

Parties and Political Identity: the Construction of the Party System of the Portuguese Republic (1910-1926)¹

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Abstract

The revolution of 5 October 1910, brought a political change in the form of a republican parliamentary regime, which required another kind of party system. Out of the fragmentation of the historical Portuguese Republican Party, in 1911-1912 there emerged a new structure of parties and political groups. During the First World War, the party system evolved in a relatively normal manner, but after 1919 it changed completely, with a series of dissidences, splits, and mergers. Throughout the First Portuguese Republic, the Portuguese Republican Party (the “Democratic Party”), which was reformed in 1911-1912, asserted its political leadership, with the great exception of the period of the republican presidential regime of Sidónio Pais.

Keywords

Contemporary History, Republicanism, First Portuguese Republic, Political Parties, Political Programs.

Resumo

A revolução de 5 de Outubro de 1910 originou uma alteração política sob a forma de um regime parlamentar republicano que exigia um diferente sistema de partidos políticos. Da fragmentação do histórico Partido Republicano Português em 1911-1912, emergiu uma nova estrutura de partidos e grupos políticos. Durante a I Guerra Mundial, assistiu-se à evolução do sistema de partidos mas, após 1919, esta situação altera-se profundamente com uma série de dissidências, cisões e fusões. Ao longo da Primeira República Portuguesa, o partido Republicano Português (o "Partido Democrático"), reformado em 1911-1912, afirma a sua liderança política, com excepção para o período do regime republicano presidencial de Sidónio Pais.

Palavras-chave

História Contemporânea, Republicanismo, Primeira República Portuguesa, Partidos Políticos, Programas Políticos.

¹ This article is an abridged version of the text used for the class given by the author in order to obtain the academic title of *Professor Agregado* in History (Contemporary History) at the Faculty of Letters of Lisbon University on 12 September 2008. A more in-depth and critical approach to the anthology of the republican political programs is made in the book *Partidos e Programas. O campo partidário republicano português (1910-1926)*. Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2008.

Problematics

This text discusses the party system of the Portuguese republic between 1910 and 1926, seeking to analyze the relationship between *parties and political identity* within the diversified political field of republicanism (Rémond, 1996: 49-85). It begins with initial analysis (monographic studies) and synthesis (panoramic studies). After this, it proceeds to a comparative perspective, looking at the relationship parties, power and public opinion, considering the characteristics of party leadership, the leader's forms of administration, and the communication between the leadership and its supporters or the oligarchic and democratic tendencies of the organization.

The different republican political parties and groups formed *multiple political identities*, without presenting any intense differentiation between them because they formed part of the historical republican heritage. They were, however, involved in permanent and important debates about questions relating to their respective contents—positivism and metaphysics, federalism and unitarianism, presidentialism and parliamentarianism, decentralization and centralization, popular supremacy and national supremacy, or radicalism and reformism (Catroga, 2000; Homem, 2001). They all remained committed to a common ideal centered around the republicanization of the State and of society.

The party system of the Portuguese republic did not always show *political parties* engaged in their two basic functions—acting either as mobilizing “agents of conflict” or as movements of “social integration,” and thus allowing for “the strengthening of national identities” through a “network of inter-local communication” and helping to “establish the national government system *above* any group of people that held high positions” (Lipset, 1992: 164-170). One of the reasons why stable political competition and the construction of a consensual National State came to an end was the excessive *intra-party factionalism* that was primarily due to a nepotistic network of patronage rather than to any form of competitive ideology, despite the existence of several doctrinal currents in the republican political culture. Such circumstances did not favor the stability that would lead to the formation of a representative regime of institutions, with events becoming more serious after 1919 and leading to the irreversible illegitimization of the system (Lopes, 1994; Valente, 1997, 1999; Martins, 1998: 69-98)

Dismantling the historical Portuguese Republican Party

The debate that took place in the National Assembly between June and August 1911 highlighted the diversity of the republican ideology, despite the fact that the *Portuguese Republican Party Program*, approved on 11 January 1891 and still valid in 1910-1911, had stipulated a political orientation based on a federal and municipal republic, legitimated by direct universal suffrage, without any reference to a President of the Republic. The model for such a system was the political regime of the Swiss Confederation.

On the contrary, however, the 1911 Constitution established a unitarian republic, based on a parliamentary system, in which the Congress of the Republic would have supremacy and the President would be elected without having the privilege to dissolve Parliament, and on non-universal direct suffrage, maintaining the non-centralized option for the municipal and colonial administration, the principles of political and economic democracy, the laicization of the State, and the secularization of society (Catroga, 2000).

The question of the presidential right to dissolve Parliament, considered fundamental under the system of parliamentary government, united the moderate democratic liberal republican parties (the Republican Evolutionist Party and the Republican Union), a principle that would be validated through Law Nr. 891, of 22 September 1919, despite its being limited by the need for a prior consultation of the Parliamentary Committee. This was also used as a censorious argument against the radical republicans of federalist tendencies: “The representatives [...] avoided, with less knowledge, the adoption of the principle of the dissolution of the Chambers, essential to a parliamentary regime, because much was said against its application in the time of the monarchy, offering us a political *mess* that men's unscrupulousness made even worse.” (Santos, 1916: 5).

The ideological revision of federalism was supported by the executive committee of the Portuguese Republican Party and accepted by the vast majority of its members, who defended a form of *republican liberal unitarianism*, with Jacobin tendencies. This led to a controversy that had at its centre, after 1911, several radical political groups who defended a form of *republican socialist federalism* with democratic tendencies (Leal, 2006). The decisive moment for the rupture between the *political factions* inside the Portuguese Republican Party was the election of the first President of the Republic, Manuel de Arriaga, on 24 August 1911, supported by António José de Almeida, Manuel de Brito Camacho and António Machado Santos—the Block—against the candidate Bernardino Machado, who was supported by Afonso Costa.

On 1 September 1911, the Democratic Parliamentary Group was formed, loyal to Afonso Costa, and three days later an extensive program was approved for the new Portuguese Republican Party (the “Democratic Party”). The parliamentary convergence of the Block evolved, during the months of September and October 1911, already without the support of António Machado Santos, into a *parliamentary alliance* (the Republican National Union) and the program was approved on 20 December 1911. Radical and federalist republicanism continued to play a leading role until 27 April 1913, when some radicals tried to instigate a military and civilian rebellion to bring down the government of Afonso Costa with the support of the Republican Union through the pressure of three small political groups: the National Alliance of António Machado Santos, the Republican Integrity of João Bonança, and the Portuguese Radical Republican Party of Adrião Castanheira, Luís Soares and Henrique de Sousa Guerra.

Structuring the Party System of the Portuguese Republic

Between September 1911 and February 1912, the bases were laid down for the creation of the first three constitutional republican parties: the new Portuguese Republican Party, of Afonso Costa, which continued to exist until the end of the republican regime; the Republican Evolutionist Party, of António José de Almeida; and the Republican Union, of Manuel de Brito Camacho, extinguished in September 1919, which lay at the origin of the Liberal Republican Party. The Congress in Braga in April 1912 approved the new program of the Portuguese Republican Party (the “Democratic Party”), a document that remained unchanged until the Military Dictatorship of 1926. Inheriting much of the organizational machine of the historical republican social-political networks, as well as including in its membership important people of note from monarchical social-political networks, this party was the most important *Government Party*, possessing almost all the functional monopoly of the political system (Martins, 1998: 78-80).

On 15 February 1912, in the Chamber of Deputies, António José de Almeida and Manuel de Brito Camacho restated that the Republican National Union was not the result of a merger of the two *political factions* but only a *parliamentary alliance*. António José de Almeida temporarily accepted the program of the Republican National Union, which belonged to the group of Manuel de Brito Camacho. Thus, all the necessary elements were in place for the creation of a new party constitution: on 24 February the Republican Evolutionist Party was founded, while on 26 February, the Republican Union announced its appearance. In this moderate democratic liberal area, the Evolutionist Republican Party was the leading political force and its parliamentary representation was far removed from that of the Portuguese Republican Party (the “Democratic Party”). It enjoyed some predominance over the Republican Union, at the representative level, for the party had won a few more senators.

The First World War was a period of cultural, ideological and political transformation, in which the modernist proposal of the *Orpheu* magazine should be contextualized, showing a new generation that oscillated between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, with some of its supporters, like Fernando Pessoa or António Ferro, being seduced by the idea of presidentialism (Leal, 1994; Cabral, 2000: 181-211). The debate about the Portuguese participation in the European war took place throughout all political spheres, with several breaches of party positions, until the declaration of war by the German Empire on Portugal in March 1916 (Fraga, 1990; Teixeira, 1996; Afonso & Gomes, 2003). The

monarchists reappeared, having been banned after the revolution—Lusitanian Integralism (1914), the Legitimist Party (1915) and the Monarchic Cause (1915)—and the Catholics created the Portuguese Catholic Center (1917). At the same time, two patriotic leagues of traditionalist and conservative origins were founded, in which both republicans and monarchists joined together—the National League (1915-1918) and the Dom Nuno Álvares Pereira National Crusade (1918-1938) (Leal, 1999).

Radical republican ideas were espoused by the Machado Santos group and its social-political network of support was reborn in January 1914 through the Reformist Center, but the arrest of the leader during the revolution of 14 May 1915, due to the support that he had given to the dictatorial government of General Joaquim Pimenta de Castro, and the prohibition of his newspaper *O Intransigente*, on 13 May 1915, led to the group's extinction, although it maintained an informal network of contacts. The criticism by some members of the Evolutionist Republican Party of the coalition formed with the Portuguese Republican Party in order to create the "Sacred Union" Government (Meneses, 2000), and this led to the formation of a *political faction*, led by António Egas Moniz. At the end of 1917, this led to the formation of the small Centrist Republican Party, whose program was approved on October 20 of the same year.

The legitimization of the "New Republic" called for the creation of a new party to organize the government candidacies for the parliamentary elections of 28 April 1918, and so the National Republican Party was founded. Its membership included most of the leaders of the Centrist Republican Party and it adopted many of its structures, while also integrating sectors of the new political elite that supported the presidentialist proposals of Sidónio Pais (Silva, 2006). The leaders of this new party did not have either the time or sufficient consensus to give the party an appropriate organic structure or to establish its social roots. What should have been the party's main functions—the legitimizing function of creating political consensus, the constituent function, the institutional implementation of the regime, and the mobilizing function of mass civic activism—were replaced by the charismatic and populist leadership of Sidónio Pais and the predominance of the government and public administration over both politics and party. Sidónio Pais toured the country to gain support, following a dangerous messianic path and drifting towards dictatorship, justifying his actions through *theories of order* that also derived from the thought of Auguste Comte (Cunha, 2006: 359-397).

Basically, the problem of the party was related to the indecision about the appropriate political system to be adopted by the new Presidentialist Republic: should it be a limited system of party competition (with a preference for the alternation of two party blocks), a limited single-party system (allowing for a mitigated pluralism of an authoritarian nature) or a closed single-party system (with one totalitarian ruling party)? Everything suggests that Sidónio Pais and his closest circle of advisers at least rejected the last of these proposals, simulating, sometimes, a form of Plebiscitary Bonapartist Caesarism. Note the statement made by Sidónio Pais on 29 July 1918: "Contrary to what many people think, the National Republican Party is not at the moment the only government party. It is true that the National Republican Party accompanies and supports the government in its highly national and patriotic politics. However, the government does not depend on it, just as it does not depend on any other party, because it cannot do without the dedication and support of the people and feels that it has to search for true support in the feelings and in the almost unanimous opinion of the Portuguese people [...]" (Carvalho, 1924: 75-76).

However, the last version of the constitutional project of December 1918, revised by Sidónio, established a democratic, presidentialist government system with two chambers (the political chamber and the corporative chamber) (Silva, 2006, v. 2: 401-413).

Restructuring of the System of Republican Parties

The presidentialist political project did not come to an immediate end and many famous people linked to the National Republican Party who had not become involved in it at the beginning of 1919 promoted its regrouping around new political groups—the Conservative Republican Party, the National Republican Presidentialist Party, the Dr.

Sidónio Pais Republican Center, and the Nationalist Action/Lusitanian Nationalist Center. The presidentialist supporters of the “New Republic” kept alive the elevated memory of Sidónio Pais and continued the debate about authoritarian correction or the complete suppression of republican parliamentarianism, with the last of these political groups exhibiting a messianic and “philo-fascist” dictatorial discourse (Pinto, 1989; Medina, 1994; Leal, 1999).

After the re-establishment of the republican parliamentary regime, the process began that would lead to the first moderate democratic and liberal merger that involved almost every member of the Evolutionist Republican Party, the Republican Union and the Centrist Republican Party. In September 1919, this gave rise to the Republican Liberal Party, in which António Granjo stood out as the leading figure. This merger was opposed by a *political faction* of the extinguished Evolutionist Party, led by Júlio Martins, who created the Popular Republican Party in May 1920. The Republican Liberal Party was active from October 1919 until February 1923, when it merged with the National Reconstitution Republican Party (which had split from the Portuguese Republican Party in 1920). They wished to create a political alternative to the Portuguese Republican Party (the “Democratic Party”), but they only governed the country autonomously for about 5 months in 1921 through the governments of Tomé de Barros Queirós and António Granjo, who was murdered on the *bloody night* of 19 October 1921. They won the parliamentary elections on 10 July 1921 with a relative majority.

The second moderate democratic and liberal merger took place in February 1923 between the Liberal Republican Party and the National Reconstitution Republican Party, resulting in the formation of the Republican Nationalist Party (Farinha, 2003). This party suffered two splits: one, in December 1923, with a group led by Álvaro de Castro remaining as a parliamentary party (Parliamentary Group of Republican Action); and another, in March 1926, with a group led by Francisco Cunha Leal, which became formalized as a party called the Liberal Republican Union. This new proposal for an alternative government to that of the Portuguese Republican Party (the “Democratic Party”) did not obtain a majority in the parliamentary elections of 8 November 1925. They only formed a government for one month in 1923, under the presidency of António Ginestal Machado, with perhaps the most significant fact being the presence in this government of General Oscar Carmona, the future President of the Republic in the “New State” as Minister of War. In 1925, members of the Presidentialist National Republican Party joined this party, a process that was followed by the extinction of that smaller party.

From October 1920 to July 1921, the radical political group led by Machado Santos again tried to structure itself around a new National Republican Federation. The group was dissolved after the assassination of its leader on the *bloody night* of 19 October 1921. In this political area, the most consistent proposal was that of the Radical Republican Party, between 1923 and 1926. In that party, under the initial leadership of José Pinto de Macedo, there coexisted a strong unitarian non-centralizing current and a strong decentralizing federalist current. Not even the motivation that came from France, with Édouard Herriot, the president of the French Radical Party, being appointed Prime Minister in 1924-1925, could prevent the radicals from experiencing a troubled and factionalist existence, not gaining enough votes to obtain a place in government and being torn apart by the dispute between constitutionalists and revolutionists.

The Portuguese Republican Party (the “Democratic Party”) suffered two important splits. The breakaway factions started out by being parliamentary groups, which was consistent with the usual dissident process to be found in organizations that enjoyed the powerful influence of prominent representatives and local dignitaries (Weber, 1973: 86-90; Duverger, 1974). These dissident factions were later transformed into political parties with a national social-political network. The first split occurred in March 1920 with the formation of the National Reconstitution Republican Party, which, after June 1920, was led by Álvaro de Castro (Silva, 1996). This party was dissolved in February 1923 when it merged with the Liberal Republican Party. The second split took place in July 1925 with the formation of the Parliamentary Group of the Democratic Left. In April 1926, this group promoted the

formation of the Democratic Left Republican Party, led by José Domingues dos Santos (Queirós, 2008).

Conclusion

In the *first phase of the First Portuguese Republic* (1910-1917), we observed a stability centered around the three constitutional republican parties—the Portuguese Republican Party (the “Democratic Party”), the Evolutionist Republican Party, and the Republican Union—and an instability in the radical republican groups, even in the segment that had more supporters and was led by Machado Santos (the National Alliance and Reformist Center).

The *second phase of the First Portuguese Republic* (1918) revealed a proto-party organization based upon the idea of presidentialist republicanism (the National Republican Party), which arose from a split in the Evolutionist Republican Party at the end of 1917 (the Centrist Republican Party) and would later survive only in the form of small political groups. The most significant of these groups (the Presidentialist Republican National Party) joined the Nationalist Republican Party in 1925.

During the *third phase of the First Portuguese Republic* (1919-1926), an instability developed inside the constitutional republican parties, with a series of dissidences, splits, and mergers (the Liberal Republican Party and the Nationalist Republican Party), together with the reappearance of the radical republican parties (the National Republican Federation and the Radical Republican Party). However, given its vocation and position as a dominant and main force in the government, the most relevant events were the divisions that took place in the Portuguese Republican Party (the “Democratic Party”), which split in 1920 into the National Reconstitution Republican Party, and in 1925-1926 into the Democratic Left Republican Party.

This political map of the parties and political republican groups, which constituted “imperfect multi-party factions or a dominant party” (Sousa, 1983: 167) or “competitive unorganized multi-party factions” (Canotilho, 2002: 176), is also explained by the slow modernization process of Portuguese society, marked by the creation of new institutions, cultural differentiation, social mobility and structural changes, making society more open and plural (Godinho, 1977: 165-195).

However, in the period of 1910-1920 in Portugal, there was still a social and political system that was highly conditioned by an extended and intricate series of networks based on hierarchical relationships and favoritism, since these were still the main characteristics of the Mediterranean societies of Southern Europe: “In Mediterranean societies—Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece—patron-favorite relationships, in their “traditional form” as well as in their more modern form of party-based, bureaucratic and administrative networks, were not an important factor in the formation of the core of the institutional structure (as in other European countries), but in fact its own central core [...]” (Eisenstadt, 2007: 107).

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