

For 19 exhilarating months during 1974-1975, the Portuguese working class was the stalking horse of revolution in all the advanced industrial societies. In the power vacuum that prevailed following the anti-fascist military coup of April 25, 1974, Portuguese workers were able to create a variety of popular self-defense and self-management organizations aimed at furthering the cause of socialism. They had a rich history of anarcho-syndicalist activity dating back to the turn of the century to draw on, so their natural inclination was toward libertarian solutions in the work place, in rural areas, in the neighbourhoods, and even in the military.

Phil Mailer, an Irish libertarian who has lived in Portugal for 15 years, has written a truly comprehensive account of these struggles in his new book, **Portugal—The Difficult Revolution**. In 450 pages of text, illustrations, indexes and documents, he describes the successes and failures of these popular institutions, and the deep relevance they have for popular struggles in the rest of Europe and in North America. If there is one theme that informs the book, it is that restoration of State power and the installation of the social democratic order that exists today in Portugal was in large part the responsibility of the vanguard, elitist and sectarian "Revolutionary Left," which time and again inter-fered with and manipulated the true revolutionary initiatives of the people.

**Portugal—The Difficult Revolution** is being published simultaneously by Black Rose Books in Montreal (price, \$4.50), Free Editions in New York and Solidarity in London, England. The following excerpts were adapted from a pre-publication manuscript made available by Black Rose, 3934 Rue St. Urbain, Montreal, Que., Canada).

The 25th was a cold morning for April. At 7:45 a.m. the following radio announcement stunned hundreds of thousands of Portuguese into a realization that a new phase in their history had begun:

"The Portuguese Armed Forces appeal to all the inhabitants of Lisbon to stay at home and to remain as calm as possible.

"We sincerely hope that the seriousness of the hour will not be saddened by personal injuries. We therefore appeal to the good sense of all military commanders to avoid any confrontation with the Armed Forces. Apart from being unnecessary, such action would only create or aggravate serious divisions between Portuguese people, which must be avoided at all costs."

At 8:15 a.m., my neighbour wakes me up, crazy look in her eyes as she stands there, in men's pyjamas. She tells me not to go to school today; all schools are closed, the Army has taken over, shooting, everyone to stay at home. She speaks in broken Portuguese to help me understand, firing her fingers into the air.

I close the door thinking she's mad, turn on the radio and return to bed. Nothing: the usual ads. I can't believe it. I can't sleep though I need to. I try other stations. Marching music on the National Radio. Could she be right?

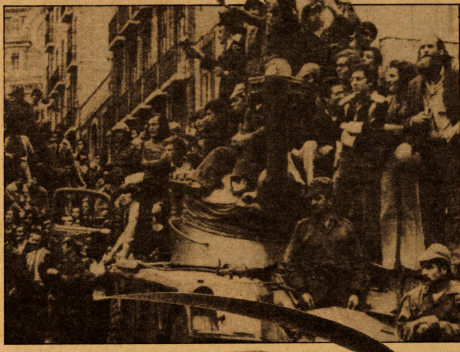
At 9:10 a.m., already late, I arrive at school. No buses outside. I meet R, a teacher who is bursting with the news. D, the school fascist, is also there. We ask if it's from the right or from the left, or even from which forces on the right: the generals or Spínola? The question remains unanswered all morning. No one knows.

April 26th, Day Two. The headlines are startling. Spínola, the leader of the new Junta, has promised the 'democratisation of politics', new elections as soon as possible, an end to all fascist institutions, negotiations over the war in Africa. Celalano and Thomas have been expelled to Madeira. Some PIDEs (political police) have been captured, one with his trousers down.

We go off to lunch and pore over the morning papers. The photos are telling. Masses of people are involved. This is clearly more than just a coup d'état. Already the old structures seem to be falling apart. We just aren't reading the same newspapers as yesterday though the names, lay-out and style are the same. Newsmen's faces on the streets are beginning to smile. Whiffs of freedom are rising over Lisbon and people are passing them on to one another in their shouting and laughter. It is fantastic, shattering.

Troops everywhere are giving the victory sign. We hear about Caxias, the notorious political prison: 170 prisoners have been released and about a hundred PIDEs put in

# PORTUGAL: The Difficult Revolution



their place. I'd had friends who'd been sent there, then beaten and tortured. The pictures in the papers are tremendous. Thousands had been to Caxias to welcome the prisoners. We hear that the Junta had only wanted to free a few of them, but that the crowds had noisily insisted on releasing the lot.

Organisations, which had been living hand to mouth, underground, were surfacing and making statements: the Communist Party (PCP), the Socialist Party (PS), CDE, LUAR. We pinch ourselves to see if it is really true. There was other news, but it didn't interest us. Someone mentioned that Mitterand stood a chance in the French elections. So what?

For forty-eight years there had been no demonstrations of joy in Portugal. Two generations had passed without being able

to walk the streets freely: now fathers and sons were there together. An old man in rags, an old man for whom Salazarism hadn't done anything, carried the Republican flag. He was embraced so much I thought he'd have a heart attack. I asked him if it was like this in the days of the Republic and he said it had never been so good. I too wanted to embrace him, he was so like a baby.

I shall never forget the First of May. The noise, the noise, the noise is still ringing in my ears. The horns tooting in joy, the shouting, the slogans, the singing and dancing. The doors of revolution seem open again, after forty-eight years of repression. In that single day everything was placed in perspective. Nothing was god-given, all was mad-made. People could see their misery and their problems in a historical setting. How can words describe 600,000 people

demonstrating in a city of a million? Or the effect of canyons everywhere, in the barrels of rifles, on every tank and every car, in the hands of troops and demonstrators alike? It is the climax of a week of hectic, fast-moving events. Working people have left an indelible mark on the situation. The call is for socialism and masses of ordinary people have been involved in making it. What started as a military coup is assuming new dimensions. The Junta is still in power, but it is the people who have called the tune, in particular the working class.

A week has passed, although it already feels like many months. Every hour has been lived to the full. It is already difficult to remember what the papers looked like before, or what people had then said. Hadn't there always been a revolution?

The immediate response of the workers to the need for autonomous organisation was the General Assembly or "plenário". All those employed in a given enterprise would get together to discuss their situation. The plenário would usually elect a Workers Committee or Ad-hoc Commission, which would be entrusted with the task of drawing up a list of demands. In the organisational vacuum that had followed April 25th the Committees had been thrown up as the natural organisations to defend the workers' interests. They pressed for economic demands and even, at times, for a restructuring of industrial life. Many called for an end to exploitation: profits should no longer be left in the hands of private individuals. Although the Committees were not revolutionary organisations (very few of them called for the abolition of wage labour or for an end to the capitalist mode of production), they showed an extreme distrust of the unions (created by the Fascists) and, in many cases, of the new institutions created by the MFA (Junta). This is not to say that the MFA was unpopular. Workers just wanted things to move faster. By the end of October 1974, some 2,000 such Committees existed.

The Committees were usually elected for one year and were liable to recall. Their aims and concerns were wide, and this at times brought them into head-on conflict with the State. The Lisivave Committee for instance was to call the demonstration of September 12, 1974 against the "anti-strike" law, despite the fact that their proposed march had been banned by the government and attacked both by the unions and by the PCP cell within the shipyard. Similarly it had been the plenário of TAP workers which had called the strike in July which had led to the "militarisation" of the airports. The Committees often existed in parallel both with unions and with the official management.

Various political parties were operating within the plenários. Their preoccupations often appeared sectarian to many attending the assemblies. Firstly there were union members, seeking to find a base by getting themselves elected onto the Committees. Then there were the various left groups, using the Committees for purposes of propaganda and recruitment.

In the plenários there would often be differences of opinion concerning the demands to be formulated. Sometimes these would reflect differences in the composition of the work force in a given firm. At other times differing policies would be dictated by obviously differing managerial attitudes — or by varying relationships between the management and the MFA.

Propan, an industrial bakery employing some 150 workers, was in many ways typical of the smaller companies. After April 25th a committee had been set up and the MFA invited to visit. Later some office workers and two members of the Committee were sacked (the management claiming that they couldn't pay the minimum wage). The MFA arrived, in the form of two young captains, who accused the management of "inefficiency and lack of loyalty." A report was sent to the government. The government replied that it had no powers to interfere with private property. The MFA insisted. Finally 3 workers and 3 managers set up an Administrative Committee. Things went well for two weeks, the bosses accepting the will of the workers. But then the bosses began to question the "legality" of MFA interventions in such matters. The Administrative Committee was fired and the other two could do nothing. Sackings began in the offices. The management took advantage of the August closure for holidays to dismiss a large number of

continued on p. 21