

# LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

## THE PORTUGUESE REVOLUTION AND THE SPANISH SOCIALISTS IN THE MID-1970S

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This article explores how the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) interpreted and reacted to the Portuguese revolution. Based on the newspaper of the party, *El Socialista*, and complemented with primary sources from Spanish, British and French archives,<sup>2</sup> the article will show the relevance of the Portuguese experience in shaping the PSOE perspective on the transition from dictatorship to democratic socialism. Additionally, it will highlight the impact of the revolution on the party's international relations. The thesis defended here is that PSOE's development immediately before and during the Spanish transition to democracy cannot be fully understood without paying attention to the Portuguese revolution. The revolution was an important example for the Spanish socialists, influencing their strategy before and during the transition to democracy in Spain in at least two senses. Firstly, it showed them how difficult the understanding between socialists and communists was in Portugal. The Portuguese experience reinforced PSOE's guardedness in establishing a coalition with the Spanish Communist Party (PCE). Secondly, the revolution had an indirect and crucial impact on PSOE. It played a pivotal role in enhancing the party's significance among its international partners, leading to substantial support from European social democracy starting in the spring of 1975. This backing would be decisive in positioning PSOE as the main party of the left in Spain once democracy arrived

### ABSTRACT

This article examines how the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party interpreted and responded to the Portuguese revolution. Based on the party's newspaper, *El Socialista*, and supplemented by primary sources from Spanish, British and French archives, the article shows the relevance of the Portuguese experience in shaping the Spanish Socialist Party's perspective on the transition from dictatorship to democratic socialism. It also highlights the impact of the revolution on the party's international relations. The main working hypothesis is that the development of Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, immediately before and during the Spanish transition to democracy, cannot be fully understood without paying attention to the Portuguese revolution.

**Keywords:** Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, Carnation Revolution, socialist internationalism, socialist and communist relations.

### RESUMO

**LIÇÕES A TER EM CONTA:  
A REVOLUÇÃO PORTUGUESA  
E OS SOCIALISTAS  
ESPANHÓIS NOS MEADOS  
DA DÉCADA DE 1970**



Este artigo explora como o Partido Socialista Operário Espanhol interpretou e reagiu à revolução portuguesa. Com base no jornal do partido, *El Socialista*, e complementado com fontes primárias de arquivos espanhóis, britânicos e franceses, o artigo mostra a relevância da experiência portuguesa na formação da perspetiva do partido socialista espanhol sobre a transição da ditadura para o socialismo democrático. Além disso, destaca o impacto da revolução nas relações internacionais do partido. A principal hipótese de trabalho é que o desenvolvimento do Partido Socialista Operário Espanhol, imediatamente antes e durante a transição para a democracia em Espanha, não pode ser plenamente compreendido sem prestar atenção à revolução portuguesa.

**Palavras-chave:** Partido Socialista Operário Espanhol, Revolução dos Cravos, internacionalismo socialista, relações socialistas e comunistas.

and significantly influenced the party leadership's shift towards a more moderate ideological stance.

Since the 1990s, historiography has acknowledged the impact that the Portuguese revolution had on Spain and on the Spanish transition to democracy.<sup>3</sup> The vast majority of works have focused on the reactions of different Spanish groups, such as the military,<sup>4</sup> extreme left parties,<sup>5</sup> and the socialist party,<sup>6</sup> to the Portuguese events. Other works have touched upon the impact that the revolution had in the way key international actors, specifically the United States, approached the change of regime in Spain.<sup>7</sup> This article combines these two perspectives while focusing on the Spanish Socialist Party.

The work of the historian Raquel Varela on the impact of the Carnation Revolution on PSOE is the one more closely related to this case study. This article builds on Varela's pioneering work, although proposing a different perspective and reaching broader conclusions. The point of departure is different in both articles. Varela's article considers

that the PSOE of 1974 was a party that:

‘advocated the establishment of a political regime [based on] syndical and political freedoms, freedom of assembly and association, and a capitalist economy. [It was] a clearly European model, sponsored by Willy Brandt, François Mitterrand and Bruno Pitterman’.<sup>8</sup>

This article adopts a point of departure that differs from the one above in two important respects. Firstly, it considers that, in 1974, PSOE did not advocate a capitalist economy. The objective of the party, as stated in its Suresnes congress, was

‘the conquest of political and economic power by the working class, and the radical transformation of the capitalist society into a socialist society. It insists in the increasingly urgent implantation in Spain of a democratic regime as a mean through which [we can] achieve these objectives’.<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, this article contends that, at the time, Willy Brandt and François Mitterrand and their respective parties – the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and the French Socialist Party (PS) – did not defend the same model. While the German party advocated what we might call a classic social democratic line, the French party promoted a kind of democratic socialism that aimed at breaking with capitalism and at establishing democratic socialism. For achieving this goal, the French proposed a union of the left,

chiefly between socialists and communists, and the implementation of workers' self-management. These two lines collided within the Socialist International (SI) between 1972 and 1976,<sup>10</sup> precisely the years in which the Portuguese revolution and the Spanish transition to democracy occurred. Furthermore, both French socialists and German social democrats attempted to spread their respective models in the Iberian Peninsula through Socialist Party (PS) and PSOE.<sup>11</sup>

These divergent starting points lead to different approaches being applied to the object of study (in this article, PSOE's international relations are taken into account) and to conclusions that converge in some respects and diverge in others. Varela's article seemingly presupposes that before the revolution PSOE had embraced a social democrat agenda, yet within the pages of *El Socialista* it in fact conveyed Marxist concepts.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, this article posits that PSOE did not adopt a social democratic agenda until the late 1970s. It further argues that one of the several factors influencing the ideological shift of the Spanish party towards a more moderate stance was, in fact, the Portuguese revolution.

#### **PSOE'S RECEPTION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE CARNATION REVOLUTION**

When the Portuguese revolution began in Portugal, Spain still lived under Franco's dictatorship. At that time, General Franco was 81 years old and ill, and in Spain, it was generally assumed that the dictatorship could not continue unchanged after the death of the dictator.<sup>13</sup> The opposition to the dictatorship in Spain had similarities to the one in Portugal before the demise of the *Estado Novo*. Still, there were important differences between the two countries, mainly at the socioeconomic and military levels, but also regarding the international situation of both countries.

In both Spain and Portugal, the dominant forces within the clandestine opposition against the dictatorships were the communist parties [Spanish Communist Party (PCE) in Spain and (Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) in Portugal]. The communists in both countries had a superior organization, boasted larger memberships and were more actively engaged in opposition activities than the socialists. However, PCE and PCP differed in their ideological lines. In the 1970s, the PCE, in contrast to the PCP, embraced the Eurocommunist ideological line, while the latter adhered to an orthodox line aligned with the directives of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

Conversely, the socialist parties in both countries – PS and PSOE – were characterized by their modest size, limited membership, and relatively restrained activism against their respective dictatorships. In the early 1970s, both PS and PSOE underwent a process of renewal that placed them very close ideologically. Their ideological evolution was significantly influenced by the experiences of the left in Chile and France, where collaboration between socialists and communists was a key feature. While the former case served as a cautionary example to avoid, the latter presented a promising model to emulate. The French union of the left, achieved in 1972 with the signature of a common

program by the communists, socialists, and left radicals, demonstrated that in situations in which socialists were less influential than the communists, the former could prosper and expand at the expense of the latter. Moreover, this left alliance was a strategic move aimed at accomplishing a novel form of socialism – democratic socialism, a synthesis of socialism and democracy – which both PS and PSOE endorsed.

The renovation of PSOE in the early 1970s led to a division within the Party. By January 1974, the SI determined that the faction spearheading the renovation would represent Spanish socialism within the organization,<sup>14</sup> and from this moment, PSOE would be built around the party's faction that was ideologically closer to the PS. It was this renewed PSOE, led by young militants full of aspirations. This party had to interpret a revolution in a neighboring country that presented an opportunity to establish the type of democratic socialism the party advocated for Spain.

Thus, when the Portuguese dictatorship was overthrown on the 25 of April 1974, PSOE welcomed it. The way it did so shows that this was a very emotional and encouraging event for the Spanish, who felt they shared a similar past and a link of brotherhood

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with the Portuguese. Shortly after the  
Armed Forces Movement (MFA) coup, the  
Spanish party and its related trade union,  
the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT),  
published a note expressing their 'happi-  
ness to our brothers from Portugal and to  
the working class for having started a deci-  
sive stage on their way towards liberation'.<sup>15</sup>

They also extended their greetings to the

PS, and urged the Portuguese army to make way for the people. The Spanish socialists found the re-establishment of political freedom and human rights in Portugal to be 'inspiring' and a great 'encouragement to the Spanish people', believing that it would contribute to speed up the decomposition of Franco's regime.<sup>16</sup>

Spain and Portugal had many similarities (both countries had suffered long right-wing dictatorships, they had been internationally ostracized, although to different degrees, and both were economically underdeveloped in comparison with their Western European neighbors), but also differences. PSOE was aware of them. The most relevant difference at this moment seemed to be Portugal's involvement in the colonial wars and the effect that it had on the military. If the army, in Portugal, was the chief driving force for the overthrow of the dictatorship, in Spain, it was merely a key supporter.<sup>17</sup> This offered food for thought to the Spanish socialists. In Spain, the military was a key supporter of the regime (together with the Catholic church and the National Movement), but there were members of the armed forces who were dissatisfied with the conservatism within the institution and with the lack of professional prospects. In fact, a group of Spanish militaries would create the Democratic Military Union (UDM) in the summer of 1974,

inspired by the Portuguese MFA.<sup>18</sup> The socialists were skeptic about the possibility of seeing the military having the same role in overthrowing the dictatorship in Spain as in Portugal. However, they deemed it helpful to work for a more self-critical Spanish military (which in their view was not fighting a colonial war, but a war against its own people), one that was willing to renew itself.<sup>19</sup> This might at least change the viewpoints of the less reactionary sectors of the army. Thus, although PSOE considered the army responsible for the Spanish situation since 1936, and for being a repressive apparatus at the service of fascism, they sent this message: '[the military] could get rid [of this image] whenever it wants, if it really wants'. Being by the side of the people, the Spanish military could recover 'the image of honor that it has lost'. The example had been set: by helping its people, the Portuguese army had also saved itself.<sup>20</sup>

The influence of Marxism in the thinking of the Spanish socialists can be noted in the way they interpreted the Portuguese events. They warned the Portuguese left about the fact that after the coup the bourgeoisie had not disappeared and that, although the interests of this class in democracy might occasionally be coincident with those of the working class, ultimately the aims of both classes were opposed.<sup>21</sup> However, the pages of *El Socialista* show that they also considered that Portugal, due to its economic underdevelopment, was not ready to try revolutionary experiments.<sup>22</sup>

In October 1974, PSOE held its last congress in exile in Suresnes (France). In it, the party chose a new executive committee led by the young Felipe González, updated its ideological line and opened the door for establishing pacts with all the forces of the left, including the communists. In the context opened by the Portuguese revolution and followed by the overthrown of the Colonels dictatorship in Greece, PSOE's congress attracted a good deal of international attention. Among the attendants were representatives of the PS, who were received with 'intense happiness and with great enthusiasm' by the congress delegates.<sup>23</sup> PSOE expected that the Portuguese example would make the survival of the dictatorship in Spain more difficult after Franco's death, and what happened in Portugal continued to be commented on in a very emotional tone.

In the first months of the revolution, there is a noticeable abundance of emotionally charged adjectives reflecting joy, contentment, and occasional concern in the discourse of PSOE. For example, while presenting the international policy of the party during the Suresnes congress, PSOE members expressed their 'most fervent encouragement to the Portuguese people, feeling the triumph of the anti-fascist forces [in Portugal] as our own [triumph]'.<sup>24</sup> If we compare the kind of language used towards Portugal and the Portuguese to that used towards Greece and the Greeks, it is evident that the Spanish socialists felt closer and identified themselves primarily with their Iberian neighbors. To be clear, they also greeted the fall of the Greek dictatorship, but references to this event were scarce and the language used was more sober: '[PSOE] also greets the Greek people for the overthrown of the military structure that suffocated their more basic freedoms'.<sup>25</sup>

However, I would not go as far as to suggest that PSOE considered Portugal ‘not like a neighbor country, but as part of a single body that would be the Iberian Peninsula’.<sup>26</sup> There was, without any doubt, a especial affinity with the Portuguese and what happened in Portugal; however, the analogies that PSOE made between the situation in

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both countries, and the lessons it sought to draw, were tied to their own specific context. Depending on the party’s interests and purposes in the rapidly changing situation in the Iberian Peninsula, they identified or distanced themselves from the Portuguese events.

After the Suresnes congress, Felipe González granted an interview to the newspaper *El Correo de Andalucía*.<sup>27</sup> The questions that the journalist asked him reflected the interest aroused in Spain by PSOE’s ideological renewal, but also the fact that the stance of the party needed further clarification. This clarification had to be made by relating the party to its international partners and to its own history,<sup>28</sup> since these were existing examples that made possible to imagine what kind of party the renovated PSOE now was. González was asked about his connections with the French socialists, and: ‘[b]etween Soares and Willy Brandt, who do you prefer?’ and González answered: ‘socialism in Spain is not identifiable with socialism in Germany, and we do not know what will happen with Portuguese socialism’.<sup>29</sup> This shows that, at that time, the kind of socialism that PS proposed for Portugal was seen as a clearly different option from the social democrat one. It remained to be seen what would eventually happen in the Iberian country, because PSOE’s objectives were very similar to those of the PS.

In December 1974, the Spanish and the Portuguese socialists experienced some days of mutual tension during and after PS’s congress in Lisbon, an event of significant international prominence. It attracted representatives from nearly all major European socialist parties. PSOE’s leaders attended to it, but also the leader of a rival Spanish socialist party, Enrique Tierno Galván. The congress was held in the context of escalating political radicalization in Portugal, as disagreements between socialists and communists on the path that the revolution should follow intensified. This helps to understand PS’ extended invitations to several communist parties, including the Spanish, Italian, Romanian and Yugoslavian ones, to the congress. Additionally, Santiago Carrillo, the leader of the PCE, received an invitation to deliver a speech. This move by Soares was likely a strategic response to appease internal criticisms within his party, which argued that he was anti-communist due to his reluctance to form an alliance with the PCP as a means of expediting progress towards socialism. It could also be interpreted as a message aimed at the PCP and its leader, Álvaro Cunhal, demonstrating that the PS was not opposed to communism but rather to the avant-garde strategy of the PCP. Whatever may be the case, PSOE considered this move a humiliation. So much

so that Felipe González and Alfonso Guerra engaged in a dispute with Mário Soares and even threatened to abandon the congress. Moreover, a few days later, PSOE sent a complaint letter to PS alleging that the party's actions had adversely affected its public image in such a publicly relevant event.<sup>30</sup>

Shortly after the congress, PSOE's newspaper published an article in which it is noticeable that this recent experience colored how the Spanish interpreted the revolution. Now that the party had been directly affected by the political struggle in Portugal, it made a more critical interpretation of what was happening in Portugal, regretting the excessive egocentrism in Portuguese politics. The Spanish started to show concern regarding what was happening in the neighboring country, not only due to the ongoing economic and social crisis, but also because the short-sightedness of the Portuguese political parties was not helping in finding solutions. PSOE argued that the personalism in the PS (the article did not mention any specific name, but it probably referred to Mário Soares and Manuel Serra) and in the PCP (Álvaro Cunhal was explicitly mentioned), made the situation in Portugal especially difficult, because the leaders of the left were more concerned with short-term small victories than with a long-term strategy. The example offered to as proof of this was PS's invitation to the PCE, which was tactically used against the PCP. 'From this attitude derives [a] consequence that damages not only the Portuguese socialists, but also the Spanish socialists, neglecting [us] a basic rule of the [socialist] internationalism.'<sup>31</sup>

PSOE also showed concern about the split of the PS after the congress. The Socialist Popular Movement, the most leftist faction of the PS led by Manuel Serra, left the party in January 1975 and created the Socialist Popular Front. The Spanish did not dare to comment on the reasons for the rupture, but they considered that the split occurred at a crucial moment for Portugal, just a few months before the democratic elections. The split of the socialists had to be added to the division of the left between socialists and communists, which could damage the democratic alternative. Especially considering that the Portuguese parties that called themselves centrist were defending the interests of the right.<sup>32</sup>

PSOE's interpretation of the Portuguese revolution was coherent with the theoretical line followed by the party at the time. PSOE's leaders believed that, at least in theory, the union of the left was key for advancing first towards democracy and later towards democratic socialism. PSOE had been positively impressed by the union of the left in France, achieved in 1972. Still, the Portuguese revolution was teaching PSOE that this kind of union was more problematic and challenging to accomplish when the time to move towards socialism arrived.

I have not found broad analyses of the Portuguese revolution in the historical archive of PSOE, but the party kept reacting to and analyzing the political developments in Portugal in *El Socialista*. The discussion occurred in January 1975 about the shape of the trade union movement, in which the PCP advocated the union of the working class in

a unitary trade union to which it would be compulsory to be affiliated, and the PS defended the freedom of workers to unionize. PSOE published an article analyzing this debate. The Spanish considered that the Portuguese debate was not very well grounded. First, the communists had entered into a contradiction trying to impose trade union unity by law based on the argument that such was the will of the working class. Of course, had that been the case, it would not have been necessary to impose unity by law. On the other hand, PSOE did not understand the stance of the Portuguese socialists. What puzzled the Spaniards was whether or not PS's defense of trade union pluralism was based on their conviction that it was the best formula to defend the interests of the workers. These debates, and the experience that PSOE leaders had had in Lisbon in December 1974, led them to suspect that there were 'hidden reasons' behind the behaviors of PS and PCP that they did not fully understand.<sup>33</sup>

On 11 March 1975, forces of the right, led by the former President Spínola, attempted a reactionary coup d'état. The attempt failed, and the most leftist elements of the MFA, with the support of the PCP, used it as an argument to strengthen their positions in the State apparatus. They created the Council of the Revolution (CR), which became the supreme authority of the State. Shortly after, the CR approved a nationalization program. A month later, the MFA, again backed by the PCP, used its strengthened position to make the participation of the political parties in the elections conditional to the signature of a pact that limited the competencies and the autonomy of future governments. PS signed the pact.

PSOE understood the coup attempt as evidence of the real intentions of the Portuguese right, which were to return to a situation similar to the one before the 25 April. Against all the interpretations circulating at the time about who was really responsible for the coup and who benefited from it, PSOE considered that 'there is only one interpretation possible [...], it is a counterrevolutionary movement of the right that, like in Chile, would have [killed] the nascent Portuguese freedoms'.<sup>34</sup> Since the left was disunited and the right was conspiring, PSOE was expecting the upcoming democratic elections to clarify the political balance of power in Portugal.

At this stage, the Spanish no longer see the Portuguese experience as a model for Spain. They recognized that the revolution was relevant for Spain and tried to learn lessons from it. But they were concerned with an interpretation that they thought was widespread in Europe, and in general among the main political leaders of the West, which consisted in considering that, since Spain and Portugal were similar countries with similar historical trajectories, the Spanish transition to democracy would follow the Portuguese model. What PSOE believed was not completely accurate. For example, when the leaders of the Western European countries met in Rambouillet in November 1975, starting what would later become the G-7/G-8 forum, they showed awareness of the differences between Spain and Portugal.<sup>35</sup> Notwithstanding this fact, the US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, publicly expressed his concerns with respect to Portugal

and started to consider the possibility of intervention in the country in case the communists attained complete control.<sup>36</sup> This probably worried PSOE, which led the party to put distance between Spain and its neighbors.

Despite the remarkable similarities between both countries, the Spanish socialists considered that the differences were even more significant. Spain's greater industrial development, greater political and unionist contestation to the regime, and the different composition of the social groups of Spain and Portugal made any analogy between both countries erroneous, they argued. The lessons provided by Portugal would be influential in Spain. Still, at this moment, it was not possible to know what the transition would look like over there, and PSOE did not wish the increasingly tumultuous Portuguese events to determine foreign attitudes towards Spain.<sup>37</sup>

### **DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS, THE HOT SUMMER AND THE END OF THE REVOLUTION**

After the elections to the constituent assembly in Portugal in April 1975, in which PS was the most voted party with a 37.9% of the votes [the Popular Democratic Party (PPD), got 26.4% and the PCP 12.5% of the votes] PSOE considered that the results should give PS a greater power than initially conceived. The Spanish seemed to disregard the pact signed between the MFA and the political parties arguing that:

'Now that the will of the people is clear, the MFA should abandon [...] power and give it to civilians. Now, the [political] parties [...] should accept the result. Now, the government should be restructured according to the votes obtained by each party. Now, socialism starts to be built in Portugal'.<sup>38</sup>

This interpretation reflected PSOE's expectations back at home. The same article in *El Socialista* asked, 'and what about Spain? What could be the influence of the electoral success [of the socialists] in Portugal?'.<sup>39</sup> The answer was that any claim to avoid or postpone democratic elections using the argument that people were not ready for them was proven wrong in Portugal. Moreover, PSOE claimed that the Spaniards would learn from Portugal that the only feasible future was socialism.<sup>40</sup>

During the spring and summer of 1975, PSOE and PS strengthened their bilateral relations. Between 22 and 29 March 1975, a numerous group of Spanish socialists, among which there were PSOE and UGT members, visited different cities of Portugal, where they 'established contacts' with their Portuguese counterparts that could allow 'future encounters'.<sup>41</sup> From May on, the leaderships of both parties were involved in creating the brand Southern European Socialism, sponsored by the Ps, and they

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began to meet more frequently.<sup>42</sup> They met in PS's headquarters on 17 and 18 June, where they exchanged views on the future of socialism in Europe and decided to strengthen their bilateral relations, widening the activities of mutual solidarity. Furthermore, they supported each other publicly.<sup>43</sup> In July, PSOE's representatives visited Lisbon again to attend an international workshop on the 'construction of socialism' organized by the association António Sérgio. However, Felipe González could not attend because the Spanish authorities had confiscated his passport.<sup>44</sup> The correspondence between both executive committees also increased, according to the documentation based at PSOE's historical archive in the Pablo Iglesias Foundation.<sup>45</sup>

The increase in bilateral relations occurred during the tumultuous period known as 'Hot Summer' (*Verão Quente*), which put Portugal on the brink of a civil war. The situation in Portugal deteriorated in July and August 1975. After the April elections, the socialists and the communists had physical confrontations on 1<sup>st</sup> May. The leaders of the PCP and the CR made public statements that downplayed the importance of the electoral results because of the pact signed between the parties and the MFA. This led the PS, which considered that the electoral result granted them the legitimacy to take a leading role in the government and in the revolutionary process, to organize massive demonstrations in Lisbon and Oporto. Later, the occupation of the Socialist newspaper *República*, and the lack of satisfactory solutions given to this problem by the CR, led the socialists to suspend their attendance at the Council of Ministers, eventually resigning from government. The ministers of the PPD followed them four days later. Moreover, the contradictions within the MFA were clearly shown between June and July. In these months, it approved several documents that envisaged different, even antagonistic, ways of implementing Socialism in Portugal. To this, it must be added that the situation was further strained by the attacks on some PCP offices.

PSOE saw these events with concern. The pages of *El Socialista* during this period suggest that the Portuguese revolution taught two important lessons to the Spanish socialists. The polarization favored a Cold War dynamic in Portugal, which was made evident by the 'passionate support' that the USSR gave to Vasco Gonçalves' pro-communist government. This was regrettable but also a very important warning for Spain. Even though the international détente had opened new possibilities for leftist experimentation in Western Europe, the Cold War had not disappeared. If international intervention and Cold War dynamics were to be avoided, it was imperative to eschew radicalization and political polarization. This was an important lesson for Spain. PSOE also noted that if the increasingly violent situation had not degenerated in Portugal, it was due to the popular support for the PS, which kept alive the hope of solving this crisis without resorting to drastic measures.<sup>46</sup>

The second lesson derived from the behavior of the Portuguese communists. PSOE interpreted that the PCP was the party to blame for the crisis of the revolution. According to the Spanish, the PCP had tried to occupy the power vacuum since 25 April 1974.

It did so by occupying critical places in the Portuguese central and local administrations, in the trade unions, in the media and in the army. Although the PCP followed a line different from the Eurocommunist one defended by the PCE, PSOE equated some of the strategies of both parties. When the moment of regime change arrived, the communists were determined, and they considered themselves to be the avant-garde of the working class.<sup>47</sup>

When the Sixth Provisional Government was appointed in Portugal in September, PSOE believed it had the task of consolidating the achievements of the revolution. The opportunity was there, as the Portuguese achievements were ‘much more advanced than the proposals of the Common Program of the Left in France’. According to PSOE, now it was urgent to organize the management of the nationalized companies, in line with the PS program, which envisioned the self-management of workers and provided some space for private enterprises. The idea was to keep advancing towards democratic socialism, but slowly, with the participation of the PCP and without hierarchies between socialists and communists. The MFA now seemed to be more prone to support a pluralist democracy, which should be a step in the Portuguese way to socialism. The success of this experience might be an immediate example for the rest of the Latin countries.<sup>48</sup>

## **THE CARNATION REVOLUTION AND THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE SPANISH SOCIALISTS**

Given the available sources, it is difficult to assess the specific impacts of the Carnation Revolution on PSOE. However, as it has been shown in the previous pages, the Portuguese events taught some important lessons to the Spanish socialists. The Carnation Revolution certainly had an indirect impact on PSOE that should not be underestimated: it enhanced the party’s relevance for its international partners. The support that the European social democracy would provide to PSOE from 1975 onwards would contribute to it becoming the main party of the Spanish left once democracy was established in Spain.<sup>49</sup> The experiences that the European socialists and social democrats acquired in Portugal were key to their decision to fully support PSOE.

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The revolution also had an indirect impact on PSOE domestically – the Spanish authorities began to realize that it would be wise to tolerate the socialist party to minimize the potential influence of the communists among the Spanish working class. However, this is something already known in the literature and, therefore, not explored in this article.

The SI supported the Spanish party well before the beginning of the Carnation Revolution. Although this support was very important for the party, it was very modest compared to what it would receive from 1975 onwards. In March 1973, PSOE complained

to the leader of the British Labour Party, Harold Wilson, that ‘the Socialist International is limiting itself to low-key denunciations [against Franco’s regime]. And the financial aid offered by some brother socialist parties in Europe to the suppressed social democrat groups in Spain has been of little significance’.<sup>50</sup>

In January 1974, the SI created the Spain Committee, which was supposed to work towards the promotion of democracy in Spain and support the PSOE in this struggle. However, at this time there were parties, such as the German SPD, reluctant to fully support the Spanish party, which was led by unknown youngsters who seemed to be very radical. This situation would change in 1975. An important factor for this change was the experience that the European social democracy had gained during the Carnation Revolution. Let’s examine briefly how three of the most important international supporters of PSOE, the British Labour, the French socialists, and the German social democrats, reconsidered their relations with the Spanish socialists in light of the Portuguese events.

In the summer of 1975, before the famous meeting of the European social democrat parties in Stockholm in which the Committee of Friendship and Solidarity for Democracy and Socialism in Portugal was created, the British Foreign Office produced a document for James Callaghan and Harold Wilson that analyzed the relations between socialists and communists in Europe. The document shows that the British were concerned with the near future of the Iberian Peninsula, not only because of Portugal, but because the Portuguese situation might extend to Spain. It also shows that they believed that only a strong and moderate socialist party could compete in the left with the communists, beating them in the elections and constraining the latter to accept the rules of democracy.

Portugal was the most urgent concern at that time, but the British considered the Portuguese revolution ‘a lesson to us [the British] when considering the far greater prize of Spain’.<sup>51</sup> They believed that in the Portuguese case they had been especially fortunate, because before the revolution they had already made ‘links with the Portuguese Socialist Party and close personal contacts with Mário Soares, [...] there is no doubt that without him there would have been no focal point of opposition’.<sup>52</sup> The British acknowledged that they had ‘responded slowly and in some cases inadequately to initial Portuguese requests for assistance’.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, despite these limitations, the assistance of the European social democracy to the PS helped it win the elections in April. This meant that assisting the PS was the right thing to do.

Regarding Spain, the British government considered that the political evolution in Spain could be more peaceful and controlled than in Portugal. The main differences between these countries were that Spain had a vast middle class with a lot to lose, which was a stabilizing element that Portugal lacked, and the fact that the Spanish army was more moderate than the Portuguese one, as it had not suffered a prolonged and humiliating colonial war like the Portuguese army. However, the British also feared that they might

face in Spain a situation similar to the Portuguese one, in the sense that there could be a well-disciplined communist party receiving funds from the Soviet Union. Thus, they 'should not be taken by surprise in Spain'. For them, at that moment, there was not 'a single undisputed leader of the left [...] of the stature of Soares' in Spain. However, they already knew who might be the best candidates to support in Spain: 'if we are to meet a potential Communist challenge, I believe the PSOE offers the best opportunity for growth into a democratic socialist alternative'.<sup>54</sup>

For the French socialists (Ps) too, relations with PSOE took on a new dimension in light of the events in the Portuguese revolution. Ps maintained close ties with the Spanish socialists since before the Portuguese revolution. However, with the political change opened in Portugal on 25 April, the French socialists saw the opportunity to build a new kind of socialism, 'Southern European Socialism', and to spread their ideological and strategic line, at the center of which was the union between socialists and communists, abroad. Like in the case of the British Labour, the radicalization of the revolution after the failed coup attempt of March 1975 was a turning point for the French socialists. If, at that moment, the British decided to focus and increase their support on PSOE, the French, which were already supporting the Spanish party, saw in Spain an opportunity to extend their strategy of the union of the left now that it seemed to be unfeasible in Portugal.

On 21 April, the PSF noted that it was 'increasingly useful for FM [Françoise Mitterrand] to react to Spain'.<sup>55</sup> In Spain, PSOE was working on setting up a democratic opposition platform that would allow the socialists to establish relations on equal terms with the PCE and its coalition, the Democratic Junta, and the French perceived this as a second chance to validate their strategy outside their borders.

Regarding the German social democracy, the historian Antonio Munoz has shown that, before the revolution, the Germans were not so sure about granting all their support to PSOE. However, for the German social democrat party and government the radicalization of the Portuguese revolution from March 1975 onwards, together with the internal situation of Spain, where President Arias Navarro was unable to liberalize the regime and where the PCE was reuniting a part of the opposition in the Democratic Junta, were crucial for their decision to provide PSOE with 'all the imaginable support'. Their intention was to help PSOE become the main party of the Spanish left, thus counterbalancing the communist influence on the Spanish working class.<sup>56</sup> The German support would also increase the tolerance that the Spanish government demonstrated towards PSOE during the transition in Spain.

These three examples show that the Portuguese revolution, especially after it was radicalized in 1975, was a key factor that made some of the leading social democrat parties in Western Europe decide to give their full support to PSOE. This support, especially the one provided by the German social democrats, would end up being crucial for the party, although this issue goes beyond this article's scope.

## CONCLUSION

The Portuguese revolution was a relevant international event for PSOE, taking place shortly after the party had renewed itself. Portugal seemed to offer a scenario in which implementing the type of democratic socialism that PSOE advocated was possible. The Spanish socialists followed it very closely, as the pages of its official newspaper, *El Socialista*, demonstrate. Initially, the revolution was seen optimistically as an event signaling that the end of the Spanish regime might be near. However, in 1975, the radicalization of the revolution led the Spanish to try and build some distance between their own situation and that of Portugal. The socialist newspaper shows that in the last months of the revolution, PSOE drew two lessons from Portugal. One was that the political polarization had favored a constraining Cold War dynamic in Portugal, something that had to be avoided in Spain. The other one was that the understanding between socialists and communists was complex when the time to move towards socialism arrived. This was a lesson that could also be extrapolated to Spain. Finally, the revolution had an indirect and crucial impact on PSOE. It played a crucial and critical role in elevating the party's relevance for its international allies, resulting in substantial backing from European social democracy from the summer of 1975. <sup>RI</sup>

Reception date: 30 November 2023 | Approval date: 4 January 2024

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> A previous version of this paper was published in Portuguese in the journal *Relações Internacionais*, No. 81, March 2024.

<sup>2</sup> PSOE's historical archive at the Pablo Iglesias Foundation, the United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA) and the French Centre d'Archives Socialistes, at the Fondation Jean-Jaurès.

<sup>3</sup> SÁNCHEZ CERVELLÓ, Josep – *La revolución portuguesa y su influencia en la transición española (1961-1976)*. Madrid: Nerea, 1995; JIMÉNEZ, Juan Carlos – *España y Portugal. Los caminos a la democracia en la Península Ibérica*. Madrid: Sílex, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> NAVAJAS ZUBELDIA, Carlos – 'La transición militar en España y en Portugal, un análisis comparativo'. In *El fin de las dictaduras ibéricas (1974-1978)*. Paço d'Arcos: Edições Pluma; Seville: Centro de Estudios Andaluces, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> CARRILLO-LINARES, Albert – 'Entre el universo simbólico y el mundo real: contactos y recepciones clandestinas de la extrema izquierda hispano-lusa en torno al 25 de abril'. In *El fin de las dictaduras ibéricas (1974-1978)*; CUCÓ I GINER, Josepa – 'La izquierda de la izquierda. Un estudio de antropología política en España y Portugal'. In *Papeles del CEIC*. Vol. 1, No. 29,

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<sup>6</sup> VARELA, Raquel – 'O impacto da revolução portuguesa de 1974-1975 no PSOE visto através de *El Socialista*'. In *Ler História*. No. 57, 2009, pp. 111-24.

<sup>7</sup> LEMUS LÓPEZ, Encarnación – *Estados Unidos y la Transición española. Entre la Revolución de los Claveles y la Marcha Verde*. Madrid: Sílex, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Author's free translation. VARELA,

Raquel – ‘O impacto da revolução portuguesa de 1974-1975 no PSOE visto através de *El Socialista*’, p. 117.

9 Author’s free translation. ‘RESOLUCIÓN POLÍTICA’. In *El Socialista*. Second half of October 1974, p. 7.

10 FLANDRE, Christelle – *Socialisme ou social-démocratie? Regards croisés français allemands, 1971-1981*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 2006.

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12 VARELA, Raquel – ‘O impacto da revolução portuguesa de 1974-1975 no PSOE visto através de *El Socialista*’, p. 119.

13 PRESTON, Paul – *Franco caudillo de España*. Barcelona: Debolsillo, 2004.

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16 *Ibidem*.

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20 Author’s free translation. ‘¿EJÉRCITO ESPAÑOL o ejército franquista?’. In *El Socialista*. First half of June 1974, pp. 1-2.

21 ‘PORTUGAL Y España’, pp. 1 and 3.

22 ‘¿EJÉRCITO ESPAÑOL o ejército franquista?’, pp. 1-2.

23 ‘ESPALDARAZO INTERNACIONAL del socialismo español’. In *El Socialista*. First half of October 1974, p. 3.

24 ‘PONENCIA INTERNACIONAL’. In *El Socialista*. Second half of October 1974, p. 6.

25 *Ibidem*.

26 Author’s free translation. VARELA, Raquel – ‘O impacto da revolução portuguesa de 1974-1975 no PSOE visto através de *El Socialista*’, p. 123.

27 This interview was reproduced in *El Socialista*. First half of December 1974.

28 Santos Juliá has argued that PSOE’s need for legitimacy in the transition to democracy was pursued through the emphasis on its history and on theory; see: JULIÁ, Santos – ‘The ideological conversion of the leaders of the PSOE, 1976-1979’. In *Elites and Power in Twentieth-Century Spain*. Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 270. In agreement with him, I add that the theory on which the PSOE relied needed to be related to other, foreign, models.

29 Author’s free translation. ‘ENTREVISTA A Felipe González’. In *El Socialista*. First half of December 1974, p. 6.

30 MUÑOZ SÁNCHEZ, Antonio – *El amigo alemán...*, pp. 167-68.

31 Author’s free translation. ‘PORTUGAL: CONGRESO socialista’. In *El Socialista*. Second half of January 1975, p. 11.

32 ‘SOCIALISMO PORTUGUÊS’. In *El Socialista*. First half of February 1975, p. 9.

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34 Author’s free translation. ‘EL FRUSTRADO golpe de Portugal’. In *El Socialista*. Second half of March 1975, p. 4.

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39 *Ibidem*.

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48 *Ibidem*.

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52 *Ibidem*.

53 *Ibidem*.

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