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The Revolutionary Promise of Portugal

1975

In human affairs nothing is inevitable until it happens.
Paul Sweezy

A single question surrounding events in Portugal was central to the radical Left: Is this a genuine socialist revolution that will overthrow a capitalist state in a western European nation?ⁱ Notwithstanding a wide spectrum of disagreement over what script such a revolution might follow, expectations ran high. Might this be the revolution long anticipated that would avoid the mistakes and excesses of the Bolsheviks, and stand in stark contrast to the Stalinist dictatorships imposed throughout Eastern Europe by the occupying Soviets after World War II? And while judgements of Third World socialism were likewise divided, it was generally argued that neither China (except among the Maoists), Vietnam, nor Cuba, nor any of the variants in Africa, provided models for revolution in a First World nation, even one as backward as Portugal.

When Tod and I touched down in Lisbon on the first of June, it had been a bit over a year since Europe's oldest fascist regime was overthrown by disgruntled military officers convinced that *their* Vietnam, the wars to suppress independence movements in the Portugal's African colonies, could not be won on the battlefield and had to be settled politically. The MFA – the Armed Forces Movement – was an interim ruling military council embracing every faction across Portugal's political spectrum, but lightly weighted toward the populist left. Having survived one internal coup attempt by a right wing general, the council's titular president, the MFA rebounded to orchestrate an

election in April for a Constituent Assembly charged with writing the country's new constitution.

Candidates of the Socialist Party (PS) had won a significant plurality of seats in the Assembly. The Portuguese Communist Party, which fared more modestly, had operated clandestinely under the fascists, but now, with the acquiescence of the MFA, rushed to fill the leadership void within the trade unions that were being formed since April 25th, often spontaneously, across virtually every economic sector; and thus the PCP came to control the country's principal labor federation as well. For us, the SP, a recent creation of the European International of social democratic parties, was a stalking horse for western capitalism, whereas the CP was a tool of the Russians whose main duty was to maintain worker discipline and prevent the widespread occupation of factories from spreading where workers had taken over production and expelled the managers and owners.

It was precisely this movement for Worker's Control that most excited interest among the younger generation of international radicals like us who had been politicized in an atmosphere that was lukewarm to both the communists and the social democrats. The thorough transformation of economic and social relations through a political structure of participatory democracy was a dominant theme of New Left ideology. And now in Portugal, workers as well as soldiers were organized into factory and barracks commissions, and coordinating among each other in local assemblies. First order of business, higher salaries and longer vacations, but they also exercised for the moment more power over the terms of employment and military service than their counterparts anywhere else in the world.

To the European and American political establishments worker's control was an abomination. Loudly disseminated through the media from Washington to London to Berlin was a demand that the Portuguese military step down and permit an immediate return to civilian government, preferably a coalition led by the Socialists, and, above all, interrupt the revolutionary process before it reached a point of no return, heralding an inevitable appropriations of industries, foreign and domestic, of banks and utilities and other key sectors of private enterprise. What the West feared most concretely was that this nightmare scenario would be carried out by a Communist Party elected to govern and slavishly obedient to the USSR.

The European nations of the Atlantic Alliance had largely avoided sharing power with their domestic communists in the decades following World War II. But it was an ideological imperative which provided the strongest basis for blocking that contingency if for no other reason than that anti-communism was the bedrock of western propaganda in the Cold War against the USSR and its allies. Even as some West European communist parties gradually distanced themselves from Soviet control, it was necessary that they continue to be demonized for mass consumption, especially in the U.S., in order to justify the confrontation with the East and the ever increasing militarization of the economy. The Portuguese Communists, however, the PCP, were in Moscow's pocket, and if the party got anywhere near the reins of government in Portugal, it would be the equivalent of harboring a Soviet fox in NATO's henhouse.

An aggressive propaganda war was being conducted throughout the media in the U.S., not least in the columns of James Reston, the illustrious Timesman and dad of Reston, Jr., our sometimes collaborator. Reston Sr. led the chorus of outrage among

mainstream journalists in response to what was known in Portugal as *O Caso Republica*. For Reston, Sr. and the other beacons of Cold War semaphore in the press, the closing of *Republica*, one of Lisbon's mass circulation dailies, by the MFA was attributed to an attempted editorial takeover by communist staff, which had been heroically rebuffed by *Republica's* editor/owner.

What Tod and I would discover, and later report on, was that "Lisbon's cafes are buzzing with a different version of *O Caso Republica*. The printers wanted to create a worker's commission similar to that existing at other Lisbon newspapers. They also wanted the paper to reflect *all* points of view. Further, 80% of the *Republica* workers were said to be sympathizers of the Socialist – not Communist – Party. The Socialist Editor Raul Rego rejected their demands and the paper was closed by the military. On June 16th, when the MFA offered to reopen the paper, Mr. Rego presented a list of conditions, including the right to fire militant union leaders. For the moment the MFA has rejected this. Rego apparently claims the right to totally control the editorial policy... The workers disagree."ⁱⁱ

That the workers commissions at the Communist Party-controlled newspapers like *O Seculo*, *O Diario de Noticias*, and *O Diario de Lisboa*, continued to "pursue a narrow editorial policy of reporting mainly the PCP perspective," came as no surprise. Members of the PCP were under party discipline; adherents of the SP, except for core leadership, were not. Having concluded that "the day to day foreign reporting of America's *national* newspaper [the *Times*] was shockingly poor," Tod and I set out to "redress the balance... interviewing activists whose activities were ignored in the regular

news media. We also spoke widely with ordinary folks, workers and soldiers. What we saw was a country in the midst of a social revolution.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The depth of detail in our reporting for two subsequent articles demonstrates how fully we immersed ourselves in the popular revolutionary whirl that was everywhere in evidence. Every public space on a given wall was plastered with factional posters featuring the slogans and marching orders of a dozen different political groups and parties, big and small. Notices announcing *comicios* – mass meetings– were an every night occurrence. The political artwork rivaled in its vivid colors and graphic originality the legendary posters from the early stages of the Cuban Revolution or the mind blowing graphics of May ’68 in Paris.

The Revolution of the Carnations, so called because as the military coup unfolded soldiers had inserted red carnations into the barrels of tank guns and rifles, soon attracted a steady flow of international leftist intellectuals like Sartre and de Beauvoir and Garcia Marques, who came to determine for themselves if what Ernest Mandel, Leon Trotsky’s successor in the Fourth International, was now anointing as a prerevolutionary moment in Portugal, was a reality they too could recognize and endorse. We had no access to such luminaries, but we did have occasion to assist Paul Sweezy, the preeminent Marxist economist in America who was in Portugal on his own fact finding mission. Tod and I had arrived in Lisbon armed with a letter of assignment from Erwin Knoll of the Progressive, and presented ourselves at the MFA press office to collect our credentials. We likely ran into someone there from Sweezy’s traveling party, and agreed to meet with the economist later in a hotel bar.

In *Monthly Review*, the Marxist journal he founded and continued to edit, Sweezy would contribute two articles later that fall to track developments in revolutionary Portugal, all of which as subscribers we closely and eagerly read. Now in Lisbon Sweezy told us he had a meeting with twenty members of the Federation of Allied Textile Unions, and asked if I would act as his interpreter. Sadly, all my notebooks from our Portuguese adventures, which carried over into the following year, have been misplaced. What I remember of that encounter with the illustrious economist is more Sweezy's stern public persona than what had actually transpired the brief time we spent in his company.

When Tod and I came to write our article for the *Progressive*, our notes then at hand, we reported that "one visiting American Marxist was skeptical" about the potential success of the Portuguese revolution. Sweezy had said he perceived too much indecisiveness. "'Socialism is not for the timid,' he warned, and he urged the Portuguese to learn well the lessons of Chile. His recommended course of action was immediate nationalization of all foreign trade as a defense against the sort of economic warfare likely to be waged by the major capitalist countries, and a rapid socialist transformation of social and economic relations. 'To delay,' he warned, 'is to allow the local owners and their friends time to prepare their counteroffensive.'"iv

What perplexes me now is why we did not mention Sweezy by name in our article. Erwin Knoll wanted us to attribute the quoted material, but only with Sweezy's permission. I have a vague memory that we didn't really click with Sweezy, and that he didn't think much of our opinions, especially after Tod made a crack about his expensive suede jacket, basically rich man baiting him. This brought forth in rebuttal a defense that the Marxist program was to raise all boats not merely sink those of the mighty, or words

to that effect. Over the years we may have snickered when recalling that bit of New Left puritanical hubris, but – at least in the abstract – we honored Paul Sweezy as a giant on the Left, even if I can't say either of us did more than brief any of his major economic works – adorning our respective book shelves - for which we found little practical application in our more rough and tumble arena of railing against the system.

Nor do I have a detailed memory of the event for which my services had been requested. Sweezy would have wanted real information to sharpen his ability to handicap socialism's chances in Portugal. And I certainly lacked the technical knowledge, and therefore vocabulary, to help him achieve that end. I suspect that one of the trade unionists stepped up with enough English to make himself understood, and that I became more of a listener than interpreter, and copied the words in my notebook that we later quoted. I don't recall if we approached Sweezy for permission or not. Or if we didn't, why we didn't.

Erwin left the quotes stand unattributed, trusting at least that we weren't making them up. At the same time Erwin was cautious about our abilities to practice journalism with more objective eyes than we were accustomed to with our typically fast and loose New Left polemical style. His one clear instruction to us before issuing the letter of introduction was, "don't let yourselves be taken in." In other words don't confuse what you want to hear in your enthusiasms for the revolution with what is actually happening in reality, both on the ground and behind the scenes.

I know that both Tod and I were enjoying our newly acquired status as "international journalists," but Erwin's words echo even more loudly in retrospect since I cannot fail to admit that we were out of our depths, and while we certainly were doing

our homework, and would attend many meeting and conduct dozens of interviews, what I'm writing here should be construed as an eyewitness, and not an historical, account of Portugal's brief revolutionary upheaval. We had little initial curiosity, for example, in the "counteroffensive" Paul Sweezy had predicted, and which was already being orchestrated by, among others, the recently installed American Ambassador, Franks Carlucci.^v

Carlucci had on his shadowy resume tours with the CIA in the Congo and in Brazil; in the first instance he has long been suspected of playing a role in the CIA sponsored assassination of the Congo's leftist Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, in 1961, and, three years later, while assigned to the American embassy in Brail, of working to overthrow the government of Joao Goumlart in favor of a military junta. Both governments the U.S. moved to eliminate, not incidentally, had been democratically elected. Little did we know, though we might have easily suspected, that Carlucci was now interfering with Portugal's internal affairs and was somehow linked to the failed coup of March 11, 1975 that had sent the Bonapartist, General Spnola into Spanish exile. After judging a second attempt at a military coup untenable, Carlucci was said to have turned his efforts to undermining the authority of communist and far left sympathizers within the MFA, while rallying political and financial support for the Socialists who, he advised Washington, were "the only game in town."^{vi}

This was the kind of story professional journalists would ride endlessly for all its speculative plot twists, without ever drawing a conclusion. What Tod and I were after was a taste of a country in the throes of "dual power," the highly visible and dynamic external world of popular institutions emerging in the factories, in the appropriated large

landed estates, and in the barracks among the enlisted ranks to challenge the rule of their former masters. And in a Marxist idiom we aped more than we spoke, we judged the game afoot and all the chips upon the table, though it was as yet far from clear, which side – the ‘class struggle’ or the bourgeoisie - held the winning hand.

We dutifully spent several hours in the press section listening to speeches at the inaugural session of the Constituent Assembly, an exercise in self-inflicted ennui which Paul Sweezy would later describe as “a pointless sideshow.”^{vii} My Portuguese is very good, but it is tuned to the dialects in Brazil. Portuguese-Portuguese was routinely mocked by comics and satirists in Brazil for its inherent stuffiness. And, predictably, in a setting like this Assembly it was intoned with the rigid grammatical formality and erudition of the Academy, little intelligible to me, and all the less if my attention wandered for an instant. Face to face, I had no difficulty with the Portuguese accent in conversation, which, in any case, I had only a few years earlier been exposed to daily during a six week summer course at the University of Coimbra.

Even what we could understand, likely thanks to an official press liaison on hand to facilitate, was far too slow paced and abstract to compete with what was going on in the street. Workers in control at the point of production, the end of siring and saluting in the armed forces, torch light parades though the main square of an interior city where many rural proletarians, socially and economically, remained bound well into the twentieth century to ancient social rules closer to feudalism than industrial capitalism. And suddenly these countrymen were gaining confidence and escaping their symbols of deference, not just in refusing to doff their caps at road side when the landed toffs speeded by, but with far more sting, through occupying their grand estates and

reorganizing them into agricultural cooperatives. We were well versed in a history that celebrated scenes of revolutionary emancipation, but this wasn't history; it was real.

How deep this visual reality penetrated, we couldn't tell, nor was that foremost in our minds. The moment was electric, and for young idealists like ourselves the pageantry was the medium to which we turned our attention, trumping any investigation of the underlying forces that might hint at the outcome. Our days were a blur of meetings and notetaking as we sought out activists of our own generation who, like us, had shed themselves of the baggage of their Old Left elders. Radical groupings of every size and tendency proliferated on Portugal's political landscape, and we found our closest co-thinkers in MES, the Movement of the Socialist Left, a large block of independent socialists and intellectuals with roots in the old democratic and Catholic opposition. We latched onto a very proper young MES economist who was conversant in English, and who arranged a series of visits to factories and military installations.

What I reproduce here from that itinerary is taken *minimally* from memory, and mostly from the articles we later wrote for *Win*, the *Progressive*, and *Radical America*. Our first meeting was with a mechanic and a draftsman of the workers' council at Eurofil, a plastics factory on the outskirts of Lisbon. The story we were told was that an investigative commission formed from Eurofil's workers, and operating with permission from the MFA, had uncovered a pattern of concealed profits and illegal capital transfers on the part of the conglomerate that owned the plant. Eurofil was subsequently occupied by its 1,600 person workforce to include most foremen and middle managers, and worker self-management immediately instituted, the monthly minimum pay raised from \$76 to

\$208. These were still modest wages, we pointed out in an article, for a country where a decent pair of shoes costs \$20.

Not all the consequences of self-management were positive. Owing to the cancelation of orders from long term customers in West Germany and Great Britain, the factory was now running at only 60% of capacity. But the excitement around ‘workers’ control’ had eliminated absenteeism, even after, as an economic necessity, the work week was extended to forty-eight hours. By the time of our visit all 88 plants belonging to the Borges Group which owned Eurofil had been occupied by their workers, and so this one major cabal from among the most intractable opponents of the revolution was temporarily in retreat seeking to create their liberation army in Spain,” the Quixotic adventure Frank Carlucci had apparently rejected.

Other meetings followed. Memorably we hung out for an afternoon with a group of highly politicized soldiers active with far left groups in the canteen at their base, headquarters of the 1st Engineer Battalion, the unit from which the coup had unfolded. My photo of four enlisted soldiers, clenched fists aloft, would grace the cover of WIN when our article appeared. An event we did not report on was a side trip to the city of Evora, a provincial medieval gem and capital of the country’s south-central Alentejo region. Late into the night we participated in a torchlight parade that numbered in the thousands, an experience perhaps too transcending and dreamlike to reproduce. At some point during our stay, I bought a copy of an LP record album with the song that, when broadcast over the radio on April 25, 1974, signaled the onset of the revolution. I’ve taken it out and played it from time to time over the years, and still get goose bumps when I hear it, the opening line, “Grandola Vila Morena, terra da fraternidade...” It’s not

the words, but a deeply moving tinge of defiant sadness in both voice and music that I associate with Portugal, and, of course, especially with the *fado*.

The big question we brought home with us toward the middle of June, and posed as the center piece for what we wrote in the *Progressive* was not: Will the revolution win in Portugal, but how long would it take, so convinced had we been from what we'd been hearing about the military's "irreversible commitment to build socialism by the shortest possible road?" We were happy to retail the criticism of the Socialist Party and its chief, Mario Soares, through rhetoric and one colorful quote from a young corporal. "For Soares, the old dirt roads of the *campo* don't lead to socialism. He wants them paved by the West Germans and Americans first."

The Socialist Party's success, in what had been that previous April the country's first free election in fifty years, was viewed as a threat to the MFA's timetable for socialism because, we would report, the party's leader, Soares, favored a form of economic development dependent on foreign investment. For us this translated as: There is nothing socialist about Mario Soares and his Socialist Party. We were leagues from the kind of mindset in politics capable of contemplating the pragmatic embrace of a lesser evil.

In its official newspaper, *25 de Abril*, the MFA questioned the Socialist Party's mandate, arguing that, if the governing military body had described itself as communist, and not socialist, the PCP, not the PS, would have received the highest volume of votes. The MFA, moving to solidify its socialist credentials, next declared as official national policy the drive toward workers' control, and intensified its campaign within the armed forces itself to "cleanse" the barracks of all "fascist and reactionary elements."

Military officers influential in the Captain's Movement, albeit politically inexperienced, had dominated the 240 member MFA assembly from the beginning, and were increasingly radicalized after General Spínola's abortive coup which, among other objectives, had sought to maintain Portuguese sovereignty over its African empire, although now favoring neo-colonial methods over armed combat to do so. But events had moved beyond that option, and colonial independence was already assured, since the antiwar veterans on the MFA had no intention of intervening in what had become civil conflicts in the former colonies, as in Angola, where several factions were fighting for control of the country. Bypassing the governing coalition, the MFA announced a direct alliance with O Povo, the Portuguese masses. The popular revolution with its attendant transitional economic and social rearrangements was thus legitimized from above by military revolutionists who spoke of a future state controlled by the majority class which produced the wealth from below.

In response, Soares removed the Socialist Party from the provisional government and vowed that his "majority" would block the MFA's attempt to govern without the parties. Tod and I would conclude in our article for the *Progressive* that Soares' approach posed no serious challenge because the MFA was both "popular and powerful," and that neither the military "nor the workers' movement need the political parties to make the social revolution." That this would prove an inflammatory and provocative statement in the ears of many of the *Progressive's* older social democratic readership was a revelation we would only learn about after publication.

Having gathered up arms full of revolutionary documents and posters, firmed up our link to the MES economist, we flew back to New York where Tod and I spent the

next several month integrating revolutionary Portugal into our Safe Return agenda. Thus Portugal came to occupy a space of its own in our daily workload, even as amnesty plodded on and fields of action widened for ongoing involvement with GIs of the all-volunteer forces era.

I must have almost immediately begun sifting through our notes and source materials to draft a long article for WIN, while I imagine Tod did the same for the more focused 1,500 word piece for the *Progressive*. On the other hand, maybe both initial drafts were mine since my name appears first in the byline for both articles, very likely because it had fallen to me to read and digest the mounds of printed matter we'd brought home written in Portuguese, then to transfer that research to a narrative structure. In that case Tod, still the more experienced writer, would have edited me, sometimes heavily, and added sections of his own. Both these articles marked our initiation into public journalism as a writing duo, acquiring our future assignments through the traditional protocol of successful queries, albeit only on the marginal ends of the established Left.

During our intense push to publish what we'd seen and learned we refined a plan to create a vehicle – the Portugal Information Center (PIC) - for sharing and updating information on what was a very rapidly evolving revolutionary moment. Our initial list was built from readers of our articles invited to contact us, expanding from there into a small but highly politicized network of likeminded revolution-watchers. Toward the end of August our list was sufficiently large to justify mailing a “memo” formalizing PIC's agenda to “build support for Portuguese self-determination; publicize and expose U.S. (read CIA) destabilization efforts and incidents of economic warfare by the West;

condemn U.S. “contingency” planning for intervention; and expose the lies of the Red-baiters.”

The memo covered “the first in a series of informational packets... which PIC will disseminate on a regular basis.” In return we requested recipients to send their own materials for inclusion in future packets.^{viii} We also used the occasion to announce our fall speaking tour, asking to be notified immediately “if any groups or colleges in your area would like to organize an appearance” for a MES activist named Francisco Madeira. In a p.s. we suggested that voluntary donations “to defray postage and printing would be appreciated.” But checks were to be made out to the Citizen’s Commission of Inquiry, not Safe Return, to avoid confusion around why a post-Vietnam amnesty project was suddenly concerned with a revolution in Portugal. Internally, of course, it was no great leap for us. Later we would run PIC under the auspices of ATOM, but CCI was still on the books, and perhaps more expedient at that stage for taking in funds; that’s a mystery I can no longer solve. We certainly hoped PIC would pay for itself, but as Tod would write Linda Alband a month later when seeking her help for booking our speaker in the Bay Area, “our main concern is that the Truth be told about Portugal, and money is a secondary consideration.”

I sense that our passion for the revolutionary promise of Portugal would have been familiar to our historical comrades a generation earlier who had flocked to support, fighting or otherwise, the Republican cause in Spain against Franco’s fascistic overthrow. Circumstance in Portugal, of course, couldn’t have been more different than they were during the Spanish Civil War. But it’s the emotional link by leftists worldwide, including in the U.S., to each of these events, where I see the parallel.

And indeed, even at that, I was somewhat amazed at the enormous amount of time Tod devoted to the planning and execution of a speaking tour for the MES economist we invited to address as many college audiences as we could sign up – while sprinkling in a couple of gigs for the Middle East speakers as well in his promotional enthusiasm. This was Tod as booking agent extraordinaire, a role he always relished for whatever cause we'd adopted to scold and defy our governing masters. With Portugal, Tod was even more highly charged than usual. And this brought out his cloak and dagger side and love of intrigue. He had chosen the *nomme de guerre*, "Francisco Madeira," to promote our speaker, on the reasonable grounds that, had we used the man's real name, he was likely to be denied when applying for a visa at the U.S. embassy in Lisbon. Tod also chose my home address as a dead drop for any correspondence between contacts in Portugal and ourselves.

For political guidance we had turned to Carl Feingold, an independent Trotskyist whose compositing firm had set type for us dating from the days of CCI. Carl and Tod had developed a close personal friendship; Carl's choice of trades and his business acumen no doubt reminded Tod of his own father's print shop, where Tod too had learned the rudiments of setting type and of how to run a business. But he also admired Carl's political development, and especially his ability to plot and name and analyze the discreet phases of Portugal's revolutionary development, which, although a delight to both Tod and I, were outside our base of knowledge and experience. To help sort through what we were witnessing and recording, we turned to this strong anti-Stalinist, but ever-staunch devotee of the Leninist revolutionary game plan, to frame PIC's political line, and eventually collaborate with us in one future writing assignment.

Our plan to return to Lisbon in October – the three of us now – was already in place by the end of September when we once more wrote to Carol and Ping Ferry in what was undoubtedly the most mature and well stated proposal we ever put before them to “announce our new program, Alternatives to Militarism, Inc.,” our tax exempt status finally approved by the IRS that June. We wrote:

“In recent months we have studied and researched the unfolding events in Portugal. Should a truly democratic socialist state emerge, the immediate and long range implications for Iberia, Western Europe and global détente are enormous. No doubt this generally accepted truism partially accounts for the chilly reception by the U.S. and other NATO countries to the April 25, 1974 coup that toppled the Caetano/Salazar dictatorship.

Our involvement in the issue of Portugal has two components:

1. We wish to help create among Americans, through articles, speakers, educational forums, literature dissemination, etc. support for the principal of non-intervention in the internal affairs of Portugal. Though this is an ambitious undertaking, and must inevitably involve numerous political constellations to be successful, we believe some initiative and preparation in this direction is long overdue. Our principal objective is to avoid another Chile.

2. Of equal importance and more direct application to American politics is our intention to analyze the nature and viability of factory, farm and barracks experiments in “workers’ control.” The establishment of far reaching democratic reforms within the military, for example, may provide important models and lessons for our homegrown GI movement. In fact our study of “military democracy” in Portugal directly complements

the second major area for which ATOM is currently developing programs. We have begun a comprehensive study on the question of “military unionism.”

We asked the Ferrys for \$1,500 to cover our flights and book purchases, retroactively I suppose, since I’m sure we were anxious to get some cash flow generated for this project. We would have already earmarked money for our plane fares from our general fund, and taken what we needed for getting around in Portugal by train. The amount we budgeted for the Ferrys seems high, but it might be read as a sign that we were indeed now paying at least our accommodations. We always paid for meals from our own pockets. Even on our subsistence wages, say \$150 a week by then, no more and maybe less, it was enough for us to live comfortable Bohemian lives, totally detached from the consumer habits that strapped others into their daily harnesses to chase a buck. I’m sure Carl paid his own way.

As I had mentioned above, the publication of our article in *The Progressive* caused a shit storm among pockets of the magazine’s social democratic subscribers. No long before our second trip to Portugal, Irwin Knoll had sent us copies of a half dozen letters he’d received denouncing the authors of “Worker’s Control in Portugal,” which was now out in the September issue. Without intending, but certainly with an abundance of indifference, we had struck deep into the institutional heart of American Social Democracy, and opened wounds within the very directorates of the tendency’s two most important parties, Social Democrats, USA and the Socialist Party USA, both remnants of an historically significant page of American political history, but, for all intents and purposes in 1975, moribund.

Both were factions of an earlier split in the American Socialist Party once led by Eugene V. Debs, and both maintained an apparatus in some form, guarded over by one of their more venerable functionaries. In fact a man like Carl Gershman, Executive Director of the Social Democrats, could probably still open doors at high levels in the Democratic Party and Labor Movement, where this was as far left as elected officials and union leaders would permit themselves to go, finding their co-thinkers among such admired European social democratic as Willy Brandt and Olaf Palme. So, it was with these contexts in mind that the authors of “Worker’s Control in Portugal,” digested their bad notices, and got off a replay of modest length before departing New York.

One of our critics, not among the social democrats, attacked us from the left, and while scoring at least one good shot – which I’ll get to below - was too close to us in her general appraisal and aspirations for the revolution to warrant inclusion in our response. Or maybe we knew her name and she was from a rival corner of the more contemporary radical left, and, in just reading a few words, Comrade Feingold was able to pinpoint her affiliation, give a brief history of when this faction split from some other faction and got established on their own, reveal the name of both their newspaper and most learned theoretical guru, all the while providing a point by point refutation of her critique. These are alternative realities, and both are possible.

As for our social democratic critics, two high placed cadres and two plain old *Progressive* subscribers who were co-thinkers, they were seeing us through the fogged lenses of their own past struggles with the Communists, one that had its origins in the nineteenth century when the German Marxists adopted the parliamentary road to power over armed insurrection and the dictatorship of the proletariat. In other words they saw

anyone from in the youthful ranks of the New Left who criticized the Socialist Party of Mario Soares and advocated for revolution from below, as an avatar of the Bolsheviks, foreshadowing a Stalin in the wings.

They had us completely wrong. We were naïve enough to imagine that a bottom up democratic revolution was a possibility under those circumstance, having been seduced by the workers' seizure of the means of production and the culture of barracks' democracy. We certainly had strong doubts that the workers and radical soldiers would be able to hold the ground they now occupied. For the moment we were happy to promote the living spectacle, and our lack of breath in understanding contests of power made us fail to think about the structure the workers would need to govern in their own names, or what exact path they might take to achieve that end. The base unit would be some version of a soviet, a worker's council of the type quickly crushed by the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution; beyond that we did not speculate.

We answered our critics with counter accusations of hypocrisy for their silence over a growing number of attacks throughout Portugal on the Communist Party offices by freedom loving vigilantes; we further pointed out that CIA's handprints were all over Mario Soares and his socialist allies, the agency "funneling up to \$10 million a month to the Portuguese Socialists since June; and finally we claimed that "the letter writers ignored the spontaneous revolutionary process [where] the urban and rural proletariat in Portugal are rapidly creating new forms of participatory democracy on the shop floor and in the neighborhoods." These gains, we wrote, were "under severe attack by the very forces who mourn the "death of democracy," with the Socialist Party leading the "wave of reaction." The point we had failed to address by the critic on our left flank, however,

would prove the decisive omission, and that was the naïve trust we had borrowed from our Portuguese comrades in the reliability of the MFA to guarantee “the revolutionary process.” But that post mortem must await an account ahead of how events ultimately unraveled.

This thought of an unraveling did not preoccupy us when we returned to Lisbon on October 12th. Our task was straightforward, to gather up-to-date information on the progress of the workers’ and barracks’ councils, to which we would add a round of tasty restaurants and plenty of hang time in cafes with one local organizer or intellectual or another, getting their versions of: Whither Portugal, which we would eagerly transfer to our notebooks. Carl’s agenda was to conduct lengthy interviews with representatives of all political currents active in the revolutionary drama. One morning we found ourselves in a closed room at the headquarters of the UDP, a Maoist group with some influence among rural workers in north of Portugal.

I liked Carl well enough. He was a kindly man. But outside the realm of politics, he could be dull company. I felt in his Old Left manner little celebration of life or individuality, the legacy of his political culture having imposed on him a colorless and shadowy existence, speaking scripted lines and always with the air of someone operating from a semi-clandestine cell. I would soon, however, owe Carl Feingold for his indispensable support in a tight situation where the emotions stirred in me were on a scale with what I’d experienced when the French special agents charged through my hotel door two years earlier with news that the Paris Conference on Desertion had been banned.

It was immediately clear from the demeanor of the two comrades who ushered us into this back room, that we were not objects of their admiration. Just as we were getting seated, one of them produced a “piece,” and set it ominously on the table atop his canvas pack. Carl and I exchanged anxious looks, as one of the comrades proceeded to hand me a copy of a five page single spaced diatribe, Recommendations Against Tod Ensign and Michael Uhl, Directors of the “Portuguese Information Center” in New York, written and distributed by none other than Dee Charles Knight.

I was momentarily unnerved and didn’t know what to expect. But Carl took immediate control of the situation which was not unfamiliar to him, although I’m not sure the 9 mm. semiautomatic was a prop in any similar impromptu political trials he may have had a role in, say when he was expelled from the Social Workers Party many years before. What was called for here was not panic, but rhetoric. And Carl, counterattacking quickly, seemed to have a pre-determined formula for neutralizing Knight’s lengthy bill of indictments as the sour grapes of a disgruntled former political ally, which was in fact entirely accurate as I was quick to confirm after giving the document a cursory reading. The more Carl spoke, the more deeply did he impress our inquisitors with his subtle grasp of the ground rules of Leninist infighting, not least on how to deal with the slanders and half-truths of adversaries.

Knight labeled his venomous screed a “report,” and the many grievances he marches across his crammed manuscript have already been dealt with in context in earlier chapters. There is not even a pretense of balancing our merits and achievements against our many alleged misdeeds. He simply revisits the scenes of past conflicts without any hint that they may have been more than single sided. Moreover, still harping about our

decision to call off the Paris Conference, he is patently deceitful claiming that he and the other exile delegates wanted to defy the French government when Knight himself had admitted in AMEX magazine that they too had acquiesced in the banning. If that was a mistake, a possibility I have already conceded, it was a collective one, not just ours.

We are denounced for refusing to join NCUUA even though, purrs Knight, the coalition “only required agreement to a statement of purpose to demand universal, unconditional amnesty, as well as implementation of the Paris Agreement for peace in Vietnam, and to educate the U.S. people on the structures and institutions that had caused the war.” True enough. But that was precisely why we had refused to join. It was not just that we wouldn’t “submit to discipline, however lax,” as Knight tooted piously—indeed we made a celebration of our preference for independent action. We had opposed that statement of purpose openly and on grounds that were purely political, as I have already taken pains to explain elsewhere.

As witnesses for the prosecution Knight assembles the names of all the participants in the amnesty movement with whom we fell out or never got on with in the first place. In the latter category he mentions Jeanne Friedman, known too me only after she incurred my animus when leading the charge to have me excluded from NCUUA, an episode I have also dealt with earlier. Knight now identifies Friedman as a leader of “the National Anti-Imperialist Caucus (Winter Soldier Organization) which was previously part of VVAW/WSO.” The irony here, of course, is that Friedman, having apparently found NCUUA infertile ground for her activism, migrated to VVAW, and then, under the banner of the above named faction, was herself expelled from that organization.^{ix}

With the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) firmly in control of VVAW, its Vietnam veteran leaders wished to reorient the group's mission toward a strictly veteran constituency, which would have excluded or downgraded a non-veteran member like Friedman. She had originally inserted herself in resister and veteran politics, I suppose, on the strength of her passion as a long time antiwar activist seeking ongoing involvement in the shrinking terrain of radical politics. But here was Knight using Friedman under circumstances where her conflict with other political rivals, and not with Safe Return, merely spotlighted behaviors du jour in a movement riddled with such internecine squabbles

Ultimately even the most hard ass leftwing fundamentalist reading this document couldn't fail to see that Knight's major gripe was around money, a clear signal that greed and envy, and not just politics, was deeply mixed within Knight's conflicting motives. Contemplating our fund raising successes, Knight's fanciful abacus produces a revenue total derived from amnesty work "close to half a million dollars." That figure no doubt was the one thing that got the attention of anyone receiving Knight's "report." Would that it had been accurate. But it is on the strength of such figures made up in his own head that Knight hoped to convince his audience that the primary impulse behind our activities was making money, and that we were more interested in business than politics. "For people unfortunate enough to be dependent on them for anything," Knight sighs, this relationship undermined their political effectiveness.

And there's the crux. Knight resented his moments of grasping dependence on us, but he could never solve the mystery of how we were able to succeed in fundraising – although much more modestly than he fantasized. Knight's exaggerated figure is the best

evidence that he didn't have a clue as to how we managed to finance a state of independence he so profoundly envied. It was precisely because we put our operation on the business basis he so bitterly criticized. I have already gone into enough detail on the mechanics of our "business." We ran it out of a cigar box as Tod liked to say, while giving the likes of Dee Knight the impression that we possessed a golden goose.

To make his dithering complete, Knight speculated that at least a quarter of our half million dollars came through foundations and legal fees. The former, a complete fiction (I can count on one hand the number of very small grants we received from foundations); and the latter, an absolute slander on Tod the lawyer who may have asked clients to pay a share of expenses from time to time – and that rarely – but to my knowledge never charged a legal fee in his life.^x As for not being interested in politics, as anyone who knew us then or who reads this memoir must inevitably attest, we were interested in little else. And if this was a form of addiction, it was one we had found a way to support and Knight didn't.

I must admit that most of whatever else happened in Portugal during the two weeks we were there had been displaced once again after being blindsided by an unforeseen shock of circumstance. This time it wasn't agents of the combined power of the French and American States, but a former comrade, although in this case a person for whom I never felt much respect. Forget the fact that what Knight had written was so obviously one-sided and full of falsehoods, it had touched me under uncomfortable circumstances that momentarily made me feel for my safety. Beyond that Knight obsessive crusade to "bring down Safe Return," brought forth zero consequences.

Back in New York much of November was dedicated to the logistics for the national tour of our speaker whose real name was Joao Ferreira Souza. This was almost entirely Tod's baby, as I have noted. While he and Joao crisscrossed the country, I was primarily occupied with the task of composing the first issue of our Portuguese Information Bulletin for distribution to our PIC network. And then, events in Portugal took an unanticipated turn when, on the morning of November 25th, a unit of paratroopers committed to their society's socialist transformation made what was interpreted as a faint toward insurrection, and thus I would write in the Bulletin, "accomplished something the Sixth Government had repeatedly failed to do, the uniting of the Council of the Revolution against the Left."

Instantly the entire focus of the inaugural Bulletin shifted from a summary of what we had learned during our recent visit to a blow by blow account of the actions leading up to the disturbing news that the revolution now hung in the balance. The Bulletin, dated December 6th, went out soon thereafter. The one hopeful note we could sound was that, throughout November, "our MES economist spoke to forty different audiences in eighteen states." The list was impressive and included such high profile campuses as Stanford, Wesleyan, Cornell and Columbia, along with dozens of other university or organizational venues and media blitzes "from Vermont to Oregon." The tour was self-supporting – each venue passed Joao along to the next - and if we reaped any gain from it financially, it was from passing the hat to support PIC, or from the sale of our PIC "solidarity poster" featuring a photo of a tank running down a Lisbon Avenue when the revolution broke out on April 25, 1974, super-loaded with literally dozens of

ecstatic Portuguese men, above which in a bright yellow ink we placed the slogan, “Portugal Must Not Become the Next Chile!”

There was a quick response to our Bulletin from an unexpected quarter. Alan Hunter, a Boston based academic and an editor of the journal, *Radical America* wrote sounding us out for a comprehensive essay on the Portuguese Revolution, a prospect which excited Tod and I tremendously. We looked on this as a promotion into ranks of the unaffiliated Marxist left, this article a task of initiation. After a sober assessment of our skills in the area of serious political analysis, we had decided we needed Carl Feingold’s co-authorship.

I had misgivings about this arrangement. It’s possible that I already had more than just ambition for a certain degree of standing in the radical community. Another way to view this long activist whirl I’ve set to documenting is as an apprenticeship to become a writer, and I already bridled at the idea of someone – at least someone not Tod – putting words in my mouth. Tod and I did this with each other as a matter of routine, almost through telepathic communication. It’s not just that Carl was overly didactic, he was incapable of writing a coherent sentence. I would have the burden of the first draft, which I welcomed, but Carl would then be given license to verbally alter anything I wrote with the *correct* political interpretation. But if that was the price of getting recognition through a piece in *Radical America*, I was content to go along.

As the year wound down, our attentions reverted to other ongoing preoccupations. We continued to keep an eye on developments in Portugal, and, based on the success of the speaking tour, Tod was keen to organize a repeat performance, which, owing to the rapid deterioration of revolutionary prospects, came to naught. To update what we

needed to complete the essay for *Radical America*, Tod and I would return one more time to Portugal in the coming spring, where, to also satisfy another assignment for the *Progressive* we would enjoy one of our more exotic and fun filled travel adventures. That account, and a detailed summary of how Portugal limped back into the Western fold, are covered in Chapter 22.

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- ⁱ. I cite here is one example from an authoritative source of how this question percolated throughout the Left: “If a revolution should occur in Portugal, it would not be another Third World revolution but the first in a metropolitan capitalist country. And that would certainly be an event of very wide-reaching consequences and implications.” Paul Sweezy, *Monthly Review* Vol. 27, No. 4: September 1975.
- ⁱⁱ. “Portugal: Reform or Revolution,” Michael Uhl and Tod Ensign, *WIN Magazine*, July 17, 1975.
- ⁱⁱⁱ. Ibid
- ^{iv}. “Workers Control in Portugal,” Michael Uhl and Tod Ensign, *The Progressive*, September 1975.
- ^v. One comprehensive account of these time can be found in *Portugal: The Impossible Revolution*, by Phil Mailer. PM Press, 2012.
- ^{vi}. Wikipedia entry for Frank Carlucci.
- ^{vii}. Sweezy op. cit.
- ^{viii}. I can find no reference to what this, or subsequent packets contained. There may not have been subsequent packets after we began to publish the Portugal Information Bulletin.
- ^{ix}. This story appears on p. 80 in the *Turning: A History of Vietnam Veterans Against the War*, by Andrew Hunt.
- ^x. Check with Fran.