied. Workers who refused to obey military orders were arrested and told they would only be reinstated “on condition they took no further part in political activity”.

## Two more coups

The actions of the social democrats and the Stalinist gave the reaction a second wind. On September 10, 1974, Spínola called on the “silent majority ... to awaken and defend themselves from extremist totalitarianism”. Plans were made for a demonstration two weeks later. In response to troop movements and the closing down of radio and TV stations workers erected barricades and thwarted the attempted coup. But Spínola was simply allowed to resign as president to be replaced by his old boss General Costa Gomes.

A new provisional government was set up, minus Spínola and three other members of the JNS, which was to last until the next right-wing coup attempt in March 1975.

In January 1975, a Federation of Workers’ Committees called Inter-Empresas was formed linking Timex, TAP, Lisnave and other companies. One of its first actions was the organisation of a demonstration against the arrival of NATO ships in Lisbon docks. The provisional government forbade all demonstrations and the PCP attacked the organisers. Despite this, 40,000 people took part.

The government then approved the economic plan drawn up by Major Ernesto Augusto Melo Antunes, who was a member of the “Group of Nine” officers in the MFA, and which was endorsed by the MFA General Assembly. The plan excluded “the social-democratic control of the

management of capitalism ... but it does not exclude a pluralistic society ... the class struggle now under way must take into account the alternative role which the middle classes can now play.”

It called for partial nationalisations, the take over of some large and badly managed estates and increased foreign investment.

Spínola attempted another coup in early March 1975 sanctioned by Kissinger and US Ambassador Frank Carlucci, but his troops mutinied at the last minute. Spínola fled to Spain and then Brazil. Many businessmen behind the coup attempt were arrested, including seven members of the Espírito Santo family who owned one of Portugal’s largest banks and the de Melos, but all were later released.

The JNS was abolished and replaced by the Council of the Revolution. In the wake of working class resistance a fourth provisional government was formed that nationalised the commercial banks (but not three international banks). Because the banks were often holding companies, the government took control of almost all the country’s newspapers, insurance companies, hotels, construction companies and many other kinds of businesses—equivalent to 70 percent of the country’s gross national product. The minimum wage was raised and a programme of agrarian reform promised.

The PCP dutifully declared that business had been “nationalised in the service of the people”, but the capitalist nationalisation proposed differed from that carried out in most Western countries after the World War II only in extent. Economic and state power still lay in the hands of the bourgeoisie, if only in part through their shadow in the social democratic and Stalinist parties. Nationalisation aimed to provide a more stable infrastructure and environment for private enterprise and to limit the power of the workers committees by making the appointment of managers a state function.

## The Constituent Assembly

Elections were held on April 25, 1975, for the Constituent Assembly to draft a constitution. The PS won nearly 38 percent of the vote, the PPD took 26.4 percent and the PCP 13 percent.

Following the elections and with no sign of the promised agrarian reforms, movements in the countryside joined the insurrectionary situation in the cities. Landless agricultural workers in the south seized the large farming estates on which they worked and started developing them collectively through organisations such as the Red Committee of Alentejo. The PCP called the occupations “anarchistic” and proposed that all future occupations be controlled by the unions (which they in turn controlled).

Between June and August 1975, following the exit of the PS and PPD from the fourth provisional government over the Republica affair, the PCP and its allies were left in virtual control of the state and the ministries. The “Gonçalvists”, as the military wing of the PCP was known, dominated the MFA’s Council of the Revolution.

The MFA and PCP convened a Front of Revolutionary Unity (FUR, Frente de Unidade Revolucionária) to “institutionalise” the “pact” between the MFA and the people. This involved the formation of local assemblies, municipal assemblies and a National Popular Assembly, which would replace the provisional government. The aim of the MFA proposal was to consolidate the control of bourgeois military officers, destroy the independent character of the workers’ committees that had sprung up and prevent moves towards dual power and soviets/workers’ councils. The assemblies could only start their work after “an evaluation by the MFA” and would be subject to military control at all levels to preserve their “independence from all parties.” No political organisations were to be permitted in the armed forces except the MFA itself.

## The middle class pseudo-left groups

FUR was a popular front set up to betray the revolution at the most critical time and it was to receive the support of most of the pseudo-left groups. These groups claimed the MFA (Armed Forces Movement—Movimento das Forças Armadas) / COPCON (Continental Operations Command—Comando Operacional do Continente) proposals were a “valid basis of work for the elaboration of a revolutionary political programme” and that the assemblies referred to as the “autonomous organs of popular power” constituted “a way forward for the revolutionary process.”

Among the parties signing a “Unity Accord” and joining FUR were sections of international organisations claiming to be Trotskyist.

The International Socialist (IS) organisation (today’s Socialist Workers Party in Britain) was represented by the Revolutionary Party of the Proletariat (PRP—Partido Revolucionário do Proletariado). The founders of the International Socialists had broken from the Fourth International in the 1940s, claiming that the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and its satellites was a new class in a new social system (state capitalism). This not only granted the Stalinist bureaucracy a legitimate economic and political role that denied its essentially parasitic character, but expressed a prostration before the post-war stabilisation of imperialism. The IS’s radical phraseology, its glorification of trade union syndicalism combined with a semi-anarchist stance, served only to conceal its refusal to challenge the political domination of the working class by the social democratic and Stalinist bureaucracies.

The PRP gave unconditional support to the MFA and COPCON. It greeted “the MFA proposal of liaison between the MFA and the people” as a “great victory for those who have fought for months for the building of revolutionary councils.” The MFA proposal for a “military government without parties” neatly coincided with its own slogan of “a revolutionary government without parties.”

The United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec) had two organisations in Portugal—the official International Communist League (LCI—Liga Comunista Internacionalista) and a “sympathising” section—the Workers Revolutionary Party (PRT—Partido Revolucionário dos Trabalhadores). [1]

The USec arose from a split in the Fourth International in 1953. Led by Michel Pablo, much of the FI leadership concluded that Stalinism had proved capable of overthrowing capitalist power. It followed that the deformed workers states that the bureaucracy had set up in Eastern Europe were the pattern of the future. Pressure on the bureaucracy—even a Third World War between the USSR and the United States—would force it into further political struggles, to take state power and institute “centuries of deformed workers states.”

Under the leadership of James P. Cannon of the US Socialist Workers Party, the International Committee of the Fourth International was formed. The ICFI rejected such impressionistic conclusions about the strength of Stalinism reached by the IS and USec and defended the analysis made by Leon Trotsky that either the working class would remove the parasitic bureaucracy in a political revolution or the bureaucracy would oversee the restoration of capitalism.

In its international magazine *Intercontinental Press* the USec rejected the MFA assembly proposals, saying Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho was attempting to establish a “non-party military dictatorship.”

While this was formally correct, the USec oriented towards the PS and Constituent Assembly, hailing it as “the only forum in which the problems of the masses could be discussed openly.” Instead of calling for genuinely

independent workers’ committees, the USec said calls for soviets were “anti-democratic” and “unreal.”

In Portugal both the Pabloite organisations supported the MFA and COPCON, calling on it to form “a real and solid unification with the movement of the exploited masses.” The PRT declared its previous characterisation of the MFA as “a bourgeois movement ... defending the fundamental interests of capital” was wrong now that it was introducing “dual power” and the military committees had become “an initiative in soviet power.”

The inability of the USec to provide a consistent analysis of the events in Portugal and at the most critical periods was shown in the August 4, 1975, issue of *Intercontinental Press*. One article said there was no threat of a military putsch, while another said events were moving towards an open military dictatorship. In the September 8 issue, an editorial by the USec’s chief theoretician Ernest Mandel reversed its previous line, condemning *Intercontinental Press* for its support for the Constituent Assembly and criticising the LCI for the way it collaborated with the PCP in the FUR.

This criticism was made not from the viewpoint that there must be an irreconcilable struggle to break the working class from the counterrevolutionary leadership of Stalinism, but because Mandel believed that the Portuguese had failed “to seize the opportunity to lead the PCP to take a position on the implementation of the essential tasks necessary for the progress of the revolution.”

Support for the MFA and COPCON came from the 70 or so other pseudo-left parties.

The Movement of the Socialist Left (MES—Movimento de Esquerda Socialista) [2], which had arisen in a split in the PCP, in 1973 said that “working class support for the MFA must go hand in hand with support by the MFA for the working class.” It claimed it was not the right time to form a party—hence its claim only to be a movement—and that the PCP was “the only party able to mobilise the masses.”

The League of Unity and Revolutionary Action (LUAR) had formed in 1967 as a direct action group concentrating on local issues under the slogan “socialism from below.” This organisation gave conditional support to the MFA for its “progressive measures,” claiming they would allow the workers to “create the embryos of alternative forms of social organisation.”

There were also a number of Maoist groups, the most important of which was the Revolutionary Movement of the Portuguese Proletariat (MRPP—Movimento Reorganizativo do Partido do Proletariado). The MRPP split from the PCP in 1970, which it now called “social-fascist.” The group lined up openly with the bourgeoisie.

In the presidential elections of June 1976, the MRPP told their supporters to vote for Ramalho Eanes, the PS-backed law-and-order candidate. MRPP leader Arnaldo Matos called COPCON “the most democratic police force in the world,” only to have it arrest over 400 MRPP militants in the Lisbon area in May 1975 using information held in old secret police files.

The MRPP’s only lasting “legacy” is that José Manuel Durao Barroso, a leader of the organisation during the revolution, is now prime minister of the right-wing-led Social Democratic Party coalition government.

## The role of the ICFI

Only the ICFI and its Portuguese supporters, the League for the Construction of the Revolutionary Party (Liga para a Construção do Partido Revolucionário, LCPR), called for the PCP and PS to break from the right-wing parties, the state machine and MFA. It demanded the

dissolution of the army and the creation of workers, peasants and soldiers soviets in opposition to the MFA and its proposals for a bogus Constituent Assembly.

The ICFI insisted, “The army remains the instrument of the bourgeois state, which must be broken up by the intervention of the working class. The idea that the army as such can play a revolutionary role is completely reactionary.” (“Statement of the International Committee of the Fourth International on Portugal after November 25,” included in *Revisionists & Portugal* by Jack Gale, Labor Publications, November 1975)

“The series of mutinies in the Portuguese army express the symptoms of a deep-seated crisis... Absolutely no confidence can be placed in the so-called left-wing generals like Gonçalves and Carvalho who themselves express the vacillations of the petty bourgeoisie”, (ibid).

Above all, this meant the building the ICFI, the only organisation capable of leading the working class and the taking of power.

### **COPCON melts away**

In the face of continuing unrest during the “hot summer” of 1975, the “Group of Nine” officers around Melo Antunes on the Revolutionary Council warned of the state “degenerating into anarchy” and persuaded a majority of army delegates to remove Vasco Gonçalves. Having lost his majority, Prime Minister Gonçalves resigned. The PCP-dominated Fifth Provisional government, faced with an appeal to the working class to take power, simply resigned along with Gonçalves.

The PS and PPD rejoined a Sixth Provisional government—yet again with the PCP—headed by Admiral José Baptista Pinheiro de Azevedo. Immediately the government circulated a secret plan known as the “Plan of the Colonels” calling for the implementation of the Antunes economic plan to revitalise the private sector and restructure the state sector. It called for laws to punish armed civilians, the formation of Groups for Military Intervention to disband COPCON and a purge of military units under leftist influence, to return Republica to the PS and to “solve the problem” of Radio Renascença. The workers at Radio Renascença had taken over the station, which was owned by the Catholic Church, and it had become the main mouthpiece for FUR.

The crisis reached fever pitch. The newly formed Sixth government and the Council of the Revolution were opposed by so many sections of society that a situation of dual power existed.

On September 29, Prime Minister Pinheiro de Azevedo ordered the military occupation of all radio stations. COPCON swore to “defend the workers.”

On November 7 the transmitters at Radio Renascença were blown up. The next day, having learned nothing, the PRP appealed to officers in the MFA to lead an armed insurrection, saying, “Knowing the devotion to the revolutionary process of a great many officers of the Army and Navy, and knowing also the positions which they hold at the level of unit commands, it is easy to think of a scheme based on a sortie by these troops, in an operation of the type of April 25th.”

The PRP continued, “As all history shows, the bourgeoisie promotes civil war to defend its interests. Happily in Portugal the right wing does not have an army. They rely on mercenaries with bases in Spain, or on the armies of the US and NATO.”

Within days, the right wing showed just how wrong the PRP had been. Colonel António dos Santos Ramalho Eanes declared a state of emergency on November 25, 1975. The army and the United Military Front (FMU—Frente Militar Unida), which included the MRPP, Antunes and Ramalho Eanes, moved in to dismantle barricades and disarm workers and soldiers with scarcely a shot being fired. COPCON, along with “rank-and-

file” military organisations such as Soldiers United Will Win (SUV—Soldados Unidos Vencerão), which in the previous weeks had mobilised tens of thousands in demonstrations, dissolved in the face of some 200 commandos.

In January 1976 food prices increased by 40 percent, Radio Renascença was handed back to the Church and most of the secret police in PIDE released.

A new constitution was proclaimed on April 2, 1976, pledging the country to realise socialism. It declared the nationalisations and land seizures irreversible. Several weeks later elections for the new parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, were held—leading to a PS victory. Almost immediately Soares turned to the IMF and implemented a structural adjustment programme.

Over the years the bourgeoisie have taken back what they had been forced to concede. The current government of Durao Barroso is completing the gutting of social conditions with its policies on labour flexibility (exploitation), redistribution of wealth to the rich and privatisation.

That the Portuguese bourgeoisie weathered the revolution is principally thanks to the betrayal of the PCP and its pseudo-left hangers-on who tied the working class to the bourgeois parties, the state machine and the MFA. The success of the Portuguese Revolution would have been a mighty blow to international capital and inspired the movements developing throughout the world in the 1970s.

[1] In 1978 the LCI and PRT fused to form the Revolutionary Socialist Party (PSR), which then founded the Left Bloc in 1999 in a merger with the pro-Albanian Maoist Democratic Union, and a group of exiles from the Communist Party in Politics XXI. In 2004, the PSR dissolved itself into a political association within the Left Bloc.

[2] The MES ceased to be active in 1981 and was formally dissolved in 1997. Many of the figures who founded and were active in the MES would later join the PS and attain high office in the state including Jorge Sampaio (Portuguese President 1996-2006) Eduardo Ferro Rodrigues (PS general secretary 2002-2004 and President of the Assembly of the Republic 2015-2022).



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**