



# Alvaro Cunhal

Interviewed by Paul Fauvet

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*How would you characterise the present government and the forces that support it?*

The present government is basically composed of the two main right-wing parties, the PPD and CDS. These two parties are trying not merely to carry out a different policy from previous governments, but to push through an operation the aim of which is the liquidation of Portuguese democracy. There are three phases to this. First, the most rapid destruction possible by the Government of the great democratic gains of our people — workers' rights, the Agrarian Reform and the nationalisations. Second, unconstitutional laws which also undermine these gains — a new electoral law which would transform the coming elections into an electoral farce and would guarantee victory to the right-wing parties, regardless of the actual strength of their vote. And finally, the unconstitutional amendment of the Constitution. This is a vast operation of a subversive, anti-constitutional and illegal nature — and today the Portuguese people, the Portuguese working class, all Portugal's democrats are defending the Constitution, democratic legality and the democratic form of government.

*Can you say something about the popular resistance to the policies of the Government? To what extent has this resistance successfully safeguarded the gains made during the revolution?*

Firstly, it should be made clear that the struggles of the working class and popular masses develop strictly within the framework of democratic legality. This struggle has been taking place ever since the massive offensive against the gains of the revolution was launched, and we can say that, were it not for the strength of our people, then not only would the major structural changes in Portugal have been destroyed, but so would the democratic regime itself. Indeed, the resistance to the illegal and unconstitutional policies of the

Government is very intense. Every day there are huge demonstrations and marches, strikes on a national scale, and it is thanks to this brave, tenacious, and sometimes (as with the workers of the Agrarian Reform) heroic struggle that the reactionary forces have still not managed to destroy the essential core of the gains made after 25 April (date of the 1974 overthrow of fascism — PF). Undoubtedly they have reduced the scope of these gains — as regards workers' rights, our people's living standards, the theft of an enormous amount of land, livestock and machinery from the collectives and cooperatives — but even so the Portuguese revolution is alive and kicking, and the democratic gains embodied in the Constitution will, in our view, be defended effectively.

*Do you think that the strength of the popular movement and the balance of class forces in Portugal are such as to defeat the most important measures of the Government?*

Yes, we work and struggle for this. We think that it is both possible and necessary to block this huge and violent reactionary offensive against the Agrarian Reform, the nationalisations and workers' rights, that it is possible to hold the coming elections under democratic conditions, and that, if this happens, the right-wing

## the aim of which is the liquidation of Portuguese democracy

parties will be defeated. They will be reduced again to a minority, and conditions created, with a democratic parliamentary majority, for the formation of a democratic government with a democratic political practice.

*Why does the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) consider the Agrarian Reform 'the most beautiful gain' of the revolution? What is its special importance in terms of democracy and of creating a social situation favourable to an advance to socialism?*

It isn't only the PCP that considers the Agrarian Reform 'the most beautiful gain'. This is what the workers of the Agrarian Reform say, it's what the workers in general say, it's what everyone in Portugal says who wants to build a genuinely democratic society. It's 'the most beautiful gain' because this is the sector of national life where the workers, with their own strength, their creative initiative, their labour, their imagination, and in permanent struggle against government attacks, managed not only to transform the agricultural economy of an important region, but also to create a new life for those who work the land. The workers undertook the transformation of agriculture in a zone where previously land was abandoned and thousands of workers were unemployed. They diversified the crops, they increased considerably the number of livestock, they invested in projects that represented real agricultural progress. Despite all the difficulties, they built social facilities — creches, playgrounds, old people's centres. An end was put to the chronic unemployment that used to exist in the Agrarian Reform zone.<sup>1</sup> Jobs were guaranteed to all those who were unemployed. The Agrarian Reform made a massive contribution not only to agriculture and the national economy, but also to improving the life of the workers in the region.

We therefore consider that this, 'the most beautiful gain' of the revolution, is essential if the democratic regime in Portugal is to continue. In our view political democracy, democratic freedoms in our country cannot be separated from the transformations that have taken place in our socio-economic structures. To defend the Agrarian Reform is to defend democratic freedoms, and to defend democratic freedoms is to defend the Agrarian Reform.

If the reactionary forces were to manage to wipe out the Agrarian Reform completely, if they managed to restore the power of the great landowners, as they are trying to do, then this would also mean the loss of political freedoms, the end of democracy in our country.

*The right-wing says that it defends the interests of the small farmers of the north and centre. What are the main problems confronting these farmers? What is the PCP's policy for solving these problems?*

The question involves many complex points, difficult to answer briefly. Firstly, the right-wing parties do not defend the interests of the small farmers. They defend the interests of the latifundists, to whom they illegally hand over land from the collectives and cooperatives, reconstructing the great landed estates, and the interests of the rich landlords who oppress thousands and thousands of peasant farmers. The problems of the small farmers are very serious, and we could say that it is these social classes who benefitted least from 25 April. Measures that could have led to substantial changes in the working and living conditions of the small farmers were not carried out. There are various problems — problems of credit, of the distribution of farm produce, of insufficient land for many small proprietors, of tenant-farmers being unable to benefit from improvements they make, and being liable to arbitrary eviction from their plots by the rich landlords. Our Party has drawn up a platform for the struggle of the small farmers, and a complete definition of basic aims — and it's no accident that support for and membership of the PCP among small farmers has grown.

The small farmers are very important — they carry out much of Portugal's agriculture. Their problems should meet with a favourable response as their own organisations, and our Party, argue.

*The PCP is opposed to Portugal's entry into the EEC. What are the reasons for this? What effect would entry have on Portuguese agriculture?*

The PCP is absolutely opposed to Portugal joining the EEC for three reasons. First, the different levels of economic development between

Portugal and the developed countries of the EEC— this gives neither our industry nor our agriculture the ability to compete with goods from the EEC on our own domestic market once we are obliged to lift our tariff barriers.

Secondly, the policy of the EEC is carried out by the great capitalist groups. We think there is no identity between the interests of these groups and those of our people and country.

Thirdly, Portugal's entry into the EEC is designed not so much to solve the problems of the Portuguese economy, but to destroy the gains made by the Portuguese people. The reactionary forces are trying to use integration into the EEC as an argument for the liquidation of the nationalisations and the Agrarian Reform, for the restoration of monopoly capitalism in Portugal, for the destruction of 25 April, on the grounds that the economic structures in Portugal, should be identical to those in the rest of the EEC, where, as we know, state monopoly capitalism is dominant.

As for agriculture, as I've said, if Portugal joins the EEC, neither in agriculture nor in industry will our producers enjoy the necessary conditions to compete, and many thousands of them would be

## Portugal did not nationalise banks — it nationalised banking

bankrupted and ruined. We think that EEC entry would have disastrous results for our economy, for small producers in industry and agriculture, and for the very independence of our country.

*Can you say something about the offensive against the nationalised sector, particularly the banks and insurance companies? What do you think of the problems in the banking and insurance trade unions where there are executives affiliated to the breakaway UGT and not to Intersindical?*<sup>2</sup>

The offensive against the nationalisations has been going on for some years. We should not confuse the Portuguese nationalisations with nationalisations that have taken place in certain other capitalist countries — some, naturally, because of working class struggle, but others on the initiative of the monopoly groups themselves, interested in dumping deficits from firms that aren't profitable onto the state budget. These are nationalisations promoted by capitalism itself. In Portugal the nationalisations were not of this kind. They resulted from the effective liquidation of the monopoly groups, from the disappearance of finance capital, from the revolutionary measures of our people which transformed our socio-economic structures.

The banks and insurance companies were nationalised, and so were other basic sectors of the economy. The policies of successive governments have attacked this — starting with the Socialist Party minority government which passed a law putting the nationalisations at risk, right up to the present Government which is going for a *de facto* liquidation of the nationalisations. The scheme the Government has adopted goes further than measures of general policy — credit policy, pricing policy, foreign trade policy — which in themselves were already creating difficulties for the nationalised companies, and favouring the private sector. Apart from these measures the Government has tried to pass a law that would allow private concerns to set up banks, insurance companies and their own firms in sectors that were nationalised in toto *as sectors*. Portugal did not nationalise

<sup>1</sup> The Agrarian Reform zone covers the southern districts of the Alentejo and the Ribatejo.

<sup>2</sup> Intersindical is Portugal's TUC, founded clandestinely in 1971 and represents over 75% of all Portuguese workers and over 95% of industrial workers. The UGT is a right-wing breakaway set up in 1978 with Socialist Party and PPD support.



banks — it nationalised banking. It did not nationalise this or that insurance company — it nationalised all insurance activity. So this law, trying to open up these sectors to private enterprise, would be a serious blow to the nationalisations. The Constitutional Committee and the Revolutionary Council have declared that this law is unconstitutional, so at the moment it hasn't been passed. Despite this the Government is preparing another law of the same kind. But we think that, unconstitutional as it is, this will suffer the same fate as its predecessor.

As for the unions, it is interesting to note that despite reactionary influences in the banking and insurance unions, the members of these unions are, in general, in favour of continuing with the nationalisations — apart from anything else, government policy of making things difficult for the nationalised banks could spell unemployment for many workers, and the same goes for the insurance companies. Even in unions where the executives are not progressive on the question of the nationalisations, positive positions have been taken.

*What importance in the PCP's strategy has the Constitution and its defence? What are the most positive features of the Constitution and which articles are most under attack?*

A country's constitution is its basic law. All citizens and the government must comply with it. The Portuguese Constitution was approved by the Constituent Assembly with the votes of all the parties bar one — even the party to which the present Prime Minister belongs at that time approved the changes in Portuguese society. It declares that the nationalisations are irreversible and that the latifundia cannot be restored. The Constitution declares that the rights and freedoms of workers cannot be subject to constitutional amendment, and likewise the principle of proportional representation in elections. It safeguards



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the democratic character of the Portuguese regime with its specific features arising from the process of democratisation. It is an essential factor for stability. Naturally our Party holds that the Constitution, as the fundamental law, obliges everyone — from ordinary citizens to the government — to defend it and to defend democracy. But today the reactionary parties are trying to destroy the Constitution, and to amend it in an unconstitutional way — by neither respecting the limits put on amendment by article 290 of the Constitution, nor the correct procedures laid down in the Constitution for its amendment, nor the principle that constitutional amendments must have a two-thirds majority in parliament.

Naturally, they attack all those articles of the Constitution that correspond to stability and to the impossibility of altering the most profound changes in Portuguese society — the Agrarian Reform, the nationalisations and workers' rights. Not only do they attack these basic principles, but it is their intention to destroy the Constitution in to order destroy the democratic regime. The battle for the Constitution is a battle for democracy itself. We defend the maintenance of the Constitution, though naturally we accept constitutional amendments provided these take place within the framework laid down by the Constitution.

*Do you think there are any negative features in the Constitution, features you would like to see altered?*

Not particularly. Experience shows us that there are some slight adjustments that could be made. There have been some difficult moments in the functioning of our institutions because some articles are not well drafted. There are questions relating to our sovereign bodies<sup>3</sup> — for instance, the Revolutionary Council. Our Party has no objection to it continuing — but there is a strong current of opinion, including from within the armed forces, and within the Council itself, that it should disappear. If this sovereign body were to disappear, then we think that in another constitutional amendment its attributes should pass to other sovereign bodies, without altering its basic character — that is a politico-military body which guarantees that the armed forces are in favour of the defence of democracy and national independence.

*At last year's 9th PCP Congress, you said: 'If the democratic forces do not manage (though we are sure they will manage) to impose finally a democratic shift in the organs of power, then these organs will end up by destroying the gains of the democratic revolution, and with them, the democratic regime itself. In the light of the present situation and the existing balance of forces, which of these alternatives — democratic shift or destruction of democracy — seems more likely? In the recent past the PCP has argued that there was no chance of a stable bourgeois democracy in Portugal — either the revolutionary gains would be maintained, or a new dictatorship would arise? Do you still think that these are the only two alternatives possible?*

In our view the defence of the Agrarian Reform, the nationalisations and workers' rights are inseparable from the defence of political democracy. Portugal's democracy cannot be compared with the democracy that exists in other Western European capitalist countries. Monopoly capitalism was eliminated, but still persists in these other countries. We also have an Agrarian Reform with a socialist character. Portuguese democracy in the constitutional framework that we defend has different characteristics from bourgeois democracies.

As for the balance of forces we cannot take elections results as the sole indicator. There are other measures — for instance the participation of the workers, of our people in social and political life, and also in economic life. It's one thing to cast your vote, and another

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to take part in the political life of the nation. In our view what is going to happen — we have confidence in our people! — is not the liquidation of Portuguese democracy, but a democratic shift that will guarantee our revolutionary gains — firstly, through the struggle of the working class and democratic forces to bring to a halt the criminal offensive which the Government has launched against the democratic transformations embodied in the Constitution. Secondly, by ensuring that the Parliamentary elections in September or October are held under democratic conditions. If these are democratic, we are convinced that the reactionary parties will again be reduced to what they are — a minority. This will deprive them of any juridical legitimacy to form a new government. If the Sa Carneiro government has not already fallen by then, it will do so at this point, and the democratic majority in parliament will create some of the basic conditions for a democratic government.

*A democratic parliamentary majority raises the question of left unity. How does the PCP see this problem, particularly united action between communists and socialists?*

As is well known we have a severely critical attitude towards the behaviour of the Socialist Party leadership and of the PS governments, fundamentally because when in government the PS launched the offensive against the nationalisations, the Agrarian Reform and workers' rights. The Socialist Party allied with the right. It formed a government with the CDS — the most right-wing party in parliament. The PS government drew up a series of laws attacking our people's revolutionary gains — we called these laws 'the legislative counter-revolution'. So we are very critical of the way the PS leadership and successive PS governments have carried on. This does not mean that we have not fought for the unity of Portuguese democrats, and particularly unity between communists and socialists. In the framework of Portugal's institutions, a solution based on those institutions depends on an understanding between socialists and communists. So, despite the continued refusals of the PS leadership to unite with communists, despite the statements at the time of the elections by Mario Soares that one of the aims of the PS was to block the progress of the PCP, we continue to argue for unity and understanding between communists, socialists and other democrats as a very important condition for a democratic shift in Portuguese politics. Ours is a policy of unity. We insist on it, and if the PS leadership doesn't understand it, there are many thousands of PS members and supporters who do understand the real need for unity among democrats and who, in day to day struggles, already work together with communists and other democrats to confront the reactionary offensive.

*Are there any signs of a change in the Socialist Party leadership's attitude towards left unity?*

Well, we say that there's no smoke without fire, but at the moment we still can't see enough smoke to say, yes there definitely is a fire. D

<sup>3</sup> Sovereign bodies are the President, Parliament, the Government, Council of the Revolution and courts. The Council of the Revolution is a military body set up at the height of the Revolution and which constitutionally has a consultative and watchdog role. The right wing has always wanted to abolish it.