

WHAT DEMOCRACY?

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Talking about the revolutionary period of 1974 and 1975 is not talking about the heroics of the captains who led the coup. Despite the merit they had, the truth is that the myth that was built around them sounds false. In fact, the fascist regime only fell because it could not resist the military disaster in the colonial wars. It could even be said that the epicenter of the fall of Salazar's dictatorship rose from the struggle of the colonial peoples for their national liberation. That's not consensual. There are those who say that it was a period of anarchy and excesses due to the lack of democratic maturity, aggravated by the actions of leftists and adventurers. But ultimately what happened at that time was that, after 50 years of silence, workers took democracy literally as being the opposite of fascism. So they considered that the leaders who oppressed them had to be put out by the power of the streets. They democratically decided in plenary meetings about their work: labour timing, categories, distribution of tasks, salaries, in short, everything related to their needs. Democracy was there and therefore, since the land also belonged to those who worked it, the peasants occupied the abandoned properties of the landowners and formed their cooperatives.

The Armed Forces Movement was supposed to be the guarantor of freedom and therefore, in the popular consciousness, it was their obligation to come and help occupy the empty houses, the uncultivated land, the factories subject to sabotage by the bosses. In a reaction that someone called revolutionary innocence, advances were imposed by the very rationality of things.

Anyone who lived in those days knows very well that there was no dark force manipulating people. It was the parties, always late, who tried to adapt to the unforeseen situation. But the regime was unable to bring into order those who first dared to exert their rights. The day after the captains' coup, the poor on the outskirts of Lisbon were already occupying empty houses, postal workers were trying to occupy central facilities, young female workers at the Timex watch factory declared a strike, women at Sogantal went into self-management, airline workers demanded their rights... The ball started rolling and it became more and more impossible to stop it.

When the Lisnave workers, tired of demanding dismissal of an administrator committed to fascism, crossed Lisbon, formed as if they were battalions, it was terror installed! When on February 7, 1975, the confederation of workers' committees called for a demonstration against unemployment and against the entry of a NATO squadron into Tagus river, the demonstration was banned but it still went ahead, bypassing a cordon of military commandos. That was terror! When the demonstrators arrived in front of the Ministry of Labor facilities, the soldiers guarding the building saluted the protesters and refused to disband them... and that was terror! The big fish saw that they did not have repressive forces ready to act. When rural workers transformed large estates into cooperatives, it was terror. When the workers' committee of the Catholic Radio Renascença decided to start reading the communications that were sent to them by the workers collectives, that was terror!

The poor were celebrating and the rich sent their money and families to Switzerland, Spain and Brazil. The scare was so big that to this day they want to know who was responsible. They

resorted to economic sabotage, counter-propaganda, military conspiracies, terrorist bombs and fires at the headquarters of left-wing parties.

The right, the fascists and the affluent classes took serious action, supported by the American embassy and other Western powers. Activists began to feel surrounded and were unable to react. When the counter-coup of November 25th occurred, repression fell upon them.

It took many years for the workers to lose, one by one, almost all the victories obtained through the popular struggle.

Contrary to what seemed possible to us at the time, we know today that a socialist Revolution could never happen in Portugal. But the popular risings caused a major shock in the national bourgeoisie. Workers gained new freedoms and new norms of relationships among the proletariat were established. If the revolutionary process and popular freedom had been maintained for another year, perhaps in Spain, instead of making a transition negotiated with fascism for a mitigated democracy, a revolutionary period would also have gone through.

What the revolutionary process showed is that, if the authority of the bosses and the recourse to the armed forces are suspended for just one week, the revelation that we can organize our lives by ourselves begins to bubble up, as if by magic. It's an amazing state of mind in which people feel their strength multiply in the trueness of action.

The social climate of labor democracy that prevailed during these portentous 580 days dealt a severe blow to the mutilated democracy they offered us. And that they still offer us today.

Anyone who lived that experience knows that this is fake liberty, because it is based on privilege and coercion. It seems to be unshakable but the only authority argument that supports it is the argument that, if you don't want it that way, then fascism will come for you.

That's what happens now, 50 years after the revolutionary crisis. Today, in this democracy that they say is great, we have 50 far-right deputies in parliament trying to dictate laws against us and preparing themselves to become a government. What a beautiful democracy this is, which destroyed our most precious possessions and gave us into the hands of fascism!