

# THE MYTHS OF PORTUGUESE BELLIGERENCY

António José Telo<sup>1</sup>

## THE GREAT WAR IN HISTORY

The Great War was a watershed event, a turning point. Even though the conflict lasted a scarce four years, the numbers involved are overwhelming when compared to the conflicts that preceded it. The number of soldiers killed in action reached an astounding 7,300,000 (4,200,000 on the allied side and 3,060,000 for the two main axis powers<sup>2</sup>), twenty times the number of soldiers killed in the Napoleonic Wars, which had been the largest conflict to date. The war left a vast trail of destruction in its wake, along with a sacrificed generation, with civilian casualties far outweighing military casualties, as is the norm in large-scale armed conflicts. Portugal was a typical case with about 8000 men killed in action (rather low numbers compared to the great European powers) and 120,000 victims of the Spanish flu, or influenza, which spread quickly due to the war.

In short, the 'Great War' was a war unlike any other for more reasons than simply its scale. It marks the end of an ordered and logical Eurocentric world, the construction of which dated back to the 15th century, and the onset of what several authors have dubbed 'modernity'.

In that Eurocentric world, seven European powers had divided Africa, Asia and Oceania amongst themselves and ruled over the Seas. The Eurocentric world had been shaken before, at the turn of the century, on two occasions when the European powers were defeated: Spain was crushed by the USA in 1898 and Russia was defeated by Japan in 1905. However, in 1914, Europe was still the centre of the world when it came to military, financial and diplomatic clout.

Five years later, it was the US that dominated and dictated the rules of the new international order at the Versailles Conference, in a meeting where President Wilson was the leading figure. The world's navies evolved in a similar way: before the war, the Royal Navy was the world's leading navy by a wide margin, followed by the German Navy. After the conflict, the Royal Navy stood shoulder to shoulder with the North American Navy in terms of quantity,

---

<sup>1</sup> Professor at Academia Militar, where he coordinates a research project on the Great War.

<sup>2</sup> The number of soldiers killed in action (in millions) were: Germany, 2,04; Austria-Hungary, 1,02; Russia, 1,9; France, 1,39; Great Britain and the British Empire, 0,9; United States, 0,05. An additional reference for the sake of comparison: France mobilised 2,300,000 men in the 16 years of the Napoleonic Wars; 100 years later, France mobilized 8,600,000 over 4 years of war.

but was more outdated in terms of quality, with the Japanese Navy coming in third<sup>3</sup>. In only a few years' time, two of the three largest navies in the world belonged to non-European countries.

The same thing happened with the global economy. Every European in 1914 was certain that London's City was the financial centre of the world, and that its heart was the Bank of England, the source of the only truly universal currency: the pound. The situation in 1918 was entirely different. All the great European powers on the side of the victors, especially GB, had borrowed heavily from the US - the small Portuguese nation was the exception, as its own 'huge' debt (a modest £22,000,000) had been contracted with GB. The dollar was the universal currency for the most part, and this trend accentuated after 1919 as the vanquished powers, especially Germany, also resorted to American credit.

It was also the beginning of the end for the colonial world. In 1914, the colonies were internationally accepted and were seen as a factor of progress and a way of promoting world order and civilization. At the time of the Treaty of Versailles, the colonies were already seen as a negative factor, temporarily tolerated by the international order, but only if steps were being taken towards their independence and colonizing powers were held responsible for encouraging their autonomy. A huge shift had taken place in a scarce five-year period. The main cause for this shift was the mobilization of human resources in the colonies by the main powers, and the way these powers instigated insurgency against the other colonising nations: France, for instance, mobilised more than 2 million African soldiers; Great Britain sent large contingents of Indian soldiers to the Middle East and to the Western Front; the Western Allies instigated and armed the great Arab uprising against the Turks; the Germans encouraged the rebellion of the populations of Angola and Mozambique against the Portuguese; and these are but a few examples. The mobilisation of the colonial populations for the war brought about a massive change in mindsets and led to the birth of numerous pro-independence movements in the following years.

The war brought with it the end of the societal values of the 19th century, and many beliefs that had been deeply ingrained over centuries were widely abandoned: that the white man was 'naturally' superior, that the vote should be restricted to those deemed cultivated, that governments existed for the common good, that monarchies were the natural form of government, that women were meant for child-rearing and that work outside the home should be restricted to men, that the Christian religion superseded the others.

War can result in massive changes over short periods of time. At its outset mass societies emerged, the right to vote was extended to the entire adult population, including women, governments were widely distrusted and both victors and vanquished were feeling the effects of a crisis in authority and leadership. This was, perhaps, the starkest of all contrasts: the domestic peace and stability which was the norm in 1914 had turned into general unrest, which was also the norm in 1919.

---

<sup>3</sup> Specifically, in 1914, GB had 2.5 million tons in war ships, followed by Germany with less than half of that (1.17 million). In 1922, GB was still in the lead (with 1.99 million), followed by the US (1.75 million) and Japan (0.86 million); France had the second largest European navy (with 0.67 million) and the fourth largest in the world. Data retrieved from *Conway's All The World's Fighting Ships, 1906-1922*, London, 1985.

The Europe that joyfully and enthusiastically entered the war in August 1914 was stable and orderly, a small continent where each power was ruled by similar social, economic and political systems, shared similar theories and doctrines and even similar military art.

The scenario in 1919 was the exact opposite. One of the great powers (Russia) embraced a different system, which it intended to export (Bolshevism), while most remaining powers were either struggling with internal strife (Germany, China, Russia, and most of the states that had emerged from the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires) or with serious domestic problems involving violent uprisings requiring military intervention (Italy, Portugal, Spain, and some Balkan states and, to a lesser extent, France), and at the same time the first significant movements demanding the independence of the colonies emerged (especially in India and in the Arab world) alongside nationalist movements against the European rule (as in China). The stability and order that once reigned supreme were now circumscribed to a small part of Europe (Great Britain and the Nordic countries), to North America and little else.

It was a massive political shift. By 1914, Europe was mostly composed of more or less liberal constitutional monarchies (with the exception of three republics: France, Portugal and Switzerland), stable systems which never, or almost never had to resort to violent means to resolve the internal conflicts in their societies. After the war, liberal monarchies practically disappeared, giving way to different forms of government: a minority of mass democracies and a majority of dictatorships with varied ideologies and architectures, from Russian Bolshevism to Nazism, Fascism, Salazarism, Francoism and the many dictatorial regimes of the Balkans. It was a major transition and, in almost all instances, a violent one in which war veterans played a vital role<sup>4</sup>. Some authors refer to the conflict as the 'European civil war', and the wording rings particularly true for the years between 1919 and 1936, a time when most European states were facing strong domestic upheaval and were rife with civil wars, revolutions, coups and counter-coups.

The societal impact was no less significant. Perhaps the most important social change brought about by the war was women's access to the labour force. European governments which had once directed their efforts to keeping women confined to the home were now mobilising women for the positions left vacant by the men. Women's rights were expanded everywhere to some extent, in some cases achieving equality with men's by conquering the right to vote, while in others (as was the case of Portugal) merely gaining some ground on the labour market.

The Social State was taking its first and most important steps. The liberal societies of the 19th century, which had held the commonplace belief that a smaller State was a better State practically disappeared. The war brought with it widespread reinforcement of the State, which began intervening in spheres it used to stay out of, from the labour market to the organization of industry, the planning of transportation, the creation of public health services,

---

<sup>4</sup> All studies have revealed that a substantial section of the Italian 'Blackshirts' and of the German 'Brownshirts' were war veterans, which was natural if one thinks that nearly all male adults had been mobilized. The 1917 Bolsheviks were also war veterans for the most part, many who had defeated from the Army of the Tsar. In Portugal, almost all officers involved in the 28 May revolution had been involved in the war, and its main leaders were the military commanders of the CEP.

education and social services. National healthcare systems, for instance, were discretely but effectively and widely implemented to fight war-related pandemics, bringing about the decline of liberal medicine, which had been the norm before.

There shift in mentalities was tremendous One need only look at the aesthetic movements. The great painters of renown in the post-War such as Picasso, Dali, Braque or Kandinsky broke with the dominant movements that preceded them, such as Impressionism and Art Nouveau. Let us now look at the ideological currents. The post-War world was marked by new '-isms', such as Nazism, Communism, Fascism, Maurism, or, in Portugal, Integralism, Sidonism and Corporatism. The same thing occurred in all cases: the works by the pioneers where the break is already visible were made before the war - as Picasso's first Cubist paintings and the work of the early Integralists, such as António Sardinha. These pioneers were only accepted after the war ended but then became the dominant currents, either in their pure form (like in the work of Picasso) or in a muted, hybridised form (as in the Integralist oeuvre, officially named one of the three pillars of the New State, along with Corporatism and the social doctrine of the Church).

The Great War was thus a turning point, a transition between two worlds and the entry-point into what would be a violent and radical 20th century. Some authors go as far as to say that the war did not end because the beliefs it destroyed have not yet been replaced by new, widespread beliefs<sup>5</sup>.

### **PORTUGAL - LYING AS STATE POLICY**

The history of the Portuguese belligerency in the Great War is yet to be constructed, although hundreds of books have been written on the subject. The main reasons for this are three-fold. The first reason was that, from day one, the Portuguese belligerency was enveloped in a veil of lies spread by the interventionists to push a reluctant Nation into the war.

With the Sidonist government of 1917-1918, during the last part of the war, there was even a semi-official consensus, a gentlemen's agreement between pro-war and anti-war elements, or if you prefer, between radicals and moderates, to perpetuate the 'great lie'<sup>6</sup>. This agreement can be described in simple terms: the entire war-effort would be presented as a great patriotic endeavour, a national imperative, and a sacrifice which the circumstances were forcing the Portuguese people to make, without discussion and without question, as that would create problems, both domestically and abroad. This gentlemen's agreement marked most of the Portuguese post-War historiography and is still in place today. Even today, the 'royal censorship' condemns those attempting to the discover the facts behind the

---

<sup>5</sup> A prime example of this is the recent book by Frank Furedi - *First World War – Still no End in Sight*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> The phrasing is by Ferreira do Amaral, one of the most renowned officers in the CEP. It expresses the facts so vividly we could not help but transcribe it.

smokescreen, punishes those who want to see past the great lie, and harms those who see History as an explanation, instead of propaganda for an official version of the truth.

The second reason why the Portuguese belligerency is not well understood is that it was framed by an intermittent civil war that began in 1908, which enhanced its effects and altered its character. This means that it was and still is highly traumatic and, because some current political organizations consider themselves heir to their 1904 counterparts, understanding this belligerency is still grounds for ideological and political battle. Many of the Portuguese works on the war are not works of History but of ideology. What we mean by this is that they do not seek to understand how events occurred, but rather to defend and embellish the stance taken by one or another political force of the time.

The third reason is that the majority of Portuguese authors usually rely solely on Portuguese primary sources and, more recently, on a small number of British and Spanish sources<sup>7</sup>. This means that only a part of the facts has been portrayed by the Portuguese historiography<sup>8</sup>.

What are the most common mistakes made by the traditionalist interpretation of the war? I detected fourteen major mistakes, although I could list many more.

#### **THE FIRST COMMON MISTAKE - OMITTING THE EXISTENCE OF A CIVIL WAR**

In 1908, an intermittent civil war began in Portugal. A society can be said to be in a state of intermittent civil war when it resorts on a systematic and extensive basis to organized and military violence in order to resolve its problems, resulting in frequent violent clashes followed by periods of relative peace which are underscored by the partial use of organised violence. Portugal experienced the above from 1908 to 1927, leading us to conclude that an intermittent civil war existed that lasted for two decades. The Great War began at the midpoint of this civil war (six years after it started and nine years before it ended) and helped shape its character.

Some Portuguese authors of the late 20th century pointed out that one must look both to domestic and foreign reasons to understand Portugal's participation in the war<sup>9</sup>. However, this approach only looked to the reasons behind the country's involvement, without recognising that it was a far wider phenomenon, one which encompassed all aspects, specifically the understanding of military operations.

---

<sup>7</sup> In the 1970s, Hipólito de La Torre Gomez was the first author to introduce Spanish sources into the study of the Portuguese belligerency. In the 1930s, José de Almada was the first Portuguese author who relied on British documents, although they were for the most part non-confidential.

<sup>8</sup> I must add that I am not excluding myself from the practice. My previous works on war and belligerence already relied on international primary sources, but only a fraction, and these were mainly English and American sources.

<sup>9</sup> Several authors followed this trend, the underlying theories of which have been systematised and expanded by Nuno Severiano Teixeira.

The reality is that the violent clashes witnessed in Portugal from 1914-1918 can only be understood as a whole and in a holistic approach. The revolutions of May 1915 and December 1917 were Portuguese military operations in the Great War, much like Naulila or the Battle of the Lys, and are closely interconnected to such an extent they cannot be understood separately. The CEP would have been an entirely different institution without the December 1917 revolution, and without the CEP a December 1917 revolution would not have occurred. They are two faces of the same coin, rather than two different coins.

Certain sceptics may ask: did an intermittent civil war really exist? Let us look at the evidences.

- a) Forty-seven governments were formed in roughly sixteen years of existence of the First Republic (an average of four months per government), none of which lasted to the end of their term, many of which were brought down by violent means and few of which held on to power for even a year.
- b) Two heads of State were assassinated (King Carlos and Sidónio Pais) and five were brought down by revolutions (King Manuel, Manuel de Arriaga and Bernardino Machado in 1917; and Sidónio Pais and Bernardino Machado, a second time, in 1926). Only one head of State succeeded in completing his term (António José de Almeida).
- c) Eight large-scale violent clashes resulting in hundreds of casualties were recorded, which are commonly described in the Portuguese historiography as 'revolutions' or 'civil wars' (in 1910, 1915, 1917, 1919, 1921, 1925, 1926 and 1927). There was also the failed coup of 1908 and the regicide that followed it, although these events resulted in lower casualties than the above.
- d) In addition to these 'revolutions', there were dozens of coups and counter-coups, insurrections and violent uprisings.
- e) Thousands of bomb attacks, violent assaults and assassinations were recorded, some of which involved prime ministers, such as the attack on João Chagas or the assassination of António Granjo.
- f) Bomb attacks and clashes were a normal part of the hundreds of strikes and violent demonstrations that occurred, in which many were killed and wounded.
- g) There were hundreds of attacks by armed mobs on party headquarters, political newspapers, cultural centres, churches, convents, and even private households (dozens of houses would be robbed in the days that followed a revolution, such as Afonso Costa's in 1917).
- h) There were violent manifestations everywhere, from deputies smashing table tops in protest and getting into fistfights in their respective houses to armed students in Coimbra vying for control of the University campus, forcing the GNR and the Army

to intervene on several occasions between 1910 and 1914, to strikers who relied to groups armed with bombs and firearms for protection.

Unlikely as it may seem, the most important of these phenomena, which allows us to state that there was indeed a state of intermittent civil war, was none of the above. The most important phenomenon was the permanent presence of organized groups of armed civilians who sought to create factions within the military headquarters by infiltrating military institutions and undermining their discipline.



*Ilustração Portuguesa*, 14 June 1915

A picture is worth one thousand words. One of the civilian armed groups who took part in the 14 May 1915 revolution, here in a rare 'official' photo taken during the euphoria brought on by the movement's victory and photographic evidence of the gangs who dominated the streets of the major cities. This armed group was officially named 'Centro Eleitoral dos Defensores da República' [Electoral Circle of the Defenders of the Republic]. A few soldiers can be seen among the civilians, mainly Navy officers, but also some from the Army and the GNR. It is noteworthy that this group included a stretcher-bearer detachment (first row on the left), the sign of a well-thought-out military organization.

The first of these groups was the 'Carbonária', Portugal's most effective and largest armed revolutionary organization. The Carbonária was officially extinguished in 1911, but in fact it simply changed and expanded. It gave way to offshoot groups such as the 'Formiga Branca' [White Ant], the 'Batalhões de Voluntários' [Voluntary Battalions], the 'Grupos Cívicos' [Civic Groups] (civic... but armed), the 'Grupos de Defesa da República' [Groups for the Defence of the Republic], and many others with seemingly innocent names like the 'Centro de Promoção do Voto' [Centre for the Promotion of Voting] or the 'Centro de Música' [Music

Centre]. Most of these armed groups were under the umbrella of the Democratic Party (predictably, the least democratic of all parties), which dominated the electoral machine and acted as a link between the Carbonária and the groups of *caciques* loyal to the Monarchy. Other civilian armed groups emerged later (after 1911): those with affiliations to revolutionary syndicalism, to Machado Santos, to the catholic students of Coimbra, to the anarchists, to the monarchists, etc.



*Ilustração Portuguesa*, 21 June 1915

Another civilian armed group that took part in the 14 May 1915 revolution. This group from Caldas da Rainha included nine civilians and nine officers from the Army, the Navy and the GNR, or at least individuals sporting those uniforms (some only partially). Their weapons were as varied as they come, from double barrel shotguns to Mannlicher carbines, Mauser-Vergueiro and Kropatschek rifles, and we can even make out what appears to be a Winchester repeating rifle like the one used in the assassination of King Charles in 1908 (this was a rare, very expensive weapon, bought in Switzerland in 1907 by the republicans). The flag is inspired in the old Carbonária, which was officially extinguished in 1911 but was still active in 1915.

This type of war brought with it a new development, as the civilian armed groups increased, which is that they became diversified and now encompassed the entire political spectrum, from the far right to the far left - from the integralists to the anarchists, as they were called then. It was a constant reality: all political forces in the Republic had their own undercover, semi-clandestine army of armed civilians, who were tolerated by the administration, and who were ready to fight at the smallest pretext and were involved in constant skirmishes both in rural and urban areas. All of these forces had infiltrated and permeated the Armed Forces.

These were the main armies involved in the intermittent civil war, with the aggravating factor that they became diversified and multiplied over time. They clashed violently during the war, both within and outside the national borders. These armies were composed of both civilian and military troops, as the rare extant photographs demonstrate.

These groups of armed civilians must not be conflated with other clandestine terrorist organizations, although these also existed, such as the *Legião Vermelha* created in the 1920s which specialised in terrorist attacks on individuals. Civilian armed groups were something quite different, although home-made bombs were also one of their most important weapons. They usually operated under a legal and official political nucleus (a party, a syndicate, a lodge), although they did not formally answer to them, which allowed these armed groups to rapidly switch from one political nucleus to another. These armed groups were semi-legal and frequently hid behind an innocent-looking front, and they even had licences for most of their weapons, thousands of which were granted by the rapidly alternating governments. Clearly, each administration granted licences for 'their groups', which meant that, after a few years, all groups had them.

These armed groups of civilians were responsible for creating a peculiar military art during the First Republic. Just as it had happened on 5 October - the genesis of these events -, the streets were dominated by the combined action of civilian armed groups and military units, a manoeuvre that was as political as it was military.



*Ilustração Portuguesa*, 24 May 1915

An everyday scene in Lisbon during a revolution: an artillery lieutenant is led in restraints by a column of armed civilians and Navy personnel. A similar column led the cadets and teachers of the Escola de Guerra da Gomes Freire [Gomes Freire War School] to the Navy Arsenal after the assault on the Escola de Guerra. As they walked, the captured cadets were beaten, insulted and their stripes were torn. At least one cadet and one teacher were shot at close range and killed in this column, even though they were unarmed, were being led by an escort and were carrying the Portuguese flag. Many were wounded and had to be hospitalised. There are reports that some cadets only escaped being shot thanks to the last-minute action of some of the armed Navy seamen escorting the column.

### **THE SECOND COMMON MISTAKE - WAR ONLY OCCURS OUTSIDE THE NATIONAL BORDERS**

The chief delusion of the traditionalist Portuguese historiography is the idea that the war was strictly a foreign war, that it began abroad and was fought abroad, and that this is the only context in which it should be analysed. According to this interpretation, the December 1917 revolution was a completely independent event that had nothing to do with the events in which the CEP was involved during the same period, and that they simply coincided chronologically. It must then be merely a 'bizarre' coincidence that the same agents were involved in both and that their motivations were similar.

In fact, the exact opposite happened: the war abroad became enmeshed in the domestic intermittent civil war, amplifying it and shaping its characteristics. From the Portuguese perspective, the conflicts that were being fought inside and outside its borders were one and the same, and its main objective was to determine Portugal's future at home and its role in the world. It was a single objective and a single conflict; some actions were simply domestic and others occurred outside the Portuguese borders, but all were closely connected.

The interventionists used all the means at their disposal to instigate belligerency, as their main goal was to hold on to power and consolidate a fragile radical regime by defeating their many domestic enemies. Afonso Costa and Norton de Matos were certain that the fate of the CEP would be decided in the Lisbon streets, and that the future regime would come out of the combined outcomes of both operations (at home and abroad). The non-interventionists also had no doubts on the matter, and knew that all battlefronts were closely connected and that the main front, where all would be decided, was the domestic front.

Interestingly, post-war historians were the first to question this theory by envisioning Portugal as if it were Great Britain. In fact, Portugal more closely resembles Russia, that is, the situation in the country was unique in that its domestic and foreign military operations were closely connected. For example: could Russia's role in the war be understood without considering the 1917 Revolution? And could the 1917 Revolution be understood without considering Russia's role in the war? Evidently not. These events are so closely connected they cannot be separated. It is the same with Portugal.

### **THE THIRD COMMON MISTAKE - BELLIGERENCY AT THE REQUEST OF AN ALLY**

The official version of events is that Portugal entered into the war at the request of an ally, presented on behalf of the Alliance. Officially, this was what happened, but the reality was precisely the opposite.

British documents issued both prior to the war and during the first few months of the conflict clearly state that the Portuguese belligerency was not required. According to those documents, the Portuguese Armed Forces had been destroyed in the four years the Republic had been in place, and by late 1914 were reduced to an undisciplined, politicised, divided mob. Any contribution they might make to a modern war was negligible, but the chaos they could potentially create was tremendous. Therefore, from a strictly military perspective, there was nothing to advise a Portuguese participation in the war and much to oppose it.

The Portuguese belligerency was also not desirable from a political and diplomatic perspective, as it would only complicate things in the Peninsula (Spain was neutral) and add confusion and background noise to the future peace negotiations, while also creating friction between Great Britain and France. From an economic and financial perspective, the Portuguese belligerency was the worst case scenario for the United Kingdom, as it would inevitably be accompanied by a request for credit and another for assistance with maritime transport.

From a strategic and military perspective, it was important for the United Kingdom that its enemies would not be able to use the vital Portuguese positions, but this could be achieved through the Alliance and did not require Portugal to participate in the war. Finally, Great Britain was interested in some concessions that Portugal was in a position of making, such as the use of its ports and the safe passage of British troops through Mozambique, but Portugal had already granted both in August 1914, again, without being required to participate in the war. In short, Great Britain had everything to benefit from Portugal maintaining a neutral but collaborative stance. The Portuguese belligerency created many more problems for Great Britain than it would ever solve - those were the facts.

How, then, did Portugal come to participate in the war, and what is more, how did it originate from a formal request by Great Britain. Describing a complex situation in simple terms, in one word: France! Paris's stance was diametrically opposed to that of Great Britain. The reasons for this were political and ideological: Portugal and France were two of three republics in Europe in 1914, which meant a rapprochement between the two was only natural. Additionally, although coalition governments were formed in France during the war, they were usually dominated by the French left, which had affinities with the radical republican interventionists. This was the case of Aristides Briand, Prime Minister (as well as Foreign Minister) of France when the Portuguese participation in the war was decided.

However, the main reasons were not, as is the norm, ideological. France knew that the British ally had signed two secret agreements with Germany to partition the Portuguese colonies, one of them in the eve of the war (in 1912; the other was signed in 1898), and resented being left out on both occasions. France knew it would be a long war with an uncertain outcome, one that could very well end in a peace settlement with no clear victors. If that were to happen, Great Britain might be tempted to rely precisely on the determinations

of those secret agreements to seek its own understanding with Germany, one that would exclude France. It was in France's best interests to prevent this from happening, and the best way to achieve that was to bring Portugal into the war. France believed that the Portuguese involvement would block any independent Anglo-German agreements for a peace settlement.

Paris' interpretation of the situation in the Peninsula was also different from that of Great Britain: for France, the Portuguese belligerency was a way of containing Spain and ensuring its neutrality, or even of encouraging it to fight on the allied side; London's main concern was that a Portuguese participation in the war could be seen as a provocation by German sympathisers in Spain, who would be tempted to take advantage of the war to annex Portugal.

Furthermore, until May 1915, British caution was the predominant allied policy, as Italy's neutrality raised problems for the balance of forces in the Mediterranean. In May 1915, Italy entered the war on the side of the Allies, eliminating for the most part the pretext for rejecting the Portuguese involvement, which gave France wider room for manoeuvre.

This meant that the Portuguese belligerency was not simply decided in a domestic struggle between interventionists and non-interventionists. It was mainly decided in a diplomatic battle between Great Britain and France, with the first supporting its non-interventionist allies and the latter encouraging its interventionist allies. The non-interventionists were natural allies of Great Britain, even though the interventionists often accused them of being 'Germanophiles' - one of the war's many official lies. The internal British documents leave no room for doubt and reveal the profound contempt that Her Majesty's Government had for the interventionist party, who were, in the opinion of British leaders, 'narrow-minded opportunists' (sic!) who always placed party interests ahead of national interests.

#### **THE FOURTH COMMON MISTAKE - A MEEK FRANCE AND AN ACTIVE GREAT BRITAIN**

To cut a long and complex story short, France facilitated the Portuguese belligerency by allying with radical republican interventionists, effectively twisting Great Britain's arm.

Paris made a first attempt in September 1914, when, without prior consent from London, it requested from Lisbon the Schneider TR75 artillery pieces it had sold to Portugal during the reign of King Carlos. Great Britain was presented with the *fait accompli*, and all it could do was to pressure Portugal into sending the pieces unmanned, so that complying with the French request would not lead to a Portuguese involvement in the war.

The British play was ingenious, as usual, and successful, also as usual. Although London's instructions seemingly supported the French request, they implied the caveat that only unmanned pieces should be deployed. When the Portuguese interventionist party (headed at the time by War Minister Pereira de Eça) insisted that men also be sent to man the pieces, Great Britain initiated 'negotiations' to generate a division that would be deployed to

France, but its intent was always to prove to both Portugal and France that it could not be done.

Predictably, Portugal soon discovered that it was unable to generate a modern division on such short notice. At the same time, Great Britain encouraged the Portuguese non-interventionists to prevent a forced participation in the war, namely by leaking its secret diplomatic documents to the leader of the opposition (non-interventionist Brito Camacho)<sup>10</sup>. As London expected, Brito Camacho published a series of articles based on the British documents in his newspaper (*A Luta*), denouncing the government's lies. His arguments were simple: Great Britain had not requested the Portuguese involvement in the war and was doing everything in its power to prevent it; the interventionist government wished to pursue it for partisan interests; Portugal should accept all requests made on behalf of the Alliance, but should not insist on belligerency. The non-interventionists, who, contrary to the claims of the interventionist propaganda, were not Germanophiles but friends of Great Britain<sup>11</sup>, made the above the pillars of their policy.



*Ilustração Portuguesa*, 10 May 1915

**Brito Camacho speaks at the Congress of the Unionist Party, of which he was the leader. Brito Camacho was the main anti-war theorist in Portugal in the early years of the war. He defended two central ideas: Portugal should accept all requests made on behalf of the Alliance, but should not insist on belligerency; in the event of**

<sup>10</sup> Carnegie, the British representative in Lisbon, later declared that, officially, Minister for Foreign Affairs Freire de Andrade (a moderate, non-interventionist republican) had been the one to hand these documents to Brito Camacho; however, he did not hide his satisfaction with these developments and mentioned that he maintained unofficial contact with Freire de Andrade, who he considered a friend.

<sup>11</sup> There was, in fact, a Germanophile movement in Portugal, but it was a rather small one. It was mainly circumscribed to a small Miguelista royalist current, which did not include the royalist new right, namely the young integralists. Even the Miguelistas were had links mainly with Austria, not Germany.

**belligerency, it should fight in Africa and on the open sea, but not deploy troops to France. Note the presence of officers in uniform at the Party Congress table; this was a normal occurrence.**

As a result, in late 1914, a large anti-war movement emerged in Portugal, the expression of the sentiment prevalent in the Nation and in the Armed Forces - it was largely born in the Armed Forces. This resulted in four direct consequences.

The first consequence was that War Minister Pereira de Eça was left isolated both in the government and in the Armed Forces, and was forced to deploy the pieces unmanned, as London had wanted. Pereira de Eça exacted his revenge by sending the pieces to France without ammunition, and as they carried a type of ammunition the French did not use (although the pieces had been sold to Portugal by France), they were useless to the Allies and remained in storage in British depots - we might add that this mattered little in the end because Portugal sent 48 TR75 pieces and the French Army had over five thousand by August 1914.

The second was that sending the pieces, as London expected, did not ignite a war, rendering moot the French pretext to encourage Portuguese belligerency. As a result, in mid-1915 the Portuguese interventionist government (that followed the ousting of Pimenta de Castro) insisted on deploying a division to France, to which Great Britain responded that it was no longer interested and advised calm and prudence, and to beware cutting ties with Germany!

The third consequence was that Brito Camacho's articles, which he wrote after having read the secret British documents, triggered a widespread anti-war movement at home that opposed the radical attempt to force the country's involvement in the war. The movement was sparked by the rapprochement between the moderate republicans (represented at the time by President of the Republic Manuel de Arriaga) and the Armed Forces officer corps, who were at the centre of the protests against the radicals' attempt to push Portugal into the war. This movement would become known as the 'movement of swords'. For the first time, the majority of Army officers spoke out against the war, allowing Manuel de Arriaga to form a government with General Pimenta de Castro as prime minister in early 1915. The latter overturned the mobilisation of the division that was to deploy to France, with the enthusiastic support of Great Britain - the non-interventionists proved to be London's allies in Portugal.

The fourth consequence of this process was the May 1915 Revolution and the violent overthrow of Pimenta de Castro, which saw the interventionists gain power again - this was the bloodiest of all revolutions, in which about one thousand people were killed or wounded.

#### **THE FIFTH COMMON MISTAKE -**

#### **GREAT BRITAIN INSTIGATED THE PORTUGUESE BELLIGERENCY**

The non-interventionist government was defeated in the May 1915 Revolution and its extensive support base was temporarily destroyed, but they were aware that they could still count on support from Great Britain, and never doubted that the attempts to force the participation in the war were driven by party interests. All memoirs and descriptions make the same mention: the idea of involvement in the war did not elicit a large-scale 'patriotic explosion', it inspired fear and both passive and active resistance.

London's stance remained the same. When the new interventionist governments called on the Ally to endorse a declaration of war on Germany, their answer was clear: Portugal was an independent country free to do whatever it so wished; but if it declared war on Germany, it could not count on the support of its Ally. This answer was enough to calm the spirits of the interventionists during 1915, as the internal situation had become even direr due to lack of credit, shortage of currency and the beginnings of famine and severe shortages.

Everything changed in late 1915. On the one hand, Portugal was unable to withstand the financial burden and lacked the currency it needed to acquire essential goods, especially American meat and cereal. Food shortages were especially worrying for the interventionist administrations, as they knew a general famine would hit the cities hard, robbing them government of its already feeble support network. In late 1915, Afonso Costa sent an urgent request for a credit of £2,000,000 to London, explaining that the survival of the government was at stake, and sent a special representative to negotiate the details, with instructions to obtain the pounds at any cost<sup>12</sup>.

Around the same time, João Chagas (the Portuguese representative in Paris) alerted the French administration to the pressing domestic problems caused by Portuguese radicals and requested that they intervene at once with Great Britain. It was then that France proposed a solution that was most beneficial to the interventionists: why not requisition the 80 or so German ships docked in the Portuguese ports and rent them to France, as the country was in dire need of freighters? This rental would solve Portugal's financial problems while leading the country into the war, as France intended. In late December 1915, France informed Great Britain that it intended to ask Portugal to intern the German ships, presenting the matter as a done deal, one not open to discussion<sup>13</sup>.

London had been following the situation of the German ships in the Portuguese ports for months, looking for a way to acquire them without causing Portugal to enter the war. Faced with France's show of force, Great Britain was left with a simple choice: it could either leave the matter to Paris, which meant Portugal would enter the war with France's support, possibly ending the centuries-old Alliance; or it could lead the process. Great Britain chose the latter option and, on 30 December, Sir Edward Grey informed the French administration that it would send word to Lisbon requesting the internment of the German ships, adding that these

---

<sup>12</sup> Telegram from Carnegie to Sir Edward Grey on 28 December 1915. PRO FO 371/2759. The representative is not Portuguese, but one Mr Bleck, a British man, very well connected in the English community in Portugal and on good terms with Afonso Costa.

<sup>13</sup> Telegram from the French government to its representative in London on 23 December 1915. French National Archive 1CPCPM1245. The official note from France was delivered to Her Majesty's Government on 29 December, without the Portuguese administration having been consulted.

ships would be used by Great Britain and that the process would be conducted under the umbrella of the Alliance<sup>14</sup>. In return, London was willing to grant Afonso Costa's request for financial aid.

This process allowed the interventionists to achieve their main objective of forcing the Portuguese belligerency and thus holding on to power - without the British credit, the radicals would have soon been ousted. From the Portuguese perspective, the process was initiated with the request for financial aid, which was made due to partisan interests (keeping the government in power<sup>15</sup>). Paris was not only willing to go forward on its own, it was also willing to face all consequences by arming and financing the Portuguese war effort in the case of a declaration of war by Germany. Great Britain was forced to make a move.

### **THE SIXTH MISTAKE - A MILITARY ORGANIZATION LIKE ALL THE OTHERS**

One of the greatest mistakes in the traditionalist historiography is that it places the Portuguese military institution on par with the other belligerents, different only in size. Some even go as far as to state that the war gave the Armed Forces the unity it had lacked until then. What happened was precisely the opposite: the Armed Forces were a shadow of their former selves and the war only increased the deep divisions that were already there.

Actually, the Portuguese Armed Forces of early 1916 were the product of six years of chaos. The forces were undisciplined, ill-equipped, divided, deeply split along partisan lines, were unprepared for a modern war in Europe, there was no national support to belligerency on which they could fall back, and they were confused and poorly organised.

How did it come to this? How was it possible that the same Armed Forces that had carried out dozens of successful operations outside Europe from 1890 to 1910 could produce the results obtained in Africa from 1914 to 1918? Certainly not by chance! The main cause was the regime's military policy from 1910 to 1916, which systematically created chaos and politicisation, a situation that was not caused by the incompetence of the administrations but by a conscious, coldly executed party strategy. Clearly, this was not a national policy. It was the policy of the radical republican interventionists, who knew that to consolidate their power they must first destroy the old Armed Forces-

Simply put, the new regime was largely born out of the paralysis of the Armed Forces, which were not willing to defend the Monarchy but also did not support the Republic. Initially, nine Army officers took part in the events that led up to the revolution of 5 October, but none were accounted for after 9 a.m. on 4 October (all of them left as soon as they thought the movement had been defeated). Only one general officer remained loyal to the republicans,

---

<sup>14</sup> Telegram from Sir Edward Grey to the British representative in Lisbon, Carnegie, on 30 December 1915.

<sup>15</sup> Afonso Costa even asked London if the request for credit could be dealt with as a 'private', unofficial affair, and for that reason the request was addressed to Lloyds' & Brown, and Her Majesty's government was only asked to lend its support. Letter from Sir Edward Grey to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 6 January 1916. PRO FO 371/2759.

and he committed suicide when he believed the movement defeated (Admiral Cândido dos Reis).

In short, the regime did not trust the officer corps, especially the Army officer corps, which it considered dangerous. This was the background against which the radical republicans devised a strategy to consolidate their power and to neutralize the potential danger posed by the officer corps. This strategy was systematically carried out by the radical administration from 1910 to 1916, and consisted of six essential points:

- a) To encourage the formation of civilian armed groups that would infiltrate the barracks and that could defeat a potential monarchist or conservative military coup.
- b) To task the offshoots of these groups of armed civilians with surveilling the officer corps in the barracks, and with reporting any officers that displayed anti-radical or anti-government tendencies. The officers reported for political dissidence by the committees of corporals and sergeants saw their careers sabotaged and were sent to garrison remote posts in the countryside or in the colonies.
- c) To organise the small number of radical republican officers into an independent unit by placing them in key roles, namely in the General Staff. The most famous of these groups were the young Turks'. Evidently, organising these radical officers into a 'secret club' resulted in a tendency to organise similar to what had already happened in other movements, quickly leading to the politicisation of the officer corps.
- d) To solve the Army's modernisation problems, which had begun in the reign of King Carlos of Portugal, and to lend enthusiastic support to the programmes to expand the armada, specifically the project known as 'Grande Esquadra', or Great Fleet. These formidable plans for the Navy did not come to fruition, largely due to lack of support from Great Britain, and by 1914 both the Army and the Navy's weaponry and equipment was unsuitable for modern warfare. Interestingly, this was particularly true in the Navy, as the Army at least possessed the relatively modern weaponry acquired through the programmes set up by King Carlos.
- e) To disband the semi-professional Army of the Monarchy, which had a large permanent officers staff and to replace it with an army composed of citizen-soldiers and a large contingent of militia officers. The project for 1911 was inspired in the Swiss Republican Army and aimed to greatly reduce the permanent officer staff. The project fell through for various reasons, but the Army remained under threat of extinction, particularly the officer corps. As a result, by 1914 the Portuguese Army was neither the effective Army of the Monarchy nor the new 'militia' model, but a hybrid version of both that did not function according to either.

- f) To create or encourage military organisations that could cooperate with armed groups of civilians to challenge the Army rule over the Lisbon streets, specifically the GNR and the Navy (which was concentrated in Lisbon, its sole base of operations, where it had barracks and shipyards).

These circumstances must be taken into account when comparing the Portuguese Armed Forces of 1916 with the other European armed forces. The Portuguese forces were simply the monstrous result of six years of destructive policy carried out by the radical republicans. The Armed Forces were not outfitted with modern weapons or equipment; they were not conceived bearing in mind a war in Europe; they were partidarised at every level; they were divided to their core, with sergeants spying on and reporting officers, and the officers of the permanent staff were under constant threat of extinction and were mistrustful of the political administration as a whole; there were no effective modernisation programmes, nor any external support to any kind of modernisation; there were serious shortages, indiscipline was rampant and the forces had been infiltrated by armed groups of civilians.

None knew this so well as the German, British and French observers in Lisbon. These observers had no illusions about the actual capabilities of the Portuguese Armed Forces, unlike several later historians.

These are but a few excerpts of telegrams dealing with the matter sent by the Allied representatives in Lisbon, but dozens of similar statements can be found in the period from 1914 to 1918.

Carnegie, the British representative in Lisbon, wrote, at the time of the Portuguese belligerency<sup>16</sup>: 'The Portuguese Army is ill-equipped, undisciplined and disorganised, and its enthusiasm for the cause is scarce, if any; should we suggest in any way that it may be needed abroad, a general mobilisation will likely create a new military movement that may prove disastrous to our interests in Portugal'. [Translated from the Portuguese]

Almost concurrently, Daeschner, the French representative in Lisbon, expressed the opinion of the defence attachés and of the French military missions when he warned that while Portugal was capable of mobilising 50,000 to 60,000 men, the force generated would be tremendously ineffective<sup>17</sup>. Daeschner explained that the problem was not lack of equipment or weaponry, as France could provide those, but the force's total lack of training in modern warfare and, above all, 'their complete lack of discipline on all levels and the open opposition of the officers corps, two thirds of whom were clearly against the war and claimed to be willing to support any mutinous movement to prevent mobilisation'. [Translated from the Portuguese]

---

<sup>16</sup> Telegram from Carnegie to Sir Edward Grey on 16 March 1916. PRO FO 371/2761.

<sup>17</sup> Telegram by Daeschner to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs on 13 April 1916. Service Historique de La Defense, GR5N135

The allied representatives in Lisbon knew what they were talking about. At that moment, the Armed Forces were, indeed, an unruly mob, as Carnegie put it, as most of its officer corps opposed the war and were only waiting for an opportunity to overthrow the interventionist government, which they saw as unpatriotic and bent on involving Portugal in a war that would end in disaster for the nation. This was the situation in the Armed Forces for 1914 to 1916, as the knowledgeable allied representatives described it. It would be preposterous to compare the above military institution with its British and German counterparts, or even with the military institutions of minor powers like Belgium or Serbia.

The great paradox facing the interventionists was one of their own making, as for six years they had worked to destroy the Armed Forces as an effective military institution, and in turn this allowed them to come out victorious in the 1915 revolution. After those six years, they were forced to ask those same Armed Forces to participate in a European war. What is more, it was no ordinary war: it was the most challenging front in the greatest war humanity had ever witnessed. The paradox goes beyond mere incompetence or political stupidity and borders on deliberate blindness to partisan interests by establishing objectives completely out of step with reality. The Portuguese officers were caught in a trap set by politicians with hugely unrealistic ideas, and, try as they might, were powerless to stop it.

#### **THE SEVENTH MISTAKE - THE CEP WAS CREATED AT THE REQUEST OF GREAT BRITAIN**

For the traditional Portuguese historiography, it was GB that requested the generation of the CEP, from which we may infer that if any error in judgement existed... The error was made by the British, who were too demanding.

As usual, when speaking of the Great War, the reality was the exact opposite. Great Britain, which had been forced to accept the Portuguese belligerence, did not desire the creation of the CEP and did everything in its power to stop it! As early as March 1916, shortly after the declaration of war, Lisbon was informed that the British believed that the Portuguese military effort should be focused on defending its ports and navigation, and on deploying forces to Africa to support the allied campaign to occupy German East Africa by allowing the allied troops safe passage through Mozambique<sup>18</sup>. There was no mention of France, and the British military command was quite clear: we will not consider the possibility of accepting Portuguese forces at the Western Front!

Afonso Costa led the negotiations on the terms of belligerency with the Ally, rather skilfully, as expected. Afonso Costa's words to Great Britain were quite simple, but very effective: everything was interconnected, so if they desired the German ships, then they had to accept the deployment of troops to France and provide financial support to the war effort. If

---

<sup>18</sup> German East Africa was the last German colony not yet fully occupied by the Allies. A campaign was ongoing in which allied forces (British, Belgian, South-African and Indian, among others) were advancing slowly from the north and the west. Portugal had sent several expeditions to the north of Mozambique and the Allies instructed those forces to cross the Rovuma and invade the German colony.

these terms were granted, then the ships would be delivered to Great Britain alone<sup>19</sup> and a favourable decision would be made on other issues that had been under discussion for years, such as the concession of the Benguela railway and control over the Nyassa Company. Great Britain hesitated and attempted to negotiate as Afonso Costa maintained full control over the proceedings, living up to his reputation as a formidable negotiator<sup>20</sup>. His tactic was simple: everything was connected; the British could either accept the deal in its entirety, or refuse altogether. Great Britain was tempted to refuse all terms.

France was, again, the one to shift the scales in Portugal's favour. The French administration had already consulted with General Joffre<sup>21</sup> on the possibility of deploying Portuguese forces to France. The reply to this enquiry was that the reports of the French military attaché in Lisbon showed that the Portuguese Army had limited operational capability and that the officers did not support the war effort, but, even so, the deployment of one or two divisions may prove useful. Joffre believed those divisions could be used in a quiet sector of the front, freeing up two French divisions, with the caveat that they would not be autonomous, and would instead be integrated in the French forces<sup>22</sup>. In 1916, France had to face the massacre at Verdun, which inflicted half a million casualties.

The response of the military led the French administration to inform London of its intentions of sending a military mission to Lisbon to arrange the Portuguese participation, adding, as if it were an insignificant detail, that it would 'be useful' if France represented both countries. Her Majesty's Government replied through Sir Edward Grey that it had also considered sending a military mission to Lisbon, but had eventually changed its mind. Great Britain probably believed the matter would be dropped, but France insisted.

In June 1916, Aristides Briand<sup>23</sup> sent a telegram to the French delegations in London and Lisbon, stating that an attempt should be made to secure the deployment of a Portuguese expeditionary force to collaborate with the Allies, either in France or in Thessaloniki (Greece). This was a show of force and, once again, a checkmate on the reluctant Great Britain. The French message to the Ally was harsh: either they accepted the Portuguese expeditionary force, or it would be integrated in the French sector through an agreement without the involvement of Great Britain (which would undoubtedly have repercussions on the matter of the ships).

---

<sup>19</sup> The situation of the ships was complex. Portugal wished to keep about 20% of the German ships. France and Italy claimed a share of the remaining 80%, and Great Britain reminded them of the terms of its alliance with Portugal, stating that all vessels must first be delivered to the British, and only then could a possible redistribution of the freighters be considered.

<sup>20</sup> It is a complex matter which we have summarised here in a few words, for the tug-of-war with Great Britain went on for several months.

<sup>21</sup> General Joffre was the commander-in-chief of the French Armies, the highest operational authority in France.

<sup>22</sup> This was one of the hardest points to negotiate. Portugal insisted that its forces be used in combined forces under Portuguese command. Both France and Great Britain requested the opposite: that the Portuguese force be integrated in minor (battalion level or smaller) units, integrated in brigade or division-type units.

<sup>23</sup> Aristides Briand was prime minister of France and minister of Foreign Affairs from 29 October 1915 to 20 March 1917. Telegram of 17 June 1916, French Diplomatic Archives 1PCOM638.

We must now explain the role of Thessaloniki in the unexpected stand taken by France. Greece was a newly opened front when the Allies moved a part of the forces that were withdrawn from Turkey to Thessaloniki after the failed Dardanelles offensive. The idea was to persuade Greece to enter the war and attack in the south to support Serbia. Things went wrong from the outset and the forces in Thessaloniki were virtually inactive until the end of the war; it was only in the last weeks of the conflict that they launched an attack on Bulgaria.

In 1915, João Chagas<sup>24</sup> indirectly informed the French government of the possibility of deploying Portuguese troops to reinforce Thessaloniki - a way of forcing Great Britain to accept the Portuguese belligerency. The French administration did not accept the offer, but, in June 1916, the possibility of Thessaloniki was brought again under consideration, likely because it was thought that London might find it a more acceptable option.

Faced with Paris' show of force, Great Britain was compelled to stand down. Her Majesty's government informed the British military command in France that it was obliged to accept a Portuguese expeditionary force for political reasons.

In late June 1916, Afonso Costa and Augusto Soares arrived in London for the final negotiations. Afonso Costa added a further demand, stating that while 'all the Portuguese people' wished to participate in the war on the Allied side<sup>25</sup>, 'certain sectors' in the Army were 'somewhat' (sic!) reluctant to accept the deployment of forces to France, which meant that... An official request from the Ally on behalf of the Alliance was now necessary. Sir Edward Grey attempted to deflect, replying that he was wary of making requests on behalf of the Alliance that gave the Portuguese people the impression that the pressure was coming from Great Britain. Nevertheless, Afonso Costa insisted; he stated in clear terms that the request was necessary to prevent a negative reaction from the Army, which might result in another 'movement of swords'. Given the situation, and especially given the stand taken by France, London once again conceded. In June 1916, the Portuguese Government received a note from its Ally 'inviting' the country to cooperate more actively in Europe alongside the Allies<sup>26</sup>.

These negotiations were particularly enlightening and revealed

- a) That pressure by France remained crucial for the success of the objectives of the interventionists.
- b) That the interventionists were fully aware of how fragile their position was, and feared a reaction from the Armed Forces, especially the Army.
- c) In order to avoid this reaction, Afonso Costa needed to present the deployment of the force to France as a British 'request', which was exactly the opposite of the truth.

---

<sup>24</sup> João Chagas was a staunch advocate of the war and was nominated to lead the first administration formed after the victory in the May 1915 revolution. He was the Portuguese representative in Paris at the time.

<sup>25</sup> The allied diplomatic representatives in Lisbon stated just the opposite: the belligerency did not elicit enthusiasm and the anti-war movement had a strong presence in the Armed Forces.

<sup>26</sup> This is only a summarised account of the extensive and complex documentation available for consultation at the PRO/NA, namely in FO 371/261.

At the close of the negotiations, Sir Edward Grey was so weary of the Portuguese and of the interventionist ruses that he seemed willing to accept the idea of 'delivering' the CEP to the French. The French government was probed on the possibility and replied<sup>27</sup> that it was willing to accept the Portuguese forces, but insisted on first sending a joint military mission to Lisbon. Sir Edward Grey then proposed that the mission be led by the French, hinting at a future integration of the Portuguese forces in the French sector.

A reminder by the War Office of the consequences for the Alliance made him review his position - in practice this agreement would place Portugal under the French sphere of influence. Sir Edward Grey acknowledged this and reluctantly reversed his stance. In light of this, Great Britain pressured Paris to accept General Barnardiston as commander of the military mission, to which the French agreed<sup>28</sup>.

The issue of the integration of the Portuguese troops in the English or French sectors would be the focus of heated argument between the two allies (Great Britain and France), an argument which Portugal was wholly unaware of. This was a complex matter which dragged on for months, but, to put it simply, France insisted that the Portuguese troops should be integrated in the French sector and Great Britain was reluctant. The British military command in France was in favour of this solution, but the War Office and the Foreign Office in London considered, with some justification, that it would spell disaster for the future of the age-old Alliance. The matter was eventually left to the consideration of the War Cabinet, and it was decided that the Portuguese would be integrated in the British sector. The British military command in France was obliged to accept the political decision, but it did so reluctantly, already predicting a disaster.

France protested and maintained its stance until late 1916, when the first troops were en route through Spain (the first contingent of 150 soldiers). The matter was settled when Norton de Matos intervened with General Barnardiston, who was now the chief allied military representative in Lisbon. The Minister of War replied that Portugal wished to send an expeditionary force to fight alongside its age-old Ally and that any other solution would create internal divisions because the 'Portuguese people' and the Army would not understand it. Norton de Matos was using the same strategy as Afonso Costa. He turned an undeniably weak interventionist position into an argument to persuade Portugal's reluctant Ally and openly acknowledged the truth: the majority of the Armed Forces were opposed to the deployment of forces to France - rightfully so, as they were aware of the military reality - and it was therefore necessary to create the pretence of a request by the Ally.

London then instructed its representatives in Lisbon (Carnegie for diplomacy and Barnardiston for military affairs) to accept the integration of Portuguese forces into the English sector. In the event that France insisted, Portugal was encouraged to present a proposal to

---

<sup>27</sup> Telegram to London, 5 July 1916. French Diplomatic Archive 1CPCOM638.

<sup>28</sup> PRO/NA FO 371/2761. Afonso Costa insisted on how everything was connected: 'belligerency, German ships, Nyassa', so the matter would have to be decided on as a whole - it was all or nothing. Afonso Costa was without a doubt the most skilled Portuguese politician, which the English were quick to note. Unfortunately for Portugal, he was also the staunchest of interventionists.

deploy the forces to Thessaloniki integrated in a British command. This time it was the British rather than the French who added Thessaloniki to the Portuguese military equation.

The issue of Thessaloniki rendered moot as France did not oppose the integration of the CEP into the British sector. In January 1917, the first contingents embarked on English vessels, following a small group of 150 soldiers who travelled by railway through Spain in late 1916, disguised as civilians.

### **THE EIGHT MISTAKE - THE EVENTS OF 9 APRIL COULD NOT BE PREVENTED**

The future of the CEP was decided in a few short weeks in late 1916, by Great Britain and France. If the CEP had been integrated in the French sector, it would have occupied the south part of the front, where there were no major attacks by either side from September 1914 to the end of the war. If that had been the case, the CEP would not have had to withstand a large-scale German offensive and would have survived unscathed until the end of the war, but the fate of the Age-old Alliance would have been different.

The only reason this did not happen was because the interventionists were not interested in the integration of the CEP in the French sector. They needed the Portuguese force integrated in the British sector as they believed this to be the only way to strengthen ties with London, and above all a way to silence the non-interventionists who controlled the Army, presenting the creation of the CEP as an obligation towards the alliance, the opposite of the truth.

Once again, those in favour of the war reached their immediate objectives, but failed spectacularly with regard to their mid-term objectives. The British military command in France was reluctant to receive the CEP, and relations between them were tense and difficult from the get go.

These relations were worsened by an unfortunate choice of commander for the CEP, the inept General Tamagnini, one of the most incompetent Portuguese generals, who had never led men into combat, lacked organisational and General Staff expertise, possessed no leadership abilities, no diplomacy, no convictions, no imagination or improvisation skills, a man who, in short, did not have any of the necessary skills. Tamagnini made a terrible first impression on the British military command, unlike Gomes da Costa and Colonel Baptista - a competent General Staff officer (although evidently an interventionist) who was the de facto leader of the CEP behind the figurehead of Tamagnini.

At first, the Army officers who opposed the war were convinced by this smokescreen and believed that the CEP was an imposition of the Alliance, but they soon saw through it: the CEP was a device created by the interventionists, one which Great Britain was reluctant to accept and fought hard against.

Portugal was tasked with the sad mission of organising its largest ever expeditionary force to Europe in a mission that its Ally only consented to after relentless pressure from

France, without the support of its troops and with the active opposition of the majority of the officers. At the same time, the CEP was wholly dependent on Great Britain for sustainment: funding, transportation, weaponry, logistics, training, integration, heavy equipment, air support, intelligence, command, etc...

The problem was aggravated by the fact that the commander of the CEP, a general whose main quality was his ability to always say yes to the interventionists, was chosen for largely political reasons and had the support of a small group of 'young Turks' who were in favour of the war (mainly Baptista and Ferrão), while most of the officers opposed it - as was to be expected. There were significant internal tensions in the CEP, particularly among officers. The British were left dumbstruck by the sight of Portuguese officers speaking out against the war in the mess halls, within earshot of the other ranks. When the British officers commented on this, the Portuguese officers replied that they meant for the soldiers to hear it... The British could not understand this attitude and saw it as incompetence - it was not; it was an attitude born out of the climate of intermittent civil war. The CEP had been caught in a deadly political trap.

#### **THE NINTH MISTAKE - THE CEP SECTOR WAS 'NORMAL'**

Predictably, the British military command in France immediately saw the CEP as more a liability than a benefit. The force had been a political imposition, and Field Marshal Haig's main concern was containing the potential dangers posed by the CEP.

The corps was stationed in a quiet location, but that did not suffice. The British command took its time assigning the CEP to a sector, waiting for the autumn rains to begin. Then, they chose a sector where the terrain had been rendered impassable by the first rains (the Lys sector, in Flanders), certain that the Germans would not attack in large numbers there, at least not until spring. The CEP only occupied its sector in November 1917, when the terrain had already been drenched by the rain, preventing any large-scale German attacks.

Most Portuguese authors fail to mention this particular point and find nothing more to say on the matter, leading to the conclusion that the CEP sector was 'normal', except for the fact that it was located on soft terrain which the rain easily turned into mud. As usual, the reality was rather different.

The truth was that the CEP was not assigned a front 'sector', but a 'semi-sector', or rather the front section of an Army Corps sector. The defence in depth system adopted by Great Britain in 1917 organised the forces in three echelons: the first echelon was the front line, with three lines of trenches (lines A, B, and potentially C). The majority of the forward defence troops were concentrated in the second line, or Village Line, which was the actual barrier and was usually formed by a series of readied communicating redoubts positioned to create a crossfire effect. The last component of the system was the Corps Line in the rear, where the Army Corps reserves were stationed, ready to counter-attack if needed. The heavy

artillery, warehouses, logistics centres and hospitals were located farther in the rear. The full British three-echelon system could be anything from 8 to 15 km deep.

The CEP stationed in the Lys was not defending a full system. From the start, the British instructions were to concentrate the Portuguese forces at the front (behind lines A and B) and at the Village Line (2 to 4 km farther back). The Corps Line in the rear was not assigned to the CEP, but to the British. In November 1917, the British command deployed two brigades to the Corps Line positions behind the CEP (one for each Portuguese division). The Portuguese sector was not a sector... It was merely the front section of one.

The Lys was chosen to deploy the CEP due to this specific distribution of forces. It was the only sector in the Western Front with two bodies of water (the Lys river and the Lawe canal<sup>29</sup>) 5 to 7 km behind No man's land, running almost parallel to it, forming an exceptional defensive barrier. British troops garrisoned the Corps Line behind the Lys and the Lawe and defended the bridges crossing those bodies of water.

This was a belt and suspenders approach by the British. The terrain conditions in the sector made it almost impossible to stage an attack in the autumn or in the winter. Furthermore, for greater protection, the Corps Line was garrisoned by British units and was supported on two bodies of water that formed an excellent natural barrier. The British command never fully explained the situation to the Portuguese, but issued very clear instructions, which Gomes da Costa summed up in an iconic quote: in the event of an attack, 'the CEP's mission was to die on the Village line'. The CEP's mission was, then, to take the first brunt of the German attack, giving the British time to send reserves to the Corps Line. The CEP would be destroyed in the process, but Great Britain was willing to pay that price. Evidently, the Portuguese were never informed of this.

Must we expand further on the trap the interventionists laid out for the Portuguese military? How could one hope that by repeatedly twisting the arm of a more powerful Ally one might gain their respect and loyalty? The warlike policy of forcing the Portuguese belligerency led the country's military to this sad state of affairs! This is one of several situations that the Portuguese historiography has systematically ignored, as if it were nothing out of the ordinary...

The obvious question is: if the British took so many precautions, what went wrong on 9 April?

Several things did, thereby proving that, no matter how many precautions are taken, anything can happen in war. The first hindrance was the weather. The winter of 1917-1918 was particularly cold but very dry. The Flanders soil, which was normally flooded until mid-April, uncharacteristically dried up enough to allow the German to attack in late March.

---

<sup>29</sup> The Lawe is an affluent of the Lys that was turned into a canal in the 19th century. It runs 10 to 15 m wide and it is crossed by a number of bridges and several flood gates. It was the course of water located behind the Portuguese front line. Some authors referred to it as the Lawe River.

Great Britain, aware of the huge drop in morale in the CEP that winter, insisted that British officers be placed in command, as they knew well the Portuguese lack of enthusiasm with the war. Lisbon categorically refused. London then insisted that the CEP be deployed to the rear in January 1918. The process was delayed mainly by General Fernando Tamagnini, who recklessly did all in his power to formally hold on his sector command, without worrying over-much about the fate of his men. Gomes da Costa, whom the English considered the only CEP general who knew how to command men, was in favour of withdrawing for the winter. In March, Lisbon finally yielded to the British pressure and agreed to withdraw the CEP.

The decision, however, came too late, although only for a scarce 24 hours. On 21 March, the first large-scale German spring offensive began in the Somme region (50 km south of the Portuguese sector). Haig had already been forced to send divisions to reinforce the Italian front in the winter of 1917-1918. The 21 March offensive forced Haig to move more divisions from the Flanders to the Somme. As a result, the British postponed the withdrawal of the CEP three times, when it had at one point been scheduled for March. It should be noted that March to April 1918 was the worst period for the Allies in the Western Front, as the unthinkable happened - the Germans again posed a threat to Paris and the western resistance was in danger of collapsing. In the face of this crisis, Field Marshal Haig had more pressing matters on his mind than the fate of the CEP.

Finally, the British at first reduced the CEP to a single division (on 5 April) and scheduled its withdrawal from the front line to 9 April, deploying two divisions to the rear of the Portuguese forces. Their concerns were at least somewhat assuaged by the decision to remove the incompetent Fernando Tamagnini and to give the command of the Portuguese division in the front to General Gomes da Costa, who the British trusted.

The German attack began at 4.15 a.m. of 9 April and the CEP was destroyed, only a few hours after having been instructed to withdraw. The CEP did indeed 'die' on the Village Line, the mission they had been entrusted by the British.

One question remains: why did the British choose 9 April? Was it simply a coincidence? Was it random? Was it an example of the 'fog of war'? These questions cannot be answered here but, as is the norm regarding the matter of Portuguese belligerency, what really happened was the opposite of the official story.

Furthermore, the British decision was perfectly logical and coherent under the circumstances - any barely competent general would have done the same to minimise losses and survive the great crisis that was effectively endangering the Western Front. It was the Portuguese choices that lacked logic and coherence... The English were evidently not to blame for them...

In any case, the events of 9 April, which could have easily been avoided if a little more realism had prevailed and if the command positions had not been put in the hands of incompetent individuals, were the logical conclusion of the warlike policy. What else was to be expected of a policy that endeavoured to destroy the capabilities of the Army for six years, turning it into an undisciplined, confused mob, utterly dividing it, removing the most

competent officers from command positions, forcing the Ally to accept a military solution it knew to be disastrous and, the final bead in a rosary of calamities, insisting on deploying the CEP to the worst sector (the British) of the most demanding front (the French) in the greatest war humanity had ever witnessed? There are many ways to make mistakes and to get carried away by ideological delusions. This was undoubtedly an extreme case of colossal error, complete blindness and absolute lack of realism. The official historiography certainly had much to hide. The Portuguese officer corps certainly knew what they were doing and had good reason to strongly oppose the war.

### **THE TENTH MISTAKE - AFRICA AND EUROPE ARE DIFFERENT**

Another lie told by the traditional Portuguese historiography is the attempt to present the reality in Africa as a different reality than that in Europe. This was based on actual facts: the non-interventionists were against sending troops to France, but were in favour of deploying them to Africa, where Portugal sought to defend its colonies. This was the national consensus: from 1914 to 1918, no political force, from the integralists to the anarchists, contested the colonies; none questioned the need to defend them in case of an attack.

In reality, however, the consensus only extended to that general statement. The Armed Forces fighting in Africa were the same forces that were sent to France, under the same conditions and framed against the same background of political chaos.

It was hard to believe that the same nation that had organised dozens of victorious expeditions for the pacification campaigns in Africa, in the same type of terrain as the Great War expeditions (south of Angola and north of Mozambique) suddenly, for mysterious reasons, forgot everything it had learned. The earlier expeditions to Africa recorded a normal number of casualties due to illness - that is, 5% to 10%. Portugal's first expedition to Mozambique during the Great War recorded 50% casualties due to illness, without any enemy contact. How could this have happened? What extraordinary events happened to turn a competent, victorious Army into a pale shadow of its former self, a band of disorganised politicians leading a pride of lions?

It was hard to believe that an Army that had been capable of adapting and changing on a regular basis from 1890 to 1910, constantly improvising new tactics and dynamics to face a variety of enemies in different types of terrain, suddenly became rigid, unable to innovate and to challenge the imaginative German tactics. It was also unfortunate that the Portuguese had to face one of the great military geniuses of the war in Mozambique: General Lettow-Vorbeck, a man willing to cut with tradition, who acted according to the treatises of the future, which he was writing himself with his actions.

Contrary to the official claims, it was not a matter of numbers or of lack of weaponry or equipment. The Portuguese were better armed than the Germans in all the African campaigns and the numbers were in their favour. Lettow-Vorbeck's Askaris, for example, were overjoyed when they managed to capture the Portuguese 1905 Mauser Vergueiro rifles (one

of the weapons brought to Portugal by King Carlos), as they preferred them over their Mauser rifles from... 1871, which still had to be recharged by igniting gunpowder.

The difference was that the Portuguese Army operating in Africa was exactly the same that was deployed to France. That is, it was the same undisciplined, divided, anti-war, disorganised and incompetent force created by the interventionist policies. A scarce few years had passed since King Carlos' pacification campaigns, but the military reality was entirely new. In the Portuguese Army of 1914, for example, pills made of flour were sent to Africa instead of quinine pills, because corruption made some individuals richer at the expense of the troops. Another example of this is that no preparations were made to receive the metropolitan forces in Africa, and the men had to disembark on the beaches and sleep on the floor, with predictable consequences for their health. On some occasions, the British ships that carried the expeditionary forces to Africa even dumped their cargo in the sea near the beach and went on their way, as they could not wait weeks to disembark due to lack of preparation. Finally, the Portuguese Army of the Great War denounced its intention of crossing the Rovuma to the enemy by being tremendously loud and by igniting a large number of fires, setting the stage for the disaster inflicted by only a handful of German machine guns.

Such was the Portuguese reality from 1914 to 1918. It was the same in Africa and in Europe, all that changed was the latitude. The problem was not the military, as they had proven their value and effectiveness abundantly in the pre-1910 African theatres. The problem was the interventionist policies of the Republican radicals, which had thoroughly destroyed the military institution.

#### **THE ELEVENTH MISTAKE - THE POLITICAL AND THE MILITARY ARE SEPARATE SPHERES**

The traditionalist Portuguese historiography would also have us believe that the political and the military existed in separate realities. That was never true. There was never an operation that was exclusively military because the final objectives were always defined by an essentially political strategy. Similarly, the forces committed depended on the political process that led to their generation with 'those' specific characteristics. A military force cannot be put together in months and is always the result of a long process. There may never have been a period in the History of Portugal when the political and the military were more closely connected than the Great War, as the two were inseparable and there is no way of knowing where one ended and the other began.

Certainly, the events that occurred were the responsibility of the interventionist politicians and not of the entire political body, as even the military were politicians. It was the interventionists who annihilated the military forces and afterwards established objectives far beyond their real capabilities. The notion that the Portuguese Armed Forces of 1914 could fight effectively on the Western Front was completely divorced from reality. We are not aware of a single document by an Allied or German soldier in Portugal who did not remark that the Portuguese Armed Forces were not prepared for modern warfare; if such a document exists,

we would like to have it brought to our attention<sup>30</sup>. We are, however, familiar with many documents by interventionist politicians and officers that state otherwise, but the ideological motives behind it are clear.

After establishing completely unrealistic objectives, the interventionist politicians constantly interfered with military operations, always with disastrous results. It was those same interventionist politicians and the incompetent officers they appointed (like Fernando Tamagnini) who, after the CEP was deployed to France, insisted it should remain an army corps and delayed its withdrawal to the rear. It was those same interventionist politicians who pressured the forces in Mozambique to invade the German colony, against the wishes of the military, who predicted it would end in disaster. It was also those same interventionist politicians who issued incoherent and contradictory orders to Alves Roçadas and who were the reason for the German victory in Naulila - the only campaign against the Germans conducted in Angola.

It was the same everywhere: interference in the military sphere at various levels by a divided, incompetent and unrealistic government who confused military art with ideological ambitions. The military were the main victims in this process, not the cause.

But there were further links between politics and the military. In fact, these were not even the crucial ones. The military operations of the Great War, precisely because they were essentially guided by disastrous interventionist policies, changed the face of Portuguese politics for at least the next half-century - another fact that the official History mentions only as a matter of little importance.

The military learned from the events of the Great War and organised in order to prevent history from repeating itself. First, they learned that it was necessary to create the basis for a more encompassing anti-war unity, different from that of the past. This led to the one-year government of Sidónio Pais, who was essentially put in office by the Army at the end of the war, riding a great wave of anti-war indignation. Second, they learned that any future situations of forced belligerency were to be avoided at any cost. It was not by accident that the great figures of the 28 May revolution had all served in the CEP at some point (Gomes da Costa, Sinel de Cordes, Alves Roçadas - who would have been the leader on 28 May, had he still been alive); it was not by accident that the staunchest advocates of the 28 May revolution were known as 'Sidónio's cadets', the most enthusiastic fighters of the December 1917 revolution. In both instances, the military implemented the lessons learned in the war about how the political and military spheres were interconnected. The interventionists confirmed the old adage - you reap what you sow, or better yet, a magician's apprentice should not attempt lofty magic tricks.

The interventionist managed extraordinary feats from a tactical perspective, such as persuading Great Britain to lie and to issue official document stating the exact opposite of

---

<sup>30</sup> We are obviously referring to documents expressing real opinions, that is, documents that had been sent confidentially up the chain of command. Public statements praising the Portuguese forces and their effectiveness are easy to find, but they remain just that: public statements, which always express the politically correct truth, not reality.

what it thought. It took some art for a small nation to do this to a great power, and one cannot but admire politicians such as Afonso Costa, João Chagas and Norton de Matos for their tactical ability. This allowed them to fool public opinion for some time and appease the non-interventionists, who became convinced that Great Britain really did want the Portuguese to participate in the war and the CEP to deploy to France - the official documents from London said as much!

But, as President Lincoln said, one can never fool everybody all the time. In the mid-term, the interventionists were digging their own grave, triggering a great wave of indignation that encompassed all sectors of society: the Church, the rural areas, the military, among many others. Worse, the success of the interventionists called into question not only the Portuguese stance in the war but also the future of democracy in Portugal. It would disappear for the next half century, mainly due to the colossal strategy mistakes made by the interventionists.

### **THE TWELFTH MISTAKE - THE NON-INTERVENTIONISTS WERE LEFT-WING RADICALS**

From 1914 to 1918, speaking of anti-war movements in Europe immediately evokes the image of the left-wing radical. This image is essentially true in a large part of Europe, where the radical left dominated the anti-war movement, whether it was the 1914 anarchists, the Russian Bolsheviks or the German or Hungarian social-democrats of 1918 (the social-democrats of the time were left-wing radicals).

However, another movement opposed the war in Europe, more discretely but with far greater importance. One example will suffice. A significant number of members of the British administration of August 1914 were against the British belligerency (they resigned after the declaration of war). One of the anti-war ministers was Lloyd George, the future British prime minister. This movement comprised all sorts, from liberal pacifists who believed nothing good would come of the war, to those who opposed the British belligerency out of cold, calculating logic, to those who believed (with some justification) that war would be the end of the 'European civilization' and should be avoided at all costs.

In Portugal, the words 'anti-war movement' mainly evoke the radical left. A collective work published recently purports to be a general summary of Portuguese, and even global belligerency, but devotes only one brief chapter to the anti-war movement, and describes it exclusively as far-left opposition essentially born out of anarchist syndicalism. In fact, there had been an active anarcho-syndicalist anti-war movement in Portugal since the beginning of the war, but it was feeble and did not have much bearing on the general movement.

What happened was (again) the result of government propaganda - that is, the official lie. The interventionist governments typically made two accusations to any anti-war movement that emerged: they were either German sympathisers and/or anarchists. It was an unimaginative way of pretending that only a small faction, one which had nothing to do with any 'serious' moderate force, could be against the war.

The truth was entirely different. There was a strong anti-war movement in Portugal, which seized power on two occasions, and we do not doubt that it expressed the general sentiment in the Nation and that it had little to do with the far-left. The Portuguese anti-war movement was essentially conservative and traditionalist, anti-radical (or anti-demagogue, in the words of its members). It mainly comprised the monarchic movement (overwhelmingly favourable to the Allies, although it did include a small group of German sympathisers), the rapidly expanding catholic movement, the moderate republicans (the Unionist Party, the friends of Machado Santos and the majority of Evolutionists) and part of the Socialist Party. Politically, only the majority of the Democratic Party and part of the Socialist Party were in favour of the war, that is, a small slice of the Portuguese political reality of the time. The anarcho-syndicalists were also fundamentally against the war, even though they represented a small stream in a very large river.

Mentally and socially, the Portuguese anti-war movement was the expression of a sentiment that was widespread: that Portugal had nothing to do with the war, that the country was not prepared for a conflict of that intensity, and that it would be better to maintain neutrality while cooperating with GB.

Finding a programme and a leadership capable of representing such a wide and diverse movement, which comprised individuals with very different sensitivities and mentalities, was the greatest problem faced by the anti-war movement. The movement may have represented the overwhelming majority of the Portuguese population, but it was also deeply divided and lacked organisation. The interventionist movement, on the other hand, was in the minority, but it was a cohesive movement that was able to rally around the leadership of the Democratic Party, backed by the electoral system, by a network of caciques and armed groups of civilians, as well as by some of the most ingenious politicians, who may have lacked strategic vision but had plenty of tactical sense.

The anti-war programme changed over time, making constant efforts to gain as wide a base of support as possible, and to find leaders that the population would accept. This unity was first expressed in late 1914, with President of the Republic Manuel de Arriaga and General Pimenta de Castro. This first iteration of the anti-war programme had two dimensions:

- a) An international dimension - to prevent forced belligerency and to stop the deployment of a division to France;
- b) An domestic dimension - to change the political system, giving monarchists and Catholics a voice in the elections by expanding the right to vote, which served to link part of the conservative world to a Republic that was, even then, Jacobin, radical and anti-democratic at its core - even for the time's narrow idea of democracy.

The May 1915 revolution put an end to the first anti-war experiment before the elections that had been scheduled for June.

Ironically, Pimenta de Castro's regime went down on official history as a 'dictatorship', even if its most important measures were to allow freedom of religion, to expand freedom of association and the right to vote, and to allow greater freedom of expression.

After May 1915, the anti-war movement faced its 'valley of death' period. This long period can be divided in two moments: before and after the Portuguese belligerency. In the period before the Portuguese involvement in the war, the interventionists masterfully force Portugal's entry into the war while giving the impression that the country was only doing so at the request of the centuries-old Ally, as we briefly explained above.

This impression was so real and so effective that the anti-war movement had its hands tied, because one of the key points of its programme was that all requests made on behalf of the Alliance must be complied with. This issue plagued the anti-war movement of the time, preventing it from presenting a united front: the interventionists were seemingly complying with the request made by Great Britain, but the reality was precisely the opposite. London was effectively muzzled, unable to set the record straight. Afonso Costa was correct when he stated in London that, should it become common knowledge that the Ally was against the Portuguese belligerency and against the deployment of troops to France, a large military movement to overthrow the government would arise in Portugal. The interventionists' main advantage was that this was not common knowledge, and that all appearances pointed to the contrary. The official lie was a crucial aspect of the policy's success.

With the entry into the war in March 1916, the anti-war movement faced an even more difficult dilemma. Like it or not, Portugal had entered the war, leading to the formation of a coalition government - the only government headed by a moderate republican, but still dominated by the Democratic Party's 'war team'. The Evolutionist Party was moderate and generally anti-war, but it was driven by the argument of national morale into accepting a coalition with the interventionists. However, António José de Almeida soon discovered that the anti-war sentiment was still strong and growing stronger every day, that the Democratic Party conducted the war policy as an independent government, without so much as informing him of major decisions, that the Evolutionist Party was increasingly isolated and that it was losing its fragile support base as the anti-war sentiment gained ground. António José de Almeida's main concern was finding a way to gracefully exit the coalition and climb out of the trap it had fallen into, which was destroying his party.

During that same year (between March 1916 and the spring of 1917), the Democratic Party masterfully conducted a hermetic war policy, thanks to the understanding between three of its ministers (Afonso Costa, Norton de Matos and Augusto Soares), who made decisions without consulting the President and carefully kept him unaware of the 'secret' of the war. The secret was that Great Britain did not want Portuguese forces in France. In spite of the lie, the constitution of the CEP was truly 'miraculous', the 'miracle of Tancos', as Norton de Matos proudly called it. One might imagine what could have happened should the Portuguese people been aware of Great Britain's real stance!

As the coalition disintegrated in April 1917, the interventionists were left to rule on their own. After seven months, they were extremely exhausted. This period was Portugal's

most difficult yet, as the country was being hit full force by the effects of the war. It was a period of desperate actions, and the general sentiment was that a great catastrophe had hit these lands of St. Mary, a country devastated by hunger, inflation and disease, where internal violence had reached its apex. But it was also the period when hope was renewed, particularly by the message of the miracle of Fátima (this one does not require quotation marks) in May - a message of regeneration, salvation through the return to traditional values and to the Holy Religion, and of the arrival of a Messiah...

The anti-war movement was growing exponentially, backed by a large coalition with a programme that was vague but effectively different from that of the past, as Portugal was now in the war and had troops in France - precisely what the anti-war movement had tried to prevent.

This resulted in the Sidónio Pais revolution in December 1917, which placed the anti-war movement in the government until the end of the war. The initial coalition was vast and encompassed almost all movements, from the anarcho-syndicalists of the UON to the integralists. What was different was that a new movement was beginning to emerge out of the traditional movements, one that can be described as Sidonist: it expressed the need to achieve a different kind of unity from that of the past, the need for a political reform of the State, for increased state intervention in caring for the poor, and the need to re-establish normal relations with the Church.

With regard to the war, the Sidonist policies were particularly difficult to enact, as the government had inherited the worst possible scenario. Portugal was not only in the war, it had deployed a large contingent to France that had no way of returning to Portugal, as Great Britain had withdrawn its ships in September 1917 (three months before the Sidonist revolution). Under those circumstances, the anti-war government could not overturn the decision and return to neutrality, nor bring the troops back from France. Officially, its programme stated that any commitments already made must be honoured and Great Britain must in turn respect their own commitments, specifically by returning the ships it had taken from the CEP.

The reality of this position was more complex and reflected the great dilemmas of the Sidonist government. The Lisbon administration had requested ships to send reinforcements and was willing to train the units to be deployed to France, but at the same time it was not displeased with the British refusal. It was also not displeased with the British insistence in withdrawing the Portuguese forces from the front line, but it did not want to do so without first putting up a façade of reluctance and official protest, so as not to leave itself open to criticism by the interventionists, who would claim that a 'patriotic effort' was being undone. Some reckless officers, like Fernando Tamagnini, made that façade easier to maintain by creating all kinds of obstacles in their efforts to hold on to their command. As a result, more time went by and the instructions to withdraw the CEP from the front line, which had been issued by Great Britain in January 1918, were only complied with in April.

To conclude, the anti-war movement was not composed of 'left-wing radicals'. It was composed mainly of conservatives and traditionalists. They were the overwhelming majority of

the Portuguese, who opposed the war and republican radicalism, who wished to prevent a national catastrophe, and who were friends of Great Britain and France.

### **THE THIRTEENTH MISTAKE - THE MILITARY WERE TO BLAME**

In 1919, the interventionists rose again to power and reformed the 'new old Republic'. After 1919, the old gentleman's agreement on the war of the Sidonist period was consolidated and deepened. It can be summarised as follows: the belligerency was not a matter up for debate and was never called into question; everything was presented as a great patriotic effort conducted for the benefit of the nation. This gentleman's agreement had an obvious weak spot: if everything had been a national effort and if the performance of the military had been poor, then the military were to blame. The reality was that this profound national divide, deepened by a policy of forced belligerency driven by partisan interests which was mainly opposed by the Army officers, was covered up and silenced, which meant that the military were blamed for their poor performance.

For this smokescreen to be effective, two ideas had to be introduced into the semi-official historiography: the political and the military were separate and independent spheres; the events at home were entirely unrelated to the military operations abroad. If one accepts these theories, then the Portuguese belligerency was confined to the strictly military events abroad, without any political or internal interference. Should one accept this monstrous theory, it would mean there was only one culprit for the disaster: the military, specifically the officer corps. This immediately took the guilt off the shoulders of the interventionist politicians, who had cautiously issued an official story which refuted any involvement on their part.

No historians - not any we know of, in any case - accepted this theory of a complete separation and attempted to explain the events abroad without ever referring to those at home. But most did fall into the trap laid by the official version and sought to understand the events in France or Mozambique without understanding their connection to the policy and to the domestic front - several of them even deny a 'domestic front' even existed.

### **WHAT NOW?**

The Portuguese participation in the war was a complex, badly understood phenomenon. The traditionalist version put forward by the main historians depicts it as a national effort which the military countered, a conflict between the politicians and the military. The reality is far more complex: Portugal had been in a state of intermittent civil war since 1908, which the world war amplified and altered. It was a deep schism in Portuguese society, one that created a divide that affected both the politicians and the military. Most institutions were divided around the issue of belligerency, and those schisms ran deep. Over

the next 60 years, until 1974, Portugal would be marked by this divide, as well as by the civil war. Most importantly, the interventionist policy of forcing a participation in the war resulted in the end of democracy in Portugal for the next half-century. The core of the 28 May movement was formed during the final part of the conflict, in the Flanders, under the leadership of Garcia Rosado, who gathered around himself a group that included Sinel de Cordes, Gomes da Costa, Ivens Ferraz and Alves Roçadas, the main leaders of the 28 May coup.

It remains to be seen whether, one hundred years past, a History of the Portuguese belligerency can now be constructed, one that explains events and reveals the truth behind the smokescreen, one that sees through the official lies and the twisted facts of the official history - which should not exist in democracy, but...

There are no straight and sure answers, especially as the smokescreen of a policy of lies and delusion still endures for a reason, and today, just as in 1914, democracy is also undergoing a process of renewal and rebirth, a constantly changing reality which keeps pace with societal change. Just as in 1914, if lying, censorship and smokescreens prevail, it may well result in the end of democracy for a relatively long time. If, on the contrary, freedom, tolerance, and the acceptance of difference and logical reasoning prevail, then it may result in the renewal of democracy. Today, as in 1914, the future remains uncertain.

### Works cited

Afonso, Aniceto e Matos, Gomes (coord.) – Portugal e a Grande Guerra, Quidnovi, Lisboa, 2010.

Costa, Gomes da – A Batalha do Lys, Porto, 1920

Costa, Gomes da – A Batalha do Lys, Porto, 1925

Martins, Ferreira – Portugal na Grande Guerra, 2 vols., Lisboa, 1934 e 1936.

Tamagnini, Fernando – Os Meus Três Comandos (org. Isabel Pestana Marques), Fundação Seixas, Viseu, 2004.

Teixeira, Nuno Severiano – O Poder e a Guerra, Lisboa, Editorial Estampa, 1996.

Telo, António José – Primeira República, 2 vols., Lisboa, Editorial Presença, 2009 e 2011.

Telo, António José – Os Açores e o Controlo do Atlântico, Porto, Asa, 1993.