Interventi/ Remarks

Riceviamo, e con piacere pubblichiamo, un intervento del politologo Thomas Gallagher, professore emerito presso l'University of Bradford (GB), in risposta all'articolo di Yves Léonard, *Autoritarisme ou fascisme? Une* Historikerstreit *portugaise sur la nature du Salazarisme* pubblicato nel n. 2, 2020 di «Storia e Politica» (pp. 207-223).

La direzione e la redazione della rivista sono liete che «Storia e Politica» possa affermarsi sempre di più come luogo di discussione e di dibattito tra studiosi delle discipline storico-politiche.

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THOMAS GALLAGHER

FASCIST GHOSTS DISTURB PORTUGAL (A REPLY TO YVES LÉONARD)[1]

Without the emergence of a new political force on the conservative wing of Portuguese politics, it is difficult to see the point in Yves Léonard's essay on the literature of Salazarism. Even although the Portuguese Constitution of 1976 outlaws any party with a fascist profile, he shows little hesitation in depicting the Chega party as an extremist phenomenon. He fears that the outspoken rhetoric of its leader André Ventura on certain subjects might promote nostalgia for the authoritarian *Estado Novo* (New State) regime that ruled Portugal from 1933 to 1974.

He thus feels the need to bring back into the academic limelight published studies about that regime which focus on its relationship with fascism. Much of the material that he refers to is at least decade or more old. He was perhaps unfortunate in his timing because the essay was completed (it would seem around mid-2020) shortly before a spurt of new publications have appeared. These include three books by José António Saraiva, my own biography of António de Oliveira Salazar, the architect of the regime, a comparison of Salazar with two redoubtable adversaries Mário Soares and Álvaro Cunhal, and a book-length interview with the

[1] See Léonard (2020: 207-223).

late Portuguese historian Vasco Pulido Valente which explored the various political systems in place in Portugal from 1910 onwards.

This contrarian, perhaps the best known Portuguese historian (until his death in February 2020) due to the frequency of his media appearances, dismissed the idea of Salazar being a fascist. He saw him as a figure governed by rules who recoiled from radical experiments or political ruptures. His attachment to Christianity meant that it was a traditional autocratic regime that he preferred to set up (Céu 2021: 139-40).

The prolific historian Fernando Rosas, a former leader of the Left Bloc (Bloco Esquarda: BE) party which today has 19 seats in parliament, has a different argument. A 2020 study of his in which he tries to show that the years 1936-1945 witnesessed an intense fascistisation' is referred to by Leonard (Rosas 2020).

He bases his evidence on the creation of a paramilitary movement the Portuguese Legion and a youth movement, the Mocidade Portuguesa, both formed in 1936. But as a recent biography of a veteran figure of the regime Pedro Theotónio Pereira shows, the Legion quickly fell under the control of the military and the Mocidade evolved into a Boy Scouts movement with a Christian formation, especially after Salazar's eventual successor, Marcello Caetano was placed in charge of it (Martins 2020: 363, 420-421).

Drawing upon Rosas, Léonard highlights four features which he believes underpinned the character of the regime: control of the armed forces; close ties with the Catholic Church, the corporative system's presence in the economy and society, and 'the totalitarian investment in the creation of a Salazarist "new man." But there are frequent examples of the army and the church checking any trend towards fascistisation, the corporative structures were arguably an arena for careerism rather than ideology, and Salazar was loathe to create a class of capable men whose role was to direct society (as shown by his neglect of the universities).

The 997 page 'História de Portugal' coordinated by Ruí Ramos (listed in the bibliography but only briefly referred to in the body of the text) made the case for the regime being despotic but far from fascist in either theory or practice (Ramos 2009) .The multivolume 'História de Portugal' of Joaquim Veríssimo Serrão, devoted six volumes of the mammoth enterprise to the 1926-68 peri-

od. It went to some pains to absolve the regime of some of the worst charges laid against it, albeit not always in a coherent manner. But it did find evidence to refute the 'fascist' claim, showing the degree of influence exercised by moderates such as the justice minister Manuel Rodrigues and the minister of public works Duarte Pacheco in the late 1930s (Serrão 2008: 498-502, 531-548). Serrão also challenged the view that there were any pro-Axis figures close to Salazar during the Second World War (ivi: 492-493).

But irrespective of certain shortcomings to be found in this historical *oeuvre*, it is a richly detailed documentary source on aspects of the regime, one that is overlooked in this essay; more curious is the absence of any reference to Riccardo Marchi's 2015 book, *The Portuguese Far-Right: between Late Authoritarianism and Democracy (1945-2015*). What emerges from it is how peripheral far-right ideologues were to the regime even when the colonial wars of the 1960s, led to its nationalist character being reinforced.

Arriving in Portugal in 1941 for what would extend into a four year stay, the Romanian philosopher Mircea Eliade, previously close to the Iron Guard movement at home, was soon disappointed by 'the absence 'in Portugal 'of vehemence of any kind' (Eliade 2010: 239).

After narrowly avoiding assassination in July 1937, Salazar disappointed those who hoped for a radicalisation of his regime. Addressing military officers on 6 July, he declared:

'You know that this regime, one that is still called Dictatorship today, and now even branded with the fascist label, is really a mild one just like our customs, modest as is the way of the nation, friend of work and of the people' (Salazar 2015: 303).

Perhaps the chief hallmark of the Estado Novo was its anti-political character. Salazar was hostile to all parties, including a conspicuous and powerful single party of the right. He shrank from mobilising the populace and cracked down primarily on communists rather than opposition in general.

An Italian Fascist party visitor observing Portuguese conditions noted in 1934 that the regime left people alone to lead their own lives and did not compel them to 'participate in the life of the state' (Ramos 2009).

It was a far less onerous task to dissolve the institutions the Estado Novo and their influence than the authoritarian regimes

of Italy, Germany or Japan. Afterwards, the biggest danger to an infant Portuguese democracy arguably emanated not from the political Right but from a civil-military alliance on the radical left which tried and failed, in 1975, to impose Third-World style revolutionary socialism on Portugal.

If any single individual embodied this utopian fervour it was the flamboyant and polarising officer Otelo de Carvalho who died on 25 July 2021, aged 84. He received eulogies from the left, including from senior figures in the ruling Socialist Party which had fiercely opposed his authoritarian plans for Portugal after 1974 (Gomes 2021).

Carvalho's prominent role in masterminding the coup which dislodged the enfeebled authoritarian regime was seen as worthy of respect across much of the political spectrum. It is likely that he would have received a state funeral but for the fact that he went on to lead a far-left terrorist grouping, FP-25 whose spree of violence in the 1980s left eighteen people dead (Poças 2021).

After being sentenced to fifteen years in prison in 1985, he and his jailed accomplices were amnestied by the left-wing government of António Guterres in 1995. He was the beneficiary of a government enjoying the parliamentary backing of the far-left. It is a similar alliance which today has been to the fore in highlighting the political danger posed by Chega and its leader André Ventura. Prominent figures such as the speaker of parliament Ferro Rodrigues and the mayor of Lisbon, Fernando Martins have urged that Chega be treated as a danger to democracy (Lopes 2021).

In his article Yves Leonard has amplified the charges made against Ventura, namely that he is a racist and admirer of Salazar and his regime. He asserts that there is 'no mystery' about him possessing such nostalgia. Ventura, for his part, has swatted away the charge, stating that unlike Salazar he is keen on economic development and firmly believes in elections and freedom of speech. But, he says, 'I hope to end my days like him—poor and incorruptible (Lusa 2020). 'We need to leave behind the ghosts of the past,' he insists, and it seems that growing numbers are prepared to take him at face value (with the party regularly receiving between five and ten per cent opinion polls). *Chega*'s stronghold is not in the once deeply pious rural north that produced the austere Salazar. It is in Lisbon and the south long

known for its anti-clericalism, which was in 1975 the epicenter of the revolution.

Ventura is a demagogue but the grounds for classifying him as a racist are not watertight. He has gone to particular lengths to insist that Portuguese of African descent are part of the national family in a country where racial inter-marriage has been the norm for centuries. In 2020, he organized a series of demonstrations on the theme that 'Portugal is not racist.' [2]

However, in 2020 he was fined over €400 by Portugal's Commission for Equality and Against Racial Discrimination for claiming that the country's Gypsy community was dependent on state subsidies and had no interest in integration. He has warned that Portugal is creating future problems with other growing minorities by adopting a relaxed approach to theft and a permissive approach to customs that violate the law (Henriques 2020).

Much of Yves Léonard's academic work on Portugal has been that of a balanced historian clearly on the political left. But in this article he does not hide his affinity with the view prevalent on much of the Portuguese left that Chega is a danger to democracy. Before presidential elections held in January 2021 in which Ventura obtained nearly 12 per cent of the vote, there were calls to outlaw Chega from the mayor of Lisbon Fernando Martins and other leading Socialists (Medina 2020).

The historian Ruí Ramos has suggested that the only grounds political rivals have for outlawing Chega arises from a difference of opinion about what issues governments should prioritise. He made an analogy with the clamour in France forty years ago to ban the French Communist Party which was loyal to a foreign state posing a threat to France and wedded to the dictatorship of the proletariat. He quoted the French academic Cornelius Castoriadis who, writing in 1981, argued that 'by banning the PCF, the government would have to arrest, watch over, and restrict the rights of so many people that France would cease to be a democracy' (Ramos 2020b).

Perhaps a vocal segment of the left has become shrill in condemnation of what it sees as a dangerous upstart because it now finds itself in a paradoxical position. The far-left's two major components, the Left Bloc (*Bloco Esquerda*: BE) and the Portu-

[2] 'Chega manifestou-se em Lisboa para dizer que "Portugal não é racista"', *Observador*, 2 August 2020, https://observador.pt/2020/08/02/chega-manifestou-se-em-lisboa-para-dizer-que-portugal-nao-e-racista/

guese Communist Party (PCP) are electorally static. They only obtained just over 8 per cent of the vote in total in the 2021 presidential election. Current polls (summer 2021) suggest that Chega will overtake both of them in the next parliamentary election.

Nevertheless, without any prospects of growth, the far-left enjoys unparalleled influence. Its votes have sustained the Socialist government for much of the period since its return to office in 2015. Not since the dramatic months of 1975 has the far-left enjoyed any influence over public policy decisions. The two wings of the Portuguese Left, the Marxist and Social Democratic, now find far more to agree on than in the era of Mário Soares, the Socialist leader who played a pivotal role in ensuring the survival of democracy in 1975 and its later consolidation. In particular, they agree on the need for a state-dominated economy, one requiring high levels of taxation. Rates of growth have been low before and after the economic crisis of 2010 which led the European Commission to impose a tough austerity policy for some years. Among those who belong outside the groups which benefit from big state policies, there is palpable anger about what is seen as chronic misgovernment. In the 2019 parliamentary election, the abstention rate for the first time rose above 50 percent (In the first post-authoritarian election in 1975, turnout was over 90 per cent). It is Chega and the existing parties on the centre-right which have been most adept at harnessing this discontent.

Unless Ventura goes too far in his rhetorical fervour, the left may well fear that Chega will turn out a more formidable opponent than longstanding centre-right parties which have accepted most of the progressive ground rules for politics established in the mid-1970s. Acting aggressively against a dangerous interloper reinforces bonds on the left. These have been frayed by divergences over austerity policies and the government's poor handling of the Covid crisis. In much of Europe, anti-fascism, rather than economic redistribution, is emerging as one of the chief rallying-cries for nearly all wings of the left as identity issues rather than economics define its twenty-first century character.

The historian Ruí Ramos is among those who argue that the sway the ruling Socialists now enjoy in the justice system, the banks, the media, and even the private economy means that they are prone to hubris by branding opinions that they dislike as a threat to liberty (Ramos 2021a). Stigmatising Chega renders a substitution in office very difficult and could entrench the Social-

ists in government despite their poor handling of the economy. Chega seems poised to obtain as much as ten per cent of the vote in the next parliamentary election and, in combination with other non-socialist parties, could oust the socialists. But if the left's bid to make the party untouchable succeeds, then politics becomes blocked, renewal is impossible, and one party's retention of power bears no relation to the way it discharges its governing duties.

In spring 2021, when the Movement for Europe and Liberty think tank (MEL) included Ventura in the speakers line-up for a conference on the future of Portugal, Socialist figures with Francisco Louça, former leader of the Left Bloc to the fore, expressed outrage (Ramos 2021b). Nuno Palma, the historian organizing the event was accused of harbouring nostalgia for the Estado Novo. He described as regrettable the emergence of this regime but stated on twitter (on 28 May 2021) that 'The *Estado Novo* was not Fascist. There is wide agreement among serious historians about it: Salazar was a social conservative dictator.'

The University of Manchester where he was a professor of economic history, was contacted by some of his critics who demanded that he be dismissed (Tavares 2021). (Soon after, the relationship of Portuguese politician with contemporary authoritarianism generated fresh polemics when it emerged that Lisbon's mayor, Fernando Martins had handed to the Russian embassy in Portugal, the contact details of Russian exiles who had organized a protest in January 2021 on behalf of the Russian dissident Alexey Navalny; an act which he later apologised for) (Dantas 2021).

Nostalgia for the Estado Novo regime exists for various motives and is likely to persist at a low level. But calls for the restoration of the regime are almost non-existent and are likely to remain so. Nevertheless, attempts by office holders to exploit past history for contemporary political advantage look likely to increase.

It is surprising that the unhealthy precedent of the ill-fated parliamentary republic of 1910-26 is not taken more into account as polarisation in Portugal starts to increase. The refusal of the Democratic Party to allow its ineffectual but often arbitrary rule to be challenged by competitors has some relevance to the present. Arguably, one of the main reasons why this regime collapsed in 1926 was due to the intense partisanship of this party and its determination to monopolise power. It sought to create a

party-state which catered for the interests of its own clientele and left the rest of the country to fend for itself (Wheeler 1978).

Perhaps mindful of history, those who proclaim their anti-fascism while exercising sway over the machinery of state and extending it to civic bodies, need to use this political tactic with restraint. I think it may be shortsighted of Yves Léonard to underscore the idea of a fascist revival when the evidence for such a danger is currently meagre while those promoting it have no hesitation of hailing authoritarian figures like the flawed liberator Otelo de Carvalho as heroes. Soon, the centenary of the fascist takeover of Italy will have arrived. Perhaps the temptation may be too great to resist for many on the political left far beyond Portugal itself to use it as a template to argue that the authoritarian peril remains a real one in Europe.

The absorption with fascism occurs following years of recession in much of Europe during which the political left has been increasingly silent on economic issues. No new economic ideas have emerged that have been popularised by Euro-socialists. Instead, promoting new identities often based around minorities of different sorts preoccupies left-wing aspirants for power. The new politics of multi-culturalism has often been driven by the need to promote conformity on a range of different issues based around race, gender and sexuality. Some argue that democratic liberties may not survive intact as these new ideological battles intensify. Portugal remains quite homogeneous in European political terms but it already has seen a demand for restrictions of what opinions can be uttered in the public square. In mid-2020, when the political scientist Riccardo Marchi published a profile of Chega which characterised the party as a national conservative force rather than as a neo-fascist one, 67 Portuguese academics publicly issued a letter of condemnation (Ramos 2020a). The book neither sought to be an apology for Chega nor a vilification of the party but a detached account which confessed the party was an anti-system one that was far from easy to define (Marchi 2020).

Portugal's relatively recent experience of undemocratic rule has produced acute sensitivity about what are the limits on freedom of speech, assembly and association. There are those who are sensitive to the state clamping down on liberties and others who feel censorship and prohibitions may be necessary to safeguard existing liberties. Such viewpoints will be hard to reconcile especially as the country emerges from a Covid pandemic where

the state is widely seen as having performed poorly and further economic adversity looms without any likely prospect of political change.

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THOMAS GALLAGHER
University of Bradford, Great Britain
School of social Sciences
t.g.gallagher@bradford.ac.uk

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