

## “All the Land Trembles with the Voices of This People”: Rural Workers’ and Farmers’ Struggles in Northern Portugal (1974–1982)

### “Toda a terra treme nas vozes deste povo”: as lutas dos trabalhadores rurais e agricultores no Norte de Portugal (1974–1982)

Leonardo Aboim Pires\*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6033-350X>

Gil Gonçalves\*\*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3303-8238>

#### Resumo

Nas últimas décadas, os discursos académicos e públicos sobre a Revolução dos Cravos e o processo de democratização tendem a circunscrever os movimentos sociais rurais ao Sul de Portugal. No entanto, a evidência histórica revela um número significativo de ações e lutas protagonizadas por agricultores e produtores nos concelhos de Braga, Bragança, Porto, Viana do Castelo e Vila Real. Este artigo propõe uma abordagem centrada na análise desses movimentos no Norte de Portugal, contribuindo para uma leitura mais abrangente da mobilização rural no pós-25 de Abril. Argumenta-se que, em contexto de sociedade rural e mudança política, estes movimentos constituíram formas embrionárias de sociedade participativa, espaços de aprendizagem política e mecanismos de reivindicação de direitos sociais e económicos. Ao destacar a diversidade territorial do ativismo rural, este estudo revela e questiona criticamente as geografias predominantes da mobilização e reposiciona as classes rurais do Norte como agentes centrais na democratização portuguesa.

**Palavras-chave:** ação coletiva; movimentos sociais; transformações rurais; Revolução dos Cravos; processo de democratização.

#### Abstract

Over the past decades, academic and public discourse on the Carnation Revolution and the democratization process has tended to limit rural social

\* Student in the Sustainability Sciences Doctorate Program, University of Lisbon. ISEG Research in Economics and Management (ISEG-UL) Investigator. Email: [lapires@ghes.iseg.ulisboa.pt](mailto:lapires@ghes.iseg.ulisboa.pt)

\*\* Student in the Globalization Studies Doctorate Program, University NOVA of Lisbon. Contemporary History Institute Investigator (IHC-NOVA FCSH/IN2PAST). Email: [gilgoncalves65@yahoo.com](mailto:gilgoncalves65@yahoo.com)



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movements to southern Portugal. However, historical evidence reveals a significant number of actions and struggles led by farmers and agricultural producers in the municipalities of Braga, Bragança, Porto, Viana do Castelo, and Vila Real. This article proposes an approach focused on analyzing these movements in northern Portugal, contributing to a broader understanding of rural mobilization after April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1974. It argues that, within a rural society undergoing political transition, these movements embodied early forms of participatory society, spaces of political learning, and mechanisms for claiming social and economic rights. By foregrounding the territorial diversity of rural activism, this study thus highlights and critically reassesses prevailing geographies of mobilization and repositions northern rural classes as key agents in Portugal's democratization.

**Keywords:** collective action; social movements; rural transformations; Carnation Revolution; democratization process.

## Introduction

The coup d'état of April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1974, led by the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), opened “the doors to the liberation of Portuguese society’s frustrations, expectations, and demands”<sup>1</sup>. This immediately generated “largely spontaneous and unorganized popular support, given the fragility of the existing party and the trade union fabric at the time”<sup>2</sup>. A protest movement arose from this spontaneity and given the opportunity provided by the horizon of democratic construction, grew, extending throughout the country. In correlation with state actions in peripheral contexts, such as the MFA’s Cultural Dynamization Campaigns, the populations organized themselves to respond to social and infrastructural issues that afflicted them. The rural association activism that then emerged, appropriating organizations originating from the authoritarian regime such as the People’s Houses or the Guilds, seen as “springs of change”<sup>3</sup>, got involved in the improvement and expansion of the road network, providing access to piped water, creating public fountains and washhouses, developing social centers and sports parks, and promoting low-cost housing.

<sup>1</sup> REZOLA, Maria Inácia. 25 de Abril: mitos de uma revolução. Lisboa: A Esfera dos Livros, 2007, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> REIS, António. A dialéctica entre as componentes militar e civil no processo revolucionário do 25 de Abril. Revista de História das Ideias, Coimbra, n. 17, pp. 561-573, 1995, p. 565.

<sup>3</sup> Povo Rural: boletim da Junta Central das Casas do Povo, 1, n.1, November 1974, p. 15.

However, the geography of agrarian conflicts in the Portuguese revolutionary context, tends to be centered in the area where the land reform was tangible that is, the fields of southern Portugal, which comprised the districts of Beja, Évora, Portalegre and Setúbal and certain municipalities such as Lisbon, Santarém, Faro and Castelo Branco, where "a frantic activity started in the fields, which had not been seen since the 1962 struggles"<sup>4</sup>. However, other areas had experienced similar unrest. To complement existing studies, this article<sup>5</sup> reports an analysis focusing on a different territory, that is, northern Portugal, corresponding to the districts of Braga, Bragança, Porto, Viana do Castelo and Vila Real. The region was chosen based on two criteria, as follows: 1) a historiographic absence of observation of rural contesting phenomena occurred in the revolutionary period and throughout the democratization process<sup>6</sup>; 2) that was an area of the country affected by changes in the traditional family farming, from the 1960s onwards, thus originating rearrangements in the countryside population.

Some examples include the men's and women's fights for joint management of common land or producers' opposition to the policy followed by economic coordination agencies. On the other hand, after 1974, associations appeared such as the Movement of Farmers and Tenants of the North, which defended a new model of rural tenancy and the creation of social support for farmers, or the League of Small and Medium-sized Farmers, class associations which intended to strengthen the collective action of farmers and the defense of their interests. Other themes originated in inorganic movements which acted by means of demonstrations on the streets, letters and petitions sent to political powers. Not limited to the revolutionary period, farmers' struggles in the north left long lasting legacy such as the expansion of the cooperative movement and the promulgation of the *Leis dos Baldios* (Law of Common

<sup>4</sup> VARELA, Raquel. História do Povo na Revolução Portuguesa, 1974-75. Lisboa: Bertrand Editora, 2014, p. 415.

<sup>5</sup> A first and brief version of this text guided a communication presented in the Colloquium "Il était une fois la révolution... portugaise" : à l'occasion du 50e anniversaire de la Révolution des Œillets (25 avril 1974)", at Université Rennes 2 (France), on May 30, 2024.

<sup>6</sup> We opted for this formulation to the detriment of categories such as "transition" or "democratic consolidation", to the extent that they tend to assume a linear trajectory and an outcome normatively fixed in the current democratic model. This option aims to avoid teleological readings of the Revolution, thus emphasizing its open and contingent nature. The recognition of a democratization process allows the challenge of approaches that seek to dilute or deny the revolutionary origins of Portuguese revolutionary institutions. This unveils the central role of popular mobilization and the intervention of the Armed Forces in the political, social and economic content configuration, which remained registered in them. About this debate, see: LOFF, Manuel. A Revolução portuguesa (1974-1976), um modelo específico de democratização no século XX. *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, n. 133, pp. 13-34, 2024.

Lands) (Decree-Law 39/76 and Decree-Law 40/76) and the Rural Tenancy Law (Law 76/77), the appearance of the National Farming Confederation (1978), alongside the organization of National Common Land Conferences<sup>7</sup> and the creation of BALADI - National Common Land Federation (1995).

Such movements toward a common cause reveal the existence of “a consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimension of the political environment, which provides incentives to people, so that they engage in collective actions, and influences their expectations of success or failure”<sup>8</sup>. At the same level as other forms of political involvement, the reasons and motivations, the dimensions and reach of rural social movements such as those of urban movements “involved thousands of common citizens in recurrent political participation (by means of opposition to specific demonstrations)”<sup>9</sup>.

To understand such dynamics, this investigation adopted a methodology centered in the analysis of primary sources, both manuscripts and printed material. Document collections were surveyed at the Historical Archive of the Presidency of the Portuguese Republic, the National Defence Archive, the Parliamentary Historical Archives, and the Torre to Tombo National Archive. In addition to those manuscript sources, newspapers were read, which included *O Rendeiro* (the Tenant), *Povo Rural* (Rural People), and *Vida Rural* (Rural Life), political parties’ publications such as *A Terra* (The Land) and *O Militante* (The Activist) (belonging to the Portuguese Communist Party), *Portugal Socialista* (Socialist Portugal) (belonging to the Socialist Party) and *Povo Livre* (Free People) (belonging to the Democratic Popular Party), alongside several local papers from the districts investigated. Such combination of sources enabled the observation of national and local plans, thus capturing the plural voices that marked the revolutionary process and contributed to a deeper understanding of the Portuguese democracy construction.

## People, parties and army in the north

Faced with the collapse of the dictatorship, among the measures to be implemented following the coup d'état, there were guidelines indicating that

<sup>7</sup> Conferences were held in 1979, 1984, 1994, 2001, 2006, 2017 and 2022.

<sup>8</sup> TARROW, Sidney. Power in movement: social movements and contentious politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> PINTO, Pedro Ramos. Urban social movements and the transition to democracy in Portugal, 1974–1976. *The Historical Journal*, v. 51, n. 4, pp. 1025–1046, 2008, p. 1027.

"the Provisional Government will lay the foundations for a new economic policy. Such policy should be placed at the service of the Portuguese people, in particular the most disadvantaged segments of the population until now"<sup>10</sup>, pointing to a progressist line but not mentioning how it would be achieved. In the diagnosis presented by the MFA based on information collected in the late 1960s about agriculture, the following aspects were highlighted: "a) unequal distribution of the right to land property; b) reduced or nonexistent economic infra-structure; c) low level of cultural and professional education; d) low level of income distributed to the workforce; and e) excessive human load on agriculture"<sup>11</sup>. The Minho population, for example, explained the situation as follows: "our delay in all areas was huge. In the agriculture and livestock sector, it was scary", with "Salazares and Caetanos left as in a bleak picture. It was to escape this that April 25<sup>th</sup> happened"<sup>12</sup>. For these reasons, restructuring the primary sector was considered a priority.

The political conception of how this process should be shaped was not limited to the south of the country. According to the Minister of Agriculture, Fernando Oliveira Baptista, "the agrarian reform cannot be commanded from the city"<sup>13</sup>, since its development must go through a process at the local level. Although there were references to the way the reform should be carried out in other regions, there was also an effort to theorize the way the north region would integrate the process, and at the same time keep its specificities. This occurred "due to the predominance of small properties" in that region, which resulted in farming problems "different from the problems affecting and raising the interest of the farmers of the south"<sup>14</sup>. To achieve a well-succeeded agrarian reform in Minho and in Trás-os-Montes, initiatives and mechanisms appeared to reverse the delay observed in those regions. One of them was the Autonomous Program for the Development of the Province of Trás-os-Montes<sup>15</sup>, promoted by the State Agriculture Secretariat in the Second Provisional Government.

<sup>10</sup> Movimento, n. 4, November 12, 1974, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Movimento, n. 5, November 26, 1974, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Nós Todos: boletim democrático da Meadela, n. 2, September 21, 1974, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Povo Rural: boletim da Junta Central das Casas do Povo, 1, n. 6, May 1975, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Vida Rural, n. 11, July 19, 1975, p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> Mensageiro de Bragança, 35, n. 1521, August 9, 1974, p. 4. In a joint effort by the Ministries of Finances, Economy, and Social Equipment and Environment, this program sought to improve the irrigation system provided by the *Perímetro de Rega da Veiga de Chaves*, promote the agriculture and livestock activity in the axis Chaves-Vila Pouca de Aguiar (comprising the municipalities of Boticas, Chaves, Montalegre, Ribeira de Pena and Vila Pouca de Aguiar) and forest areas subject to mandatory partial forestry regime.

As some newspapers in Porto highlighted, “Agriculture must seek and find its own path. It has the right to expect greater incentives, greater technical and financial assistance, but the main effort must come from the sector own organization”<sup>16</sup>. Although most of the farmers’ and producers’ fights were spontaneous and inorganic, the role played by political parties was significant. The Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) was one of the most active members promoting rallies and clarification sessions among the populations of the north, within an environment that was many times hostile<sup>17</sup>. In Porto, the communists held the I Conference of Peasants of the North, on December 29, 1974, and the theme sessions of that meeting presented a list of the issues affecting farmers in the northern municipalities. They discussed taxes, rural leasing, common land, milk, meat, egg, wine and potato production and commercialization, price policy, services supporting farming, the end of corporative organizations, wage earning workforce and social security. For the PCP general secretary, Álvaro Cunhal, the conference was held to get to “hear from the farmers’ what field problems they faced and what their suggestions of solutions for those problems were”<sup>18</sup>.

The Socialist Party (SP) followed a similar strategy with different shades. Upon the social extraction of most of their activists, originating in the medium class, their penetration into rural populations was advisable. Although there were no assemblies, except for the meeting held in December 1975, in Figueira da Foz<sup>19</sup>, in some clarifying sessions, the socialists went to the north communities, to listen to the problems felt by peasants and explain the party’s intentions in relation to those matters. At the internal level, the PS only created the Farmers’ District Unions later, which afterwards were joined in a National Confederation, led by Manuel Francisco da Costa, but without significant claiming power. In the north of the country, one of these Unions was created only in Braga in September 1978.

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<sup>16</sup> Jornal de Gaia, 1, n. 31, April 9, 1975, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> In the district of Bragança, for example, in 1975, “mass manipulation” and “direct threats and assaults to party’s offices were observed [...] doors were forced and stones thrown”, in addition to “waves of rumors and attacks against various government agencies [...]” (National Defence Archive [ADN], EMGFA, 5<sup>a</sup> Divisão, CODIRE Norte (Comissão Dinamizadora Regional), 6/15/41/10, p. 7).

<sup>18</sup> CUNHAL, Álvaro. Intervenção de Álvaro Cunhal na sessão de abertura da Conferência. In: O PCP e a Luta pela Reforma Agrária. Lisboa: Edições Avantel, 1975, p. 85.

<sup>19</sup> This meeting, described as “General States” of the farmers of the Center region and promoted by the PS Coimbra District Federation, was attended by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, António Lopes Cardoso, delegations coming from Castelo Branco, Guarda, Leiria, Viseu and an observer from Aveiro (Portugal Socialista, 9, n. 74, December 17, 1975, p. 9).

The right wing opted for a differentiated position. According to the Democratic Popular Party (PPD), "we do not want farmers to be our poor siblings. We do not want to see them oppressed by large companies"<sup>20</sup>. They defended a link to the market, preferably from the north, resorting to cooperatives of transformation in the wine and milk activities<sup>21</sup>. It occurred mainly with the economic agency of rural classes to the detriment of the politics, once the opponents saw the possibility of farmers becoming "free and responsible entrepreneurs"<sup>22</sup>. Initiatives by the PPD to organize the peasants like the ones proposed by the PS and PCP were not observed<sup>23</sup>.

Despite party support, there were divisions within the farmers' mobilization in the north. A weekly newspaper from Braga reported that "in neighboring municipalities, even in our own," meetings were held where farmers preferred autonomous organizations, showing marked distrust towards organizations accused of "exaggerated leftism"<sup>24</sup>. With the escalating political tension throughout the "Hot Summer" of 1975, the most radical period in the Portuguese Revolution, from the PCP's perspective, "reaction dominates in many rural areas and in many economic circuits that condition the lives of small and medium-sized farmers" and, given this specificity, it was "essential to distance the peasants from reaction, from the bourgeoisie, and attract them to the Revolution"<sup>25</sup>. Despite adversities, on the peasants' side, there were signs of volunteerism, as in a letter sent to the Revolution Council<sup>26</sup>, a dweller from Mesão Frio, wrote in October 1975, that "times are difficult for all of us! I agree with and accept all sacrifices that may be requested or even imposed upon me, so that we may carry forward the establishment of socialism and uncompromisingly defend National Independence"<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Povo Livre, n. 1, August 13, 1974, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> About the PPD positioning regarding economic matters, see: LIMA, João Moreira Santos. O Partido Popular Democrático e a Revolução Portuguesa: uma análise a partir do *Povo Livre* (agosto de 1974 - dezembro 1975). 2024. Dissertation (Contemporary History Master's Program) – Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Lisboa, 2024.

<sup>22</sup> Povo Livre, n. 11, October 22, 1974, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> Despite being outside the geographical area investigated, we observed that a rural worker from Figueira da Foz reported that "the SP and the CP are the ones with the greatest activities on this land" (*Povo Rural: boletim da Junta Central das Casas do Povo*, 1, n. 4, March 1975, p. 9).

<sup>24</sup> Tribuna Livre, 28, n. 943, November 16, 1974, p. 1

<sup>25</sup> O Militante, 43, n. 3, August/September 1975, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> Agency created on March 14, 1975, integrating MFA members with political-constitutional and custody functions in the democratic transition process. It was extinct with the 1982 constitutional review (Lei Constitucional n. 1/82, of September 30).

<sup>27</sup> Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo [ANTT], Conselho da Revolução, Correspondência não classificada

Coming from the governmental sphere, one of the initiatives with the greatest impact on northern communities was the Cultural Revitalization and Civic Action Campaigns. Organized by the 5<sup>th</sup> Division of the MFA (Armed Forces Movement), these prioritized the interior northern and central regions, with the aim of “discovering a more authentic culture, but also economic, social and cultural development”<sup>28</sup>. It was, after all, in these territories that the most pronounced levels of cultural and political underdevelopment were observed. In total, throughout 1975, the MFA launched the *Nortada* Operation (Trás-os-Montes, January 9-18), the *Alvorada* Operation (Viana do Castelo, February), the *Verdade* Operation (Alto Minho, January 31-February 9), and the *Maio-Nordeste* Operation (Bragança, May 17-October 8, divided into three phases). The initiatives encompassed the improvement of water supply services and the road network, the promotion of sporting activities, the organization of film and theater screenings, as well as support for the creation of popular power structures, such as residents’ and village committees. To fulfill the MFA’s program and considering “the urgent need to ensure the participation of the most disadvantaged classes in the countryside”, the Agricultural Support and Development Service was created (SADA)<sup>29</sup>, in 1975, developing its action in the “regions of small properties, namely, Algarve and North of Tejo”<sup>30</sup>, providing technical support to small and medium-sized farmers and preparing the “bases of a land reform”<sup>31</sup>.

During the “Hot Summer”, together with SADA, the Agrarian Reorganization Institute, the Cultural Promotion Campaigns and some liquidation committees of the Farmers’ Guilds<sup>32</sup>, the PCP summoned its activists to work with rural populations of the north, promoting the peasants’ organization, mainly through the Leagues of Small and Medium-sized Farmers. Such task was prioritized since those “were disarmed and disorganized” and it was necessary to “awaken their initiative and gain their class power, while organizing them for the Revolution”<sup>33</sup>. Wherever there were wage earning

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do Secretariado Coordenador, vol. 107, n. 240, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> ALMEIDA, Sónia Vespeira de. *Camponeses, cultura e revolução: Campanhas de Dinamização Cultural e Ação Cívica do MFA (1974-1975)*. Lisboa: Edições Colibri, 2009, p. 273.

<sup>29</sup> SADA was extinct on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1976, by a Decision of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries of the I Constitutional Government, António Barreto.

<sup>30</sup> ADN, EMGFA, 5<sup>a</sup> Divisão, CODICE - Comissão Dinamizadora Central, 6/13/36/26, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Povo Rural: boletim da Junta Central das Casas do Povo, 1, n. 7, June 1975, p.6.

<sup>32</sup> FERNÁNDEZ, Ernesto Martínez. “Ganhar o campesinato para a revolução”. O PCP e o processo de enquadramento do campesinato nortenho (1974-1975). *Análise Social*, v. 52, n. 222, 2017, p. 84.

<sup>33</sup> Vida Rural, n. 11, July 19, 1975, p. 27.

rural workers, they should be encouraged to enroll with the union, and "in the lack of this class structure, they could be organized in Committees"<sup>34</sup> of tenant farmers, users of common lands, irrigators, milk producers, and pro-sanitation cooperatives, among others. A month later, it was considered that Vila Real "really needs a strong organization to defend agricultural workers against the parasites and bloodsuckers of agriculture"<sup>35</sup>.

The appeal to the implementation of associative forms of representation and defense of farmers' interests became frequent. From June 1975 onwards, the first Leagues appeared, with functions that comprised the "presentation to the government of several problems affecting farmers and their associates as well as their suggested solutions"<sup>36</sup>. Compliance with the Rural Leasing Law was among the priority tasks alongside the creation of conditions for the sale of agricultural products at fair prices, establishing cooperatives, and guaranteeing better rural social security. In short, they fought to free peasants from "two great evils, namely, nature and the market"<sup>37</sup>, forming trade union-like associations that constituted the privileged interlocutor with the institutions.

With the agreed containment of the revolution after November 25<sup>th</sup><sup>38</sup>, which led the social movements created during the "Hot Summer" to adopt a more defensive stance, the development of the land reform in the north should occur "within associativism, and taking suitable measures to the small properties, always supporting the leagues and cooperatives"<sup>39</sup> as well as other associations. As an example, the Farm Workers Union of Vila Real was constituted on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1976, which was seen as the "only way to have a unitary fight for the defense of their legitimate interests"<sup>40</sup>.

The struggle of farm workers in the post-revolutionary period also provoked inter-regional solidarity. Thus, on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1976, workers from Seixal (Setúbal) went to the village of Cortiços (Macedo de Cavaleiros), to

<sup>34</sup> O Militante, 43, n. 3, August/September 1975, p. 14.

<sup>35</sup> A Terra, n. 32, November 21, 1975, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Correio do Planalto, n. 14, June 15, 1975, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> A Terra, n. 35, January 9, 1976, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> On November 25, 1975, the alleged attempt of a military coup, in a context marked by conflicts inside the MFA between the "moderates" and the leftists, resulted in a clarification of the political situation in favor of the former and in the retreat of the revolutionary process. About this issue, see: NORONHA, Ricardo. *A ordem reina sobre Lisboa: uma história do 25 de Novembro*. Lisboa: Tigre de Papel, 2025.

<sup>39</sup> A Terra, n. 28, February 21, 1976, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Povo Rural: boletim da Junta Central das Casas do Povo, 2, n. 20, August 1976, p. 12

offer a tractor (Figure 1) and various implements to the Collective Production Unit “Os Pioneiros” (The Pioneers). Later, a statement from the Agricultural Workers’ Union of Bragança, based in Mirandela, regarding the events that occurred in Montemor-o-Novo in 1979<sup>41</sup>, expressed “to the families of our comrades murdered by the National Republican Guard our sincere condolences and demand that those responsible be investigated and punished, and that workers be allowed to work in peace, respecting the Constitution and democratic legality”<sup>42</sup>.

**Figure 1.** Tractor donated to UCP “The Pioneers”



**Source:** A Terra, n. 43, 1 de maio de 1976, p. 1 (National Library of Portugal, Cota J. 3363 V.)

These expressions of solidarity also arrived via transnational networks<sup>43</sup>. In November 1976, the Soviet government granted material support to farming organizations in the north of the country: a tractor and a trailer to the League of Farmers and Tenants of Gaia; a truck to the Production Collective Unit

<sup>41</sup> On September 27, 1979, during the handover of the reserve at the Herdade Vale de Nobre of the Collective Production Unit “Bento Gonçalves”, in Montemor-o-Novo (Évora), two protesters, José Geraldo and António Casquinha, were killed by members of the National Republican Guard.

<sup>42</sup> Mensageiro de Bragança, 40, n. 1776, October 26, 1979, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> About this dimension, see: PIRES, Leonardo Aboim; GONÇALVES, Gil; CANUDO, Manuel. Nuevos amigos: alcances de la solidaridad internacional con la Reforma Agraria portuguesa, 1975-1977. Rubrica Contemporanea, v. 14, n. 31, pp. 215-237, 2025.

(UCP) "The Pioneers"; and a tractor and a trailer to the League of Vila Real. In April 1977, the League of Small and Medium-Sized Farmers of Montalegre organized the delivery of a tractor, donated by the Russian cooperatives to the Vento Norte Popular and Agricultural Cooperative, of Carvalhais (São Pedro do Sul), thus showing the capability of mobilization of such structures, even in a context marked by distrust by sectors of the population and the existence of an open "anti-communist" and "anti-tractor" campaign"<sup>44</sup>.

In this regard, it is important to mention the mobilization triggered by the large local landowners. At a plenary meeting of farmers from Trás-os-Montes, held in Mirandela in February 1976, attended by 4,000 people, they decided to "unite with the other Portuguese farmers in the Confederation of Farmers of Portugal," strongly criticizing the agrarian reform and what they considered to be "the Gonçalves dictatorship" and the "negative actions of certain parties, agricultural unions, and leagues"<sup>45</sup>. In another plenary session, in Chaves, in April, the same criticism was emphasized, with the approval of "a vote of no confidence in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, in the person of Minister Lopes Cardoso"<sup>46</sup>. These episodes reveal that those owners were initially organized around dismantling the agrarian reform, relegating the demands of the lower strata of rural society to the background.

The regime's new constitutional order did not stop the politicization of the countryside, which took on incisive programmatic contours. In September 1978, after a meeting of farmers in Barcelos, the initiative of creating the Portuguese Farmers' Party, invoking "the need for farmers to form a political association so that agriculture does not fall into the hands of others" and so that they "had the opportunity to adhere to their own party"<sup>47</sup>. Later, in October 1981, during an event of similar nature held in São Martinho de Dume (Braga), farmers and agricultural technicians stated that "there might be an embryo of the Portuguese Farmers' Party"<sup>48</sup>. However, there are no records of the formalization of these initiatives, making it plausible to conclude that they never materialized. We can, however, see them as evidence of the existence of a rural political awareness, but also of the difficulty in structuring lasting movements, favoring cooperative and union forms of representation over autonomous party structures.

<sup>44</sup> Correio do Planalto, 3, n. 59, April 15, 1977, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Mensageiro de Bragança, 37, n. 1598, March 5, 1976, p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> Mensageiro de Bragança, 37, n. 1603, April 9, 1976, p. 9.

<sup>47</sup> A Voz do Lavrador, 1, n. 8, September 1978, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Mensageiro de Bragança, 42, n. 1875, October 30, 1981, p. 7.

It is within these frameworks that actions such as the assemblies of community members and their struggle for the restitution of common lands, the Northern Tenant Farmers Movement, organizations like the Collective Production Unit “Os Pioneiros” or the Leagues of Small and Medium-sized Farmers are inscribed. Prioritizing, in some cases, dialogue with political parties, especially the PCP (Portuguese Communist Party), we will see how the subordinate and fragmented integration of small farmers, shaped by the dominant structures and channels of the corporatist model of the Estado Novo (New State), was overcome in the Revolution and during the democratization process, generating integrative narratives and contexts that elevated the problems of peasants and family farming to projects that sought to establish compromises and provide solutions.

### **The return of common lands to communities**

In a rural area such as the north of Portugal, common lands were a highly relevant element in the life of communities. Those were pieces of land occupied and managed by local communities used to shelter cattle, extract firewood and brushwood and grow some crops. Throughout dictatorship, those areas suffered great changes due to their large-scale afforestation under the Forest Settlement Plan (1938-1968). State services and agents, ignoring the importance of communal lands for the small economies of mountain farmers, incited protests throughout the regime. With a long history, the struggle against the afforestation of common lands created mechanisms to protect them from state interference in communities during the recognition of communal areas, with the intensity of protests paralleling the pace of implementation of the forestry policy.

The recovery of common lands by “people” started spontaneously with the Revolution, a historical opportunity for dispossessed communities to recover their claims and present them to the new political power, both local and central<sup>49</sup>. The struggle for the return of common land was organized by MFA in order to insert in the north the principles of collective property where “common lands became the base of a socialist regime in some delayed regions in our country”<sup>50</sup>. With the approval of the Laws of Common Lands and the

<sup>49</sup> About this theme see: PIRES, Leonardo Aboim; GONÇALVES, Gil; “Os baldios são dos povos!”: propriedade comunitária e movimentos sociais em Trás-os-Montes (1974-1979). *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, n. 138, 2025 (to be published).

<sup>50</sup> Arquivo e Biblioteca da Madeira, Coleção de Folhetos Políticos, Doc. 29-866, p. 1.

new Constitution in 1976, hundreds of Directive Councils (CD) were formed<sup>51</sup>. The populations used common land management to improve infrastructure (roads, electricity, water, education, health, housing and transport) and their life conditions, in a social movement like those of urban neighborhood committees. In some cases, community management of communal land optimized cooperative dynamics, aiming to promote the direct sales of their produce and stop de influence of middlemen.

The fight continued even after regulation, due to new attempts of economic exploitation of the lands, mainly promoted by Forestry Services (SF) and the right-wing parties, which led many of the neighborhoods in the north region. In addition to deliberate delays by local authorities in registering community members and scheduling meetings to elect the CDs<sup>52</sup>, there was a legislative offensive similar to that targeting the agrarian reform in the fields of the south. Based on the argument that the DC did not manage competently the pieces of land they were in charge of, new laws were proposed in 1977 and 1979, which passed the management of common lands to the Municipal and Parish Assemblies, putting an end to their communal use and facilitating their subsequent sale.

The wave of protests and social pressure exerted by thousands of community members, combined with governmental instability, prevented the scope of the 1976 laws from being restricted. However, at the local level, significant obstacles to the functioning of the Common Land Delegation Councils persisted: difficulties in accessing revenues and bank accounts, the sale of timber by the FS without the authorization of the community members, and the inertia of the authorities in the face of the private appropriation of common lands. Nevertheless, both the associative dynamics generated by the process of returning the common lands and the subsequent mobilizations in defense of the legislative framework that enshrined it contrast sharply with the image of subservience frequently ascribed to farmers of the north.

### **“We are strong”: agricultural cooperatives in the northern region**

Projects of cooperative organizations resembling those of the southern fields faced difficulty gaining traction in the north. However, there was one exception: the Collective Production Unit “Os Pioneiros” (The Pioneers), in

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<sup>51</sup>Those in charge of implementing the assembly's resolutions, registering the co-owners of the common land annually, proposing revenue allocation plans, and engaging in dialogue with public entities.

<sup>52</sup> GRALHEIRO, Jaime. Comentário à(s) Lei(s) dos Baldios. Coimbra: Almedina, 1990.

the village of Cortiços (Macedo de Cavaleiros)<sup>53</sup>, constituted on August 1, 1975, soon after the occupation of 100 hectares of uncultivated land belonging to the Federation of Agricultural Guilds of Northeastern Trás-os-Montes and the Internal Colonization Board.

“Revealing a strong collective spirit”<sup>54</sup>, the Farmers’ Committee elected to manage it only allowed the entrance of landless peasants in the project. Most of them came from a context of migration, excluding family farmers and creating antagonism between the settlers and the village population. Furthermore, while the initiative received solidarity from the workers’ committees, unions, similar cooperatives and other structures that supported the agrarian reform, the reconfiguration of traditional power structures in the region, which intensified after November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1975, led to their dismantling. “The tightening of agricultural policy, with CAP (Portugal Farmers’ Confederation) regaining prominent positions, worsened the situation”<sup>55</sup>. The new leadership of the liquidation committees of the Farmers’ Guilds and agricultural cooperatives in the region had become hostile to the Pioneers. This was supported by the military and police forces, and the anti-communist diocesan press.<sup>56</sup> Also through governmental action, the PFC publicly discredited the project and weakened its economic viability. Gradually dispossessed of the land and its produce, the cooperative dissolved in December 1977, and the land was divided into small plots for family farming.

However, cooperative experiences adapted to a territorial and political context that was not favorable to the model of collective units developed in the south achieved some noticeable results. The extinction of the Farmers’ Guilds, transformed into Agricultural Cooperatives, accompanied by the creation of new marketing cooperatives, aimed to guarantee better conditions for the supply and distribution of production to farmers, limiting the action of traders and middlemen. In Boticas, the Liquidation Committee of the former Farmers’ Guild established, in March 1977, BOTICOOP - the Agricultural Cooperative of the Municipality of Boticas. The promotion of the processing, storage, transport and sale of the agricultural production of its members were among

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<sup>53</sup> For the UCP detailed history, see: BAPTISTA, Fernando Oliveira. *A Aldeia e o Mundo Novo: os pioneiros dos Cortiços*. Castro Verde: 100 Luz, 2021.

<sup>54</sup> *A Terra*, n. 26, August 1975, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> *A Voz do Lavrador*, n. 10, November 1978, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> FREITAS, Bruna Patrícia Calé. “Que nenhum cristão se deixe cair na armadilha do medo”: o anticomunismo católico no PREC (1974-1976). Dissertation (Contemporary History Master’s Program) – Faculdade de Letras, Universidade do Porto, Porto, 2025.

its objectives, as well as technical, administrative and financial assistance or the shared use of machinery and equipment<sup>57</sup>. Its action would be limited, however, with the delivery of the former Guild assets to the Cooperative of Potato Producers, which was already ruled by large landowners, thus leaving BOTICOOP without machinery or a storehouse. The same did not happen to the 31 de Janeiro Agricultural Cooperative, created in 1977 in the Vila Nova de Gaia municipality, which saw the whole property of the former Guild integrated to the cooperative due to the resistance promoted by the local League against old directors and managers who wanted to take over. In the municipality of Vila Nova de Gaia, the entirety of the former Guild's assets was integrated into the cooperative, thanks to the resistance mounted by the local League against the former leaders and bosses who wanted to seize control. This allowed the cooperative to quickly gain a thousand members and establish 21 sales points, spread across 16 parishes in the municipality<sup>58</sup>.

However, in most cases, after the VI Provisional Government allowed the election of former, purged leaders to the liquidation committees, the large landowners, organized around the PFC and with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, fought for the removal of the progressive leadership of the cooperatives and their replacement with individuals they trusted. They did this by conditioning their activity and manipulating elections. Small and medium-sized farmers were left with no option but to denounce these maneuvers and what they perceived as the fraudulent management of the cooperatives by their new (old) leaders. This was the case of the Terra Fria Cooperative (Bragança), whose facilities were occupied by workers and members, supported by the local League, who thus intended to prevent access to the leaders of the Administrative Committee, accused of disastrous management, forcing new elections<sup>59</sup>. However, when the elections were held, there were several irregularities ranging from the lack of electoral registers to the tampering with ballot boxes<sup>60</sup>. Local agrarian elites, reorganized at the PFC level, managed to reverse much of the initial gains of the process, reinforcing a reestablishment of traditional rural power.

These cooperative experiences in the north, different from those in the south, showed lower dependence on national law regulations and higher

<sup>57</sup> A Terra, n. 65, May 15, 1977, p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> PAIVA, Vasco. *O desbravar dos caminhos: a construção do movimento camponês após o 25 de Abril*. Coimbra: Lápis de Memórias, 2023, p. 182.

<sup>59</sup> A Terra, n. 74, October 29, 1977, p. 12.

<sup>60</sup> A Terra, n. 76, November 26, 1977, p. 4.

dependence on the configuration of local sociopolitical alliances and the control of the old Farmers' Guilds. The segmented and unequal nature of the regional agrarian relationships explains why similar initiatives had such diverse fates within the country. In progressive committees that managed to keep property control, such as the 31 de Janeiro Cooperative, it was possible to create structures of commercialization and functional technical support. However, in those where the property was captured by agrarian elites, such as in the BOTICOOP, the cooperative transforming potential was neutralized. Thus, the possession of infrastructure and the political compositions of management boards were determinant factors for the success or failure of those experiences.

### **The northern rural tenants' movement**

The tenants' struggle to defend themselves from the control of landowners who established their income and what they should produce (with the power of dismissing tenants without appeal or recourse) was another significant case. This is how the creation of a new Rural Tenancy Law was seen in the north, as the "first step toward Agrarian Reform". However, it was clear that agents such as the MFA as well as other sectors were "unfavorable to the revolutionary process because the caciquism in the province is still active"<sup>61</sup>. Therefore, conditions should be created for greater class awareness, which allowed the concretization of revolutionary objectives. Even the DPP showed that the dictatorship law "followed a line of orientation almost medieval in certain cases and generator of utterly unjust situations"<sup>62</sup>.

The Northern Rural Tenants' Movement MARN appeared at the end of 1975, following the approval of the Rural Tenancy Law (Decree-Law nº 201/75), aiming to provide legal support to tenants and guarantee the application of the new law to face the resistance and violence exercised by more reactionary landowners. Initially constituted by local and municipal committees, the movement was structured progressively in a Regional Coordination Commission and a Central Secretary. Although it originated in the north, it spread to Beiras and, unlike mobilizations around the common lands, it was characterized by a process of legal institutionalization, more than a popular dynamic.

<sup>61</sup> Vida Rural, n. 8, June 28, 1975, p. 26.

<sup>62</sup> Povo Livre, n. 26, February 4, 1975, p. 4.

The NRTM held the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of Northern Tenants, in Porto, on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1976 (Figure 2). The 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting was also in Porto, on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1976, while the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting was in Penafiel, on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1977. "One should be able to distinguish the real farmers, those stained with sulphate and soil, from the false ones, whose nails are varnished and want to exploit us". That was a statement put forward by tenants from Entre-Douro-e-Minho, in their 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting, where they claimed "their April 25<sup>th</sup>"<sup>63</sup>. The movement held many other meetings, which were more limited, such as the Workers' and Peasants' Confraternization Party on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1976, in Penafiel, organized with the Porto Agricultural Workers' Union and attended by more than 3,000 people.

**Figure 2.** 1st Meeting of Northern Tenants



**Source:** A Terra, n. 37, February 7, 1976, p. 1 (Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Cota J. 3363 V.)

The political context after 1976 was averse to tenant farmers, with a partial reversal of gains achieved, a trend observable in other rural sectors linked to agricultural work. Although the 1976 Constitution (Article 101) recognized the need for stability and protection of tenant farmers' interests, the following years were marked by legislative initiatives, promoted mainly by the PPD/PSD and the Democratic Social Centre (CDS), which sought to limit the legal advances then achieved, in line with what occurred regarding the legislation on common lands. This political landscape demonstrated that "the rural population is revolted, not against the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, but against

<sup>63</sup> Nortada: jornal unitário de esquerda, n. 4, July 30, 1976, p. 7.

anti-democratic governments” that “do nothing but destroy agriculture”<sup>64</sup>. At the MRTN General Assembly in 1977, changes in legislation led to the new version being dubbed the “Traitor’s Law” by a leader of the movement, because it had been “approved against the will of the tenant farmers”<sup>65</sup>. These attempts at change are the leitmotif for public action in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As the tenant farmers stated, this was a struggle in which MRTN “has done everything to improve the law. A lot of money has been spent, a lot of time has been wasted, especially at times when fieldwork is most demanding,” but these demands were pursued in the search for “a better and fairer life”<sup>66</sup>.

In addition to the unfavorable political context, acts of violence were committed against tenant farmers. In 1976, in Lousada, at a meeting of small farmers, “half a dozen troublemakers, in the pay of local bosses” and “armed individuals (some with pistols visible on their belts)” tried to prevent “through provocation and violence, the clarification of the Rural Tenancy Law to hundreds of farmers”<sup>67</sup>. Later, in 1979, in Arcos de Valdevez, “a gang of thugs, in a typical fascist act, boycotted an MRTN meeting [...] violently assaulting the farmers who were trying to exercise their rights”<sup>68</sup>.

### Small and medium-sized farmers

Leagues developed in the North later than in the South. The first associations of this type appeared in Vila Nova de Gaia, Póvoa de Varzim and in Vila Real (October 1976), while Bragança was the last district to have them, first in the capital in September 1977, followed by Macedo de Cavaleiros, in October of the same year<sup>69</sup>.

This movement seems to run counter to the strategies for integrating peasants promoted by the PCP in the aftermath of November 25<sup>th</sup>. The adoption of a defensive posture by rural social movements, focused on safeguarding the gains of the revolution, would lead to the progressive marginalization of

<sup>64</sup> A Voz do Lavrador, n. 11, December 1978, p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> Arquivo Histórico da Presidência da República, Casa Civil, Audiências, Doc. 1833, p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> O Rendeiro, n. 1, November 1978, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Nortada: jornal unitário de esquerda, n. 4, July 30, 1976, p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> ANTT, Conselho da Revolução, Correspondência não classificada do Secretariado Coordenador, vol. 144, n. 277, p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> It seems relevant to observe that these dates not always coincide with the start of the Leagues’ activity. If, in some cases, they start with the notary register, and then seek to enlarge their support base, in others, such formalization is merely the culmination of activity developed over the preceding months.

the Leagues by communist cadres, to the detriment of sectoral movements, considered more mobilizing at a time when the approval, without alterations, of the Rural Tenancy Law or the Laws of Common Land was particularly urgent<sup>70</sup>. For this reason, not surprisingly, one of the purposes of the Leagues was to establish the necessary relationships with movements such as MRTN or MAPRU<sup>71</sup>, thus guaranteeing that their members would receive technical and legal support from those entities. However, even if the relationship between those organizations was said to be complementary, in some municipalities, the difficulty in finding distinct local leaders was observed, which resulted in the progressive integration of tenants' fights in the Leagues' actions<sup>72</sup>.

Nevertheless, these organizations continued to fulfill the roles for which they had been created, giving voice to the demands of the peasants before the governing agencies. The mobilizations they promoted reflected the productive reality of their respective territories and the relationship they established with other spheres of peasant associations. In Minho, it was the milk production sector that prompted the Leagues of Viana do Castelo and Caminha to demand from the government the abolition of category C milk, the allocation of subsidies for the installation of collective barns and for the refrigeration and equipping of milking parlors<sup>73</sup>. In Bragança, the League supported the petition presented by members of the Terra Fria Cooperative to the respective administrative committee, demanding governmental technical and financial support<sup>74</sup> and organized alongside the League of Mirandela, protests regarding the distribution of potatoes and petitions against price increases for fertilizers, pesticides, seeds, and diesel<sup>75</sup>. On the other hand, the Montalegre and Chaves Leagues, took steps with the National Fruit Board (JNF), the Committee of Agriculture and Fisheries of the Assembly of the Republic, and the State Internal Trade Secretariat, in an attempt to resolve the

<sup>70</sup> FERNÁNDEZ, "Ganhar o campesinato para a revolução", p. 86.

<sup>71</sup> The Better Rural Social Security Farmers' Movement (BRSSFM) developed its activities mainly in the Beiras region. It advocated for farmers' rights to family allowances, decent retirement pensions, widow's pensions, and medical and pharmaceutical assistance. It worked in close collaboration with MRTN, and the Casas do Povo (People's Houses). Most of its demands were met, leading to its inactivity, also justified by the emergence of aggregating associative structures. However, in the northern region, the movement was insignificant, its demands being taken up by other farmers' organizations, namely the League.

<sup>72</sup> PAIVA, O desbravar dos caminhos, p. 101.

<sup>73</sup> Praça da República, n. 12, November 30, 1977, p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Correio do Planalto, 3, n. 73, November 15, 1977, p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> PAIVA, O desbravar dos caminhos, pp. 96-97.

problem of distribution and payment delays to potato producers<sup>76</sup>, claiming better guarantee prices and the construction of proper warehouses.

Demonstrating that the Leagues' capacity for intervention was far from exhausted, the Alliance of Agricultural Leagues of the North (AGRINORTE) was created in May 1977,<sup>77</sup> in a meeting in Porto, organized by the Lousada League, which was joined by several Leagues, Farmer Unions, League Promoting Commissions and Cooperatives. That was a federative structure aiming to go beyond the municipality limits and private claims, facilitating technical and financial support to farmers and promoting collaboration between their different associations – mainly after the SADA dissolution<sup>78</sup>. AGRINORTE advanced with the organization of four groups of work, namely, information and funds, accounting and credit, legal and technical. The alliance summoned agricultural technicians, bank clerks, accountants, union managers, engineers, architects, teachers and medical doctors. Saying that such alliance was not more than “another attempt to put pressure on the government, without any practical results” is not entirely true<sup>79</sup>. Their services of support and information to farmers enabled the notification of relevant ordinances and other documents to farmers, making them aware of increased prices of fertilizers and pesticides, for example, or the possibility of obtaining subsidies and indemnification. In addition, their headquarters provided technical support regarding agricultural credit, rural social security, veterinary care, legal support and maintenance of farm machines. Finally, growth of the farmers' fights allowed the rooting of the peasants' movement and inaugurated new fight agendas.

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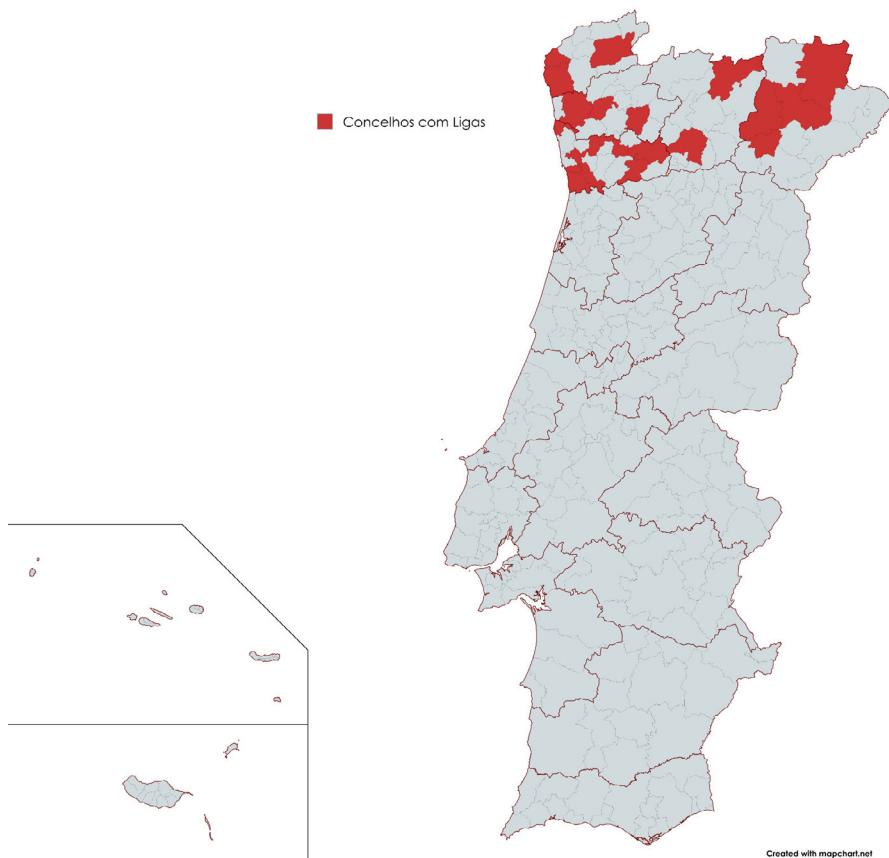
<sup>76</sup> Correio do Planalto, 4, n. 87, June 15, 1978, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> That was a structure similar to those of AGRINOVA (Beiras) and MAPA (Leiria district).

<sup>78</sup> PAIVA, O desbravar dos caminhos, p. 234.

<sup>79</sup> PIÇARRA, Constantino. Revolução e Contrarrevolução nos Campos de Portugal: Análise Histórica das Políticas Agrárias, 1975-1977. Thesis (History Doctorate Program). FCSH/UNL. Lisboa, 2022, pp. 240-241.

**Figure 3.** Municipalities in the northern region with small and medium-sized Farmer Leagues (1976-1978)<sup>80</sup>



**Source:** The authors, based on the *Diário da República*.

While petitions continued to predominate as a form of protest, tractor marches and road or railway blockades signaled the greater organizational capacity of the peasant movement. In July 1978, faced with the government's

<sup>80</sup> In the period analyzed, 22 Leagues were created in the districts of Viana do Castelo, Braga, Porto, Vila Real and Bragança. In the municipality of Braga, the association of small and medium-sized farmers and tenants adopted the designation "Union" rather than "League", keeping its objectives. Apart from the Leagues marked in the map, others, which were short lasting or informal, were never legally registered. This is the case of the Small and Medium-sized Farmers of Montalegre, which in 1977, worked hard on the promotion of rural cooperativism in the region, and later, on the resolution of problems related to potato production and distribution (Correio do Planalto, 4, n. 87, June 15, 1978, p. 1).

lack of response regarding the payment and distribution of potatoes, the Montalegre League started to wonder: “What can the farmers of Montalegre do to make the government fulfill its promises? Barricade roads? Destroy bridges? The Montalegre League believes that this is not a correct process. But it sadly observes that only those who use these methods are heard and supported by the government”<sup>81</sup>. Likewise, the Bragança Farmer League informed the Prime Minister, Francisco Pinto Balsemão, the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries António Cardoso e Cunha, and politicians in the Republic Assembly of the “serious situation of agriculture in the region”<sup>82</sup> and demanded the resolution of their problems, accusing the ministry services of “neglect and lack of interest”<sup>83</sup>. The situation in the Trás-os-Montes region reached the point where it was said that “either a new scenario is built now in Trás-os-Montes, or change will happen in another way because revolutions occur in similar situations”<sup>84</sup>. Starting in February 1978, with the creation of the National Agriculture Confederation (CNA), which gathered Leagues, cooperatives, common lands, and People’s Homes, their ability to promote of more challenging mass actions such as the National Protest Journeys was improved, thus inaugurating a “new era”<sup>85</sup> in the peasant movement.

### **Movements regarding production and commercialization of agricultural products**

From the 1960s onwards, socioeconomic transformations occurred in the fruit and vegetable, wine, and livestock sectors, with the latter being particularly affected in terms of milk production in Trás-os-Montes and Minho. In an authoritarian context, the absence of effective conditions for the exercise of public and organized protest imposed strong constraints on the demands of different social strata. Despite the functioning of the repressive apparatus, there were episodes in which rural classes expressed their disagreement with the regime’s directives, resorting to forms of mobilization and collective action aimed at pursuing common interests and objectives, outside of official institutions. Thus, in the final years of the Estado Novo,

<sup>81</sup> Correio do Planalto, 4, n. 89, July 15, 1978, p. 5.

<sup>82</sup> O Transmontano, 1, n. 4, August 21, 1981, p. 3.

<sup>83</sup> Mensageiro de Bragança, 42, n. 1867, August 28, 1981, p. 4.

<sup>84</sup> O Transmontano, 1, n. 8, September 18, 1981, p. 13.

<sup>85</sup> PAIVA, O desbravar dos caminhos, p. 226.

situations of confrontation, protest, and resistance by rural populations against the regime multiplied<sup>86</sup>.

The rupture with the dictatorial order was undoubtedly unequivocal. However, a closer analysis of the organizational structures inherited from the Estado Novo in the field of the rural economy and society reveals that this process was less abrupt than is often assumed. Indeed, although the Farmers' Guilds and their respective federations were formally dissolved by Decree-Law No. 482/74 of September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1974, the economic coordination agencies created in the 1930s, as well as their bureaucratic apparatus, remained in operation. In this context, during the revolutionary period, social movements in the north revived demands previously made by farmers, especially those directed against the constraints imposed by the persistence of these organizations in the production and commercial networks. At a meeting of farmers in Vila Nova de Cerveira in August 1974, participants demanded that political leaders ensure that "products must be paid for at their fair price," and that it was necessary to "destroy the entire fascist corporatist machine (guilds, federations, and the Farmers' Corporation) and destroy the Economic Coordination bodies"<sup>87</sup>. Farmers from (Boticas) requested information from the II Provisional Government about the support "they would give to the economic development of that parish in the areas of livestock farming and the production of rye, potatoes and seed potatoes"<sup>88</sup>. Three activities showed great potential for the organization of protests and demonstrations. Among these, potato production represented the agricultural sector, while in the livestock activity, milk production and cattle rearing stood out.

The struggles surrounding the placement of potatoes for consumption in commercial circuits and seed potatoes, used for planting, and the impacts of corporate organization on these schemes already had a history, dating back to the post-World War II period and intensifying in the following years<sup>89</sup>. The demands stemmed from the policy conducted by the regulatory agency for the fruit and vegetable sector, the National Fruit Board (NFB). A meeting held on April 8, 1975, in Montalegre, brought together approximately 200

<sup>86</sup> PIRES, Leonardo Aboim. "Protesta y conflictualidad campesina en Portugal: el final del Estado Novo desde una perspectiva rural (1950-1974)" In *Transversalidades contemporáneas: análisis, perspectivas y espacios históricos*. Valladolid, Ediciones Universidad de Valladolid, 2023, pp. 355-366.

<sup>87</sup> A Terra, n. 2, August 1974, p. 3.

<sup>88</sup> A Terra, n. 3, September 1974, p. 4.

<sup>89</sup> PIRES, Leonardo Aboim. Os pomos da discordia: resistências locais contra a Junta Nacional das Frutas. Medi@ções, 9, n. 1, pp. 243-258, 2021.

small and medium-sized potato producers, with the support of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and the Portuguese Democratic Movement/Democratic Electoral Commission (MDP/CDE), and was attended by the president and vice-president of the NFB, who presented measures aimed at resolving that sector's problems. For new harvests, the government decreed guaranteed production prices, minimizing potential losses and market fluctuations. One of the problems pointed out was the fact that, despite the existence of surpluses from previous harvests, the tubers were frequently imported, which hampered producers' profit margins and benefited wholesalers and middlemen. In fact, the 1974 production "was poor," and there was pressure from intermediaries for the NFB to "import seed potatoes"<sup>90</sup>, thus guaranteeing their profit. Farmers from Vila Real considered "the import and distribution of foreign and national potato seeds did not serve farmers' interests, but rather those of large wholesalers"<sup>91</sup>. That was a situation that impacted negatively "not only the economic survival of thousands of farmers all over the country, but also the existence of dozens of agriculture cooperatives"<sup>92</sup>. The PS approached this view, defending that it "would be necessary to reduce costs to the minimum possible" and thus "it would be advisable to use the excess production"<sup>93</sup> as seeds. The "polemic involving the potato produced in Trás-os-Montes was traditional. On the one hand, it had to be distributed, on the other hand, farmers were eternally waiting for its payment"<sup>94</sup>.

The movements occurring around this issue reveal how difficult it was to break up with the legacies of the previous political regime and the unprecedented public visibility of popular mobilizations. The said Leagues played an aggregating role, promoting meetings on tuber prices in various locations, such as Casas Novas (Chaves) and Campeã (Vila Real) in December 1977, and Montalegre in January 1978. Such actions culminated in farmers' demonstrations, notably the protests that took place in Chaves (December 1977 and April 1981), Bragança (January and November 1978), and Vila Pouca de Aguiar (February 1979).

Regarding livestock, milk producers presented contestation repertoires that resembled those used during the dictatorship. At a time when "the

<sup>90</sup> Povo Rural: boletim da Junta Central das Casas do Povo, 2, n. 15, March 1976, p. 13.

<sup>91</sup> A Terra, n. 38, February 21, 1976, p. 3.

<sup>92</sup> Mensageiro de Bragança, 40, n. 1744, March 2, 1979, p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> Portugal Socialista, n. 129, February 1978, p. 46.

<sup>94</sup> Mensageiro de Bragança, 43, n. 1889, February 12, 1982, p. 1.

country really needs milk"<sup>95</sup>, demonstrations focused on the action of the National Board of Livestock Products (JNPP), the entity responsible for regulating the productive cycle, which became the target of the producers' critique. Throughout the revolution, governments sought to provide a national organization comprising both milk production and distribution by promoting internship for agricultural technicians to qualify workforce for the Trás-os-Montes, Alto Douro, Beira Baixa and Beira Alta areas. However, many problems were still observed. Producers from Douro and Minho complained in December about the meat cattle criteria and the "payment for the cattle to the producer, which should occur within 10 days"<sup>96</sup>, to prevent losses. Later, the Leagues of Vila Real and Chaves requested to the government that Trás-os-Montes "should be considered, for all legal purposes, Organized Milk Collection Zone" and that the milk should be paid "at the same price as that of the Litoral Zone"<sup>97</sup>. For this reason, measures were taken to invert the producers' situation, such as the creation of a milk processing center, in Macedo de Cavaleiros in 1982.

Cattle breeders also faced adversities. Therefore, they sought solutions. In September 1974, the inhabitants of Vilar de Mouros (Caminha) and Meadela (Viana do Castelo) saw an experience of livestock cooperative organization in S. Pedro da Torre (Valença) as a solution proving that farmers "should not and could not expect that the government would do much"<sup>98</sup>, emphasizing difficulties, but, above all, the advantages of that model. Despite the government action to rule meat production and supply<sup>99</sup>, in the early 1980s, there were problems in Trás-os-Montes with the continued smuggling of Spanish cattle and the emergence of foot-and-mouth disease outbreaks, so "the competent authorities prohibited fairs and open markets"<sup>100</sup> and intermediary costs of production increased.

The mobilization was carried out through farmers' associations affiliated with the Mirandela League, which, in February 1981, requested a review of the price list for livestock products stipulated by the government and "demanded the creation of agricultural insurance that would cover livestock,

<sup>95</sup> Povo Rural: boletim da Junta Central das Casas do Povo, 1, n. 12, November 1975, p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> Povo Rural: boletim da Junta Central das Casas do Povo, 1, n. 12, November 1975, p. 13.

<sup>97</sup> O Transmontano, 1, n. 14, October 29, 1981, p. 11.

<sup>98</sup> Nós Todos: boletim democrático da Meadela, n. 2, September 21, 1974, p. 2.

<sup>99</sup> The government created the Rede Nacional do Abate and the Rede Nacional de Recolha de Gado (National Slaughter Network and the National Livestock Collection Network) in 1979.

<sup>100</sup> Mensageiro de Bragança, 42, n. 1840, February 13, 1981, p. 5.

facilities, crops and diseases”<sup>101</sup>. Those protests resulted in some measures, such as the creation of special credit lines and subsidies by the Agriculture Ministry to mitigate the effects of the problems addressed. The effects of the 1980/1981 drought also led to the creation of credit lines to “support farmers in acquiring metal tanks for transporting water for livestock”<sup>102</sup>. Other situations illustrate local problems in this sector, such as the serious dispute that arose between the NBLP sub-delegate and the butchers of Bragança, leading to the interruption of meat supplies to the city in June 1981.

## Conclusions

The social movements of the Portuguese revolutionary process were based on “ordinary people, without any experience of intervention or political participation, becoming aware of their power, engaging in protest movements, organizing themselves and intervening directly to solve their problems”<sup>103</sup>. However, regarding social mobilizations in the rural context, the continuity of many of the demands made during the dictatorship is undeniable. In Portugal in 1974-1975, the demands of farmers, wage earners, and producers became more complex, moving towards concerted action, accelerating and conditioning political decision-making.

Similar to other social revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Portuguese peasantry played an active role in the process of political and social transformation between 1974 and 1976. Their intervention took on multiple scales and fronts, articulating local mobilizations with broader networks of protest and demands. In the north of the country, movements of farmers, tenants, pensioners, communities of common landowners, and agricultural producers emerged, sometimes with the support of political parties, namely the PCP, the MDP/CDE, and the PS, demanding distributive justice and the recognition of historically denied rights. Although rooted in local realities, these struggles revealed forms of collective awareness that transcended the immediate and the particular, making the structural problems of rural society visible. This interpretation, however, must be considered with an analysis of the continuities inherited from the *Estado Novo* (New State).

After 1976, significant retreat from these dynamics was observed, that is, the expectation of building social alternatives was gradually replaced by

<sup>101</sup> *Mensageiro de Bragança*, 42, n. 1841, February 20, 1981, p. 9.

<sup>102</sup> *O Transmontano*, 1, n. 2, August 7-14, 1981, p. 13.

<sup>103</sup> REZOLA, 25 de Abril, p. 205.

defensive postures in the face of the reversal of legal gains and the persistent ineffectiveness of their application. The mobilizations were not limited to the material dimension of the struggle; they also involved a confrontation with regimes of authority, norms, and values established throughout the *Estado Novo*. In this sense, they expressed a form of "moral resistance," directed not only against economic oppression but also against various forms of symbolic and institutional domination.

Despite the limitations and tensions that marked the post-revolutionary period, the participation of peasants, wage earners, and producers was crucial in redefining the contours of citizenship in rural areas. The debate on land management models, the redress of historical inequalities, and the construction of social protection mechanisms found one of its main driving forces in these struggles. The case of northern Portugal, characterized by hybrid forms of collective action and a strong territorial identity, therefore constitutes a privileged vantage point for understanding peasant logics of transformation and reproduction in contexts of political change.

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