

DO ESTADO NOVO AO 25 DE ABRIL



INSTITUTO DE HISTÓRIA E TEORIA DAS IDEIAS
FACULDADE DE LETRAS

COIMBRA 1995

**DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION IN PORTUGAL AND SPAIN:
A COMPARATIVE VIEW**

*"Comme la vie est lente
Et comme Vespérance violente"*

*(How slow life is
And how violent is Hope)*

Apollinaire

In 1976, two years after the beginning of the Portuguese revolution, which brought to an end the longest autocracy in European contemporary history, an American historian by the name of Robert Harvey, who had previously written that Portugal, a country even smaller than Scotland, "is a peanut of a country", raised what seemed to him the essential question concerning the then-uncertain process of democratic rebirth in the southwestern corner of Europe. He wrote: "If it fails, and a military dictatorship moves in once again, it will lend credence to the almost racist, but among many Portuguese and Spaniards alike widely held idea that Iberians are inherently incapable of democracy'^1). And,

* University of Lisbon, Visiting Professor at Brown University (1993-1994), U.S.A.

p) Robert Harvey, *Portugal: Birth of a Democracy*, New York, St-Martin's Press, 1978, p. 8.

in 1984, ten years after the "revolution of carnations/" another observer concluded with some relief, as he pondered some of the shortcomings of a process already lasting a decade, that at least a positive conclusion could be drawn from Portugal's experience of restoring democracy. In his words, this "last decade has clearly disproved Salazar's firm belief that the Portuguese are temperamentally and historically unsuited for democracy⁽²⁾).

With already two decades of Portugal's tumultuous restoration of freedoms behind us, and with the phantom threat of a return to some form of dictatorship gone once and for all, we can now assert that the Portuguese, having resisted the temptation of a military solution of the Nasserian, Libyan or Peruvian type, knew how to pave — as did their Iberian neighbors — a pluralistic and Western way, both politically and socially speaking, as well as an efficient way, economically speaking, and they have thus justified the reshaping of their paralysed country in ruins according to the democratic model predominant in the rest of Europe. In 1986, in fact, Portugal would become a member of the European Community, thereby permanently securing a return to the fold of Western Europe. In so making this return, Portugal ceased to be the most backward and, in political terms, the most uneducated in all Western Europe.

Yet the revolution of 1974 brought with it a danger never entirely forgotten by many observers: the danger of sliding unawares into a new dictatorship of a military sort. This never ceased to seem possible, given that the protagonist of the revolutionary movement, the Movement of the Armed Forces (MFA), was heavily Marxist in its thinking and, at least in part, allied with the Portuguese Communist Party, the most rigorously committed to the Leninist-Stalinist mythology of the Marxist State, whose dictatorial command came from the working class vanguard — in other words, from the bureaucratic vanguard. However, any threat of a military dictatorship was eliminated relatively quickly⁽³⁾. The exalted promises of free elections and free-

(2) Tom Gallagher, "Democracy in Portugal since the 1974 Revolution", in E. Sousa Ferreira and W. Opello (eds.), *Conflict and Change in Portugal, 1974-1984*, Lisbon, Teorema, 1985, p. 77.

(3) Mário Soares, who was then Portugal's Socialist foreign minister, came to lunch with Kissinger, in 1974, at the State Department. To Kissinger's eyes, Soares resembled the idealistic Socialists in 1917 revolutionary Russia. "You

dom of thought — made to the country by the uniformed authors of the coup of April 25, 1974 — took hold of the people's imagination, and the subsequent results of the 1975 elections revealed how scant, how minimal, in fact, was the number of people who desired adherence to the most Stalinist of European Communist parties. And even though the Portuguese Constitution of 1976 hoped to be able to dogmatically steer the Portuguese helm in the direction of Socialism, the rapid discrepancy between the solemn high-sounding paragraphs of the Constitution — the most radical in the Western world — and the surrounding political reality, made it quickly necessary to revise a text which affirmed, for example, right in the second article, that Portugal should guarantee "the transition to socialism by creating the conditions for the democratic exercise of power by the working class". An ideological text heavily influenced by the Socialist phase of the first two years of the revolution (1974-76) the Portuguese Constitution was revised more than once (both in 1982 and again in 1989) so as to remove

are a Kerensky", Kissinger told Soares. "I believe your sincerity, but you are naive". Soares shot back: "I certainly don't want to be a Kerensky" [the Russian premier deposed by the Bolsheviks in 1917]. "Neither did Kerensky", Kissinger replied. See Walter Isaacson's *Kissinger*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1992, pp. 672-673. Kissinger made gloomily predictions that Portugal had begun a slippery slide into Communism, a view that was disputed by the US Ambassador in Lisbon, Stuart Nash Scott, who urged continued economic aid for Portugal's new government to bolster its connection to NATO. Kissinger's response was to sack Scott. To replace him, he appointed Frank Carlucci, a foreign service officer who had served in Africa and would eventually be secretary of defence.

Carlucci (b. 1930) was a pragmatic and "apolitical" Atlanticist, and served, later, as deputy director of the CIA. He found himself out of step with the "hawks" of the Reagan administration (1981-89) and left to work at Sears World Trade after barely a year as deputy secretary of defence; in 1986 he replaced John Pointdexter as National Security Adviser, and served as defence secretary from 1987.

Embassador Carlucci's conclusions were the same as Scott's: it was best to cooperate with the Lisbon government and not worry too much about the communists in the cabinet. "Whoever sold me Carlucci as a tough guy?", Kissinger bitterly remarked. See Isaacson, *op. cit.*, p. 674. In fact Portugal was at the time excluded from NATO intelligence, in general, and nuclear contingency planning in particular, and the country's NATO membership had even seemed about to come under review at the organization summit in May 1975.

all the excessive revolutionary measures that were most apt to link the Portuguese to a Soviet type of society and State rather than to a Western-style democracy, that is, a pluralistic, liberal society of free enterprise, free market and real freedoms.

The final trace of an Egyptian, Libyan or Peruvian model was wiped out in 1982 with the dissolution of the Council of the Revolution, a military body empowered to offer advice about the legal, institutional life of the new democratic regime as well as to annul any legislation which they felt was not in keeping with the spirit of the revolution. The quiet dissolution of this organization, which occurred in accordance with the legal procedures that had created it, guaranteed once and for all the life of a new Portuguese democracy, committing it to the world of normal political strife.

It is important that we view Portugal's democratic transformation as part of a broader phenomenon of democratization among other European nations which, like Spain since 1939 and Greece since 1967, had been cut off from free, pluralistic and democratic models: two months after the fall of the military dictatorship in Greece, Portugal experienced its own democratic revolution and a year and a half later, Spain began, with the death of Franco, its own slow but sure evolution towards a government of freedoms (a curious and seemingly contradictory situation since King Juan Carlos had first pledged fidelity to the regime in power — Franco's regime — when he — the Bourbon candidate — was first named successor to the throne in 1969). This triad of democratic restorations (or better, democratic installations) of liberal regimes in Southern Europe is enormously interesting if we consider that Iberia is not only a geographical designation but it formulates as well a common destiny among various peoples whose fate is rooted in the peninsula. Therefore, if we are to better understand the specificity of the Portuguese revolution of 1974 and its subsequent ways and byways, it is enormously useful to compare what occurred in Portugal with the concomitant process in Spain⁽⁴⁾: the democratic transi-

(4) Our analysis of this comparison is partially due to the excellent study of Juan Linz, "Some comparative thoughts of the *transition* to democracy in Portugal and Spain" in J.B.Macedo and S. Sarfaty (edits.), *Portugal since the Revolution*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1981, pp. 25-46. Concerning the Spanish transition and *ruptura pactada* (*negotiated break*) see the important study by José Maravall, *The Transition to Democracy in Spain*, London, New York, Croom Helm and St-Martin's Press, 1982. And also: David Gilmour, *The Transformation of Spain: from Franco to the Constitutional Monarchy*, London, New York, Quartet

tion of these two neighboring countries will help us to better understand the limits and the originality of the Portuguese model as well as the regime itself which was installed in Portugal twenty years ago.

First of all, we need to underscore the crucial difference between the mode of transition followed by each country: in Portugal, on the one hand, a radical break with the past, an authentic coup with features of a classical revolutionary process, while in Spain, on the other hand, a rupture by way of an agreement, that is by way of a *ruptura pactada* — to use the Spanish term. The political processes resulting from these two distinct points of departure would be very different, as would be the attitudes of the unions of the two countries or even the attitudes of the various parties on both sides of the Spanish/Portuguese border (one only needs to think of the immense difference between the Portuguese Communists and their Spanish counterpart). And then there is, of course, the very different mood of two respective texts, the 1976 constitution of Portugal and the 1978 constitution of Spain. In order to fully understand the different directions taken by the two Iberian nations, we should also mention the economic differences between the two countries. And, finally, we need to keep in mind that Spain's transition to democracy began (or accelerated) in a country where a civil war had been fought and ended only 37 years before, whereas in Portugal, the old liberal Republican order, which had fallen in 1926, was no more than a vague historical memory, faded by time and without any hope of being restored. In other words, the Portuguese had to begin again from scratch, inventing almost everything again from zero, since the last free elections had taken place forty-nine years before...

Spain's *reforma pactada* constituted what was essentially a kind of legal revolution carried out by capable and knowledgeable men, like Adolfo Suarez and the monarch Juan Carlos I, who were able to secure a change in legitimacy itself through social, political and institutional agreements, which would definitively put to rest the three years

Books, 1985; Anatoli Krasikov, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: Spanish reportage*, Oxford, New York, Pergamon Press, 1984; Juan Linz and José Montero (eds.), *Crisis y Cambio: Electores y Partidos en la España de los años ochenta*, Madrid, Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1986; Paul Preston, *The Triumph of Democracy in Spain*, London, Methuen, 1986; John Hooper, *The Spaniards: A Portrait of the New Spain*, London, Penguin Books, 1987; Donald Share, *The Making of Spanish Democracy*, New York, Praeger, 1986; Joseph Harrison, *The Spanish Economy from the Civil War to the Economic Community*, London, Macmillan, 1993; Raúl Morodo, *La transición política*, (2nd ed.), Madrid, Editorial Tecnos, 1993.

of civil war (1936-1939) and thereby make it possible for the bureaucracy in power as well as the armed forces, who had inherited Franco's victory of 1939, to accept working with new political, social and institutional forces which represented another, and quite opposite, form of legitimacy. Although the base of political legitimacy would change completely, the Spanish elite of the former regime as well as the former victors of the civil war of 1939 were allowed to participate in the creation of a new, democratic regime. This kind of cooperation between the outgoing and incoming regimes stands in striking contrast to the Portuguese solution which was begun with the military coup of 1974. A large part of Portugal's former leadership and political establishment had to quickly find its way into exile in Spain, Brazil, South Africa, since there was no way at all in which they could resurrect their previous political tendencies. However, never once during the twenty years since the coup was there a single serious attempt at reorganizing Salazar's or Marcelo Caetano's party. The "apolitical" nature of Salazar's regime had the effect of creating total indifference within the Portuguese rightwing; many of them emigrated after the revolution or, having returned — or never having left in the first place —, they preferred to become members of the various existing parties of the new political system. As for the right-wing extremists, they had been marginalized already during the dictatorship of Salazar and later Marcelo Caetano, and they simply continued to lead a politically mute and ineffective existence.

If the Spanish transition happened by means of compromise and an ongoing balancing act between antagonistic forces, the Portuguese rupture doubtlessly brought with it a greater sense of excitement, exaltation, celebration and, in many instances, spontaneous social protest which took various forms among which were the public trials, the appropriation of land by the peasants, mural drawings in the bigger cities, a spate of printed material on hitherto censored topics, such as pornography. From all this revolutionary folklore, the only aspect that in some way lasted and had some significance in economic and social terms was that of the agrarian reform. This, in fact, was one of the Portuguese revolution's least studied aspects, with the exception of Nancy Bermeo's book, entitled *The Revolution within the Revolution: Worker's Control in rural Portugal* (5).

(5) See Nancy Bermeo, *The Revolution within the Revolution: Workers Control in rural Portugal*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986; an instance of

In Spain, as was natural, the model of transition which was adopted did not permit the same overwhelming sensation of liberation nor did it allow for the same sense of euphoria and celebration among the populace. This was so because, in Spain, there had never been any recourse to revolutionary measures nor had there been any major political dismissals from office or "witch hunts" in search of former members of the secret police. All this did occur, however, in Portugal. For example, after the revolution dozens of former PIDE agents were locked up in Lisbon's main jail while howling masses of people stood outside demanding that justice be done immediately, and afterwards they were locked up again in the penitentiary of Alcoentre, not far from Lisbon, where a large number had fled in the face of such anti-fascist wrath. But the truth is that in spite of these imprisonments, there were never in Portugal real judicial trials for the thousands of hated former spies who had been virtually omnipotent as the dictator's political police. (The PIDE changed its name during the government of Marcelo Caetano to DGS, Direcção-Geral de Segurança/General Management of Security). The enthusiasm and hope awakened by the "revolution of the carnations" in Portugal has no real analogy in Spain; in fact, curiously enough, this enthusiasm and hope were viewed by some Spaniards with fear and/or envy⁽⁶⁾.

The difference between the Spanish and the Portuguese transition towards a pluralistic democracy has a great deal to do with the respective armed forces of each country. To begin with, there is the absolutely crucial fact that the Spanish army had nothing to compare with the dramatic situation of the Portuguese army, which had been involved in a 13-year-old colonial war in Africa, from 1961-1974. Neither the process by which Portuguese soldiers within the armed forces became radically political during those 13 years nor the Movement of the Armed Forces itself (MFA) had any equivalent in Spain. In brief, Franco's Spain in the last years of the regime did not have — notwithstanding the terrorism of the ETA — any insoluble problems

"popular justice", that of the peasant José Diogo, is mentioned in our *História de Portugal*, Alfragide, Ediclube, n.d.(1993), vol. XIV ("Portugal Democrático"), pp. 128-132.

⁽⁶⁾ See the study by Josep Sánchez-Cervelló, "A influência da Revolução portuguesa na transição espanhola", *História de Portugal, op. cit.*, vol. XIV, pp. 143-150. And J. Sánchez-Cervelló's book *A Revolução portuguesa e a sua Influência na transição espanhola (1961-1976)*, Lisbon, Assírio & Alvim, 1993.

which were in anyway analagous to the colonial wars during Caetano's years of the Portuguese dictatorship. The Spanish armed forces did not need to intervene, therefore, violently or otherwise, in the political process which was begun with the physical disappearance of Franco in 1975. It was enough that they maintained a neutral position which was favorable to the *reforma pactada* then taking place, thus clearly siding with the idea of gradual evolution when the rightwing of the Guardia Civil attempted its anti-democratic coup on February 23,1981.

In this connection, let us try to recall as succinctly as possible the principal chronological phases of the Spanish transition towards democracy. Firstly, on July 22,1969 Juan Carlos was named successor to Franco. Franco died on October 20,1975 and Juan Carlos was sworn in as King of Spain two days later. The King gave to Adolfo Suarez, a former Falangist, the mission of initiating reforms, one of the most important being to legalize the Spanish Communist Party. The government of Suarez, which was begun in July of 1976, lasted until 1981, and it thus was responsible for carrying out the essential steps in the transition towards democracy. Suarez' party, the UCD (Union of the Democratic Center) received 34.8% of the votes in the first free Spanish elections (1977); the PSOE of Felipe Gonzalez received (29.4%) the second largest number of votes; the Communists got 9% of the vote and the AP (Popular Alliance) received only 8% of the vote. The new bicameral legislature voted for a new constitution in October, 1978. There was a referendum on the autonomy of the Basques and the Catalans and both were clearly approved, although the same autonomy was not granted for Andalusia.

Suarez stepped down on January 29, 1981 and his party chose Calvo Sotelo to succeed him. When the legislature voted on the new cabinet proposed by Francisco Calvo Sotelo, some members of the Guardia Civil, under orders from Tejero Molina, broke into the room and kidnapped the deputies. Even though the anti-democratic coup was masterminded by some generals, the Chiefs of Staff, the police itself, and the monarch rejected it. Thus the "23-F" (February 23) failed and Tejero was jailed and later condemned to a stiff prison sentence. In 1982, the PSOE of Gonzalez won the elections and began a long period of governance which has not yet ended, and this despite a certain falling behind in the 1993 elections. In conclusion, the Spanish left-of-center PSOE and the Portuguese right-of-center PSD followed, in a certain sense, parallel roads to power almost simultaneously.

The Spanish transitional process begun by Suarez in 1976 and continued with the majority coalition as a result of the 1977 elections represented that which Caetano himself might have achieved in Portugal after Salazar's physical collapse in 1968. Yet, the six years of Caetano's power were, on the contrary, proof of his incapacity to resolve the intolerable situation created by the colonial wars in Africa (Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique). And here again, the difference with what would happen in Spain after the death of Franco would be extremely significant. Whereas Suarez could count on the strong support of the Head of State — King Juan Carlos I — to carry out a difficult, negotiated transition, to legalize the Spanish Communist Party and to establish an equilibrium between the old elite and the parties adverse to Franco, Caetano clashed with the then-President of the Republic, the conservative obtuse and inflexible Admiral Américo Tomaz. Perhaps Caetano's inability to reform the Portuguese dictatorship helped the King of Spain to keep open the way to reform that Suarez had begun to pave, after having ascertained that the previous attempt at paving such a way by Arias Navarro had come to nought. The importance of the King's role as arbiter in the process of Spanish democracy should not be underestimated. It explains, in part, the silence and "invisibility" or "neutrality" of the Spanish military during the transition from Franco to democracy, which handed over the responsibility of reform to a group of civilians under the auspices of the monarch. In Portugal, from 1974-1975, the initial steps in the rupture with the former regime were taken by the military, which saw itself more and more removed from the political scene as the "revolution" — or the PREC as it was then called (Revolutionary process in the making) — gradually gave birth to a constant, regular and *civilian* normalization of the transition process; the aforementioned Council of the Revolution was a kind of military appendage which would continue to exist until complete democratization of Portuguese political life had occurred. A curious paradox which Juan Linz underscores lies in the fact that the Portuguese were able to achieve reform with much less blood than were the Spaniards, even though the Portuguese revolution was much more exuberant and active(7).¹

17) Juan Linz, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

The differences highlighted in both processes of transition towards democracy in the Iberian peninsula obviously had their inevitable consequences. For example, the Portuguese Communist Party was able to keep a large segment of the society under its control: in the unions — where even today CGTP's (Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses - Intersindical) aggressive manner is visible; in the countryside where the agrarian reform left a lasting mark; in the industrial region south of Lisbon; in some regions in the Alentejo where the local councils continue faithful to the party. And this is not to mention other pertinent sectors such as highschool teachers.

Notwithstanding all this, the most relevant protagonist of the revolution, the Portuguese Communist Party, became more and more isolated in the Portuguese socio-political landscape, especially after its failed revolutionary attempt at taking power in November of 1975, and it simultaneously grew more and more isolated within the left-wing parties as well. And, in spite of having been superseded apparently by a younger comrade, the former Stalinist leader Álvaro Cunhal (born in 1913) maintains the reins of power within the organization — an organization which, it is worth pointing out, is the only existing party founded before the advent of the Portuguese dictatorship and, significantly, the only one, therefore, which withstood forty-eight years of implacable repression. In Spain, where the PCE (Spanish Communist Party) was less rigidly orthodox, less willing to venerate the Leninist-Stalinist dogmas, the party members knew how to play the game of the *reforma pactada*, and they were willing to adhere to social pacts made by the government (for example, the pact of Moncloa) all because they were intent upon guaranteeing a democratic transition which would be smooth and without incident. These major differences make it impossible to confuse the two processes of transition in the Iberian peninsula: the advent to power of the PSOE in 1982 (which has continued up to the present) is intimately connected to this difference, since instead of arrogantly isolating itself in the political landscape, as did the Portuguese Communist Party, the Spanish Communist Party of Santiago Carrillo accepted the agreements and compromises that allowed for the establishment of democracy in the wake of Franco's dictatorship. The Spanish constitution of 1978 is, in this sense, symptomatic of the differences in the two processes of transition in the peninsula: the Spanish text represents a consensual text that even the Spanish right-wing, the AP (Alianza Popular), voted for, whereas the Portuguese CDS (Christian Democratic Party) did not want to subscribe to a

text that was, in fact, excessively ideological — that is, revolutionary. In order for it to be acceptable, the Portuguese constitution of 1976 would have to be revised more than once, as already mentioned, above all so as to permit the privatization of insurance companies, banks, public enterprises and other sectors which had been nationalized during the socialist fury of March, 1975. The Spanish text, resulting from compromise among the various parties, was accepted by nearly 88% of the electorate, so that it was recognised right from the outset as would be expected (only the Basques were not in agreement with it). And this is why, in concluding this brief analysis of the two processes of democracy in the Iberian peninsula, we cannot help but concur with Juan Linz, who writes: "While Portugal combined the transition to democracy with considerable social and economic change that to some extent deserves the name of the revolution, the transition in Spain was combined with a deep questioning of the unitary centrist State and the emergence of a new multilingual and multinational policy, with considerable devolution to nationalist and regional periphery"⁽⁸⁾. But, of course, these differences between the small, relatively homogeneous Portugal and the complex national puzzle of Spain would lead us to another level of analysis which goes beyond the bounds of our purpose here.

⁽⁸⁾ J. Linz, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39.