

# Major Lisbon Newspaper Attempts Experiment In Workers' Control

LISBON (CUP)----- One of the major casualties of Portugal's recent sharp turn to the right is the workers' controlled newspaper Republica.

The Lisbon daily stopped publishing December 23 when its military-appointed director resigned. The resignation left Republica in legal-limbo, because all Portuguese newspapers must have a director appointed by management.

When Republica workers took control in July, Portugal's military authorities agreed to appoint a figurehead director, despite the objections of the paper's Socialist Party (PS)-oriented owners. With key leftists now removed from the military leadership, the authorities refuse to appoint a new director, declaring the matter a labour-management dispute.

The owners refuse to talk to the workers.

(Portugal's political-military situation changed dramatically November 25 in what now appears a well-executed coup by right-wing and centrist military leaders. Imposing a news blackout in Lisbon region, they ended a paratroop rebellion and moved conservative troops to the capital city to disarm local regiments-who hadn't joined the rebellion - but who had been actively assisting workers and poor people's movements for many months.)

## Western Press Distorts Facts

Republica gained notoriety throughout North America and western Europe last spring through an international press campaign that distorted the facts of the workers' struggle beyond belief.

Press agency reporters, accepting the interpretation of the paper's owners without question, portrayed the workers' fight for a non-partisan daily as a Communist Party attempt to seize the paper. The 'professional' media used the Republica case as a significant example of how "Communists" were allegedly imposing a new dictatorship on the Portuguese people.

But since July, Republica workers were publishing a paper frequently hostile to the Communist Party - attempting to present news and analysis "at the service of the working class and the rest of the exploited classes" - without promoting any political party, according to their editorial statutes.

The paper emphasized news from grass roots popular organizations- workers' commission, residents' commissions, peasants' organizations, soldiers' groups. The journalism had been mediocre at times - especially in earlier issues, but was courageous and informative, describing efforts of common people to better their lives and build a new society.

Major decisions in Republica were made by the workers' commission, elected by the workers and subject to immediate recall. Composing room staff and typesetters - who led the struggle against the owners - established a three-member political commission with authority to approve all significant political statements in the paper.

Newsroom staff were divided into subject areas, each with a co-ordinator elected by the workers. All the co-ordinators met each morning to plan the first and last pages, produced by a general co-ordinator.

Before the fall of fascism here in April 1974 Republica was the voice of restrained opposition to the regime. Soon afterwards, publisher Raul Rego began openly favoring the Socialist Party in editorials, and in the choice and placement of news stories.

Republica's printing worker's didn't approve.

In October 1974 they held their first large plenary contesting the ideological line of the paper. They demanded an independent, non-partisan paper at the service of the Portuguese revolution. The Socialists' emphasis on western European style electoral democracy didn't impress the workers, who wanted changed economic relationships and a more deeply-rooted democracy than merely voting every four years in the new Portugal.

But with the PS gearing

up for its long battle against the Communist Party and other leftist organizations, Republica's publishers were in no mood for compromise.

## Journalists Quit Over Editorial Stand

Some 14 journalists quit the paper last winter, protesting its partisan approach.

All these facts were ignored by the international press in its hysterical campaign against Republica's workers. (In a well-documented academic study, a Swedish journalism student shows how the newspapers in his country systematically accepted Rego's claims and ignored the worker's side. The Swedish press was echoing the behavior of news media in North America and the rest of northern Europe.)

Matters came to head when Rego tried to fire an administrative worker for his opposition. The printing workers petitioned against the dismissal, and on May 2 they prepared an issue of Republica themselves. But Rego refused to authorize it. Because the mailers and clerical staff were not yet committed to the fight, the printers couldn't put it out.

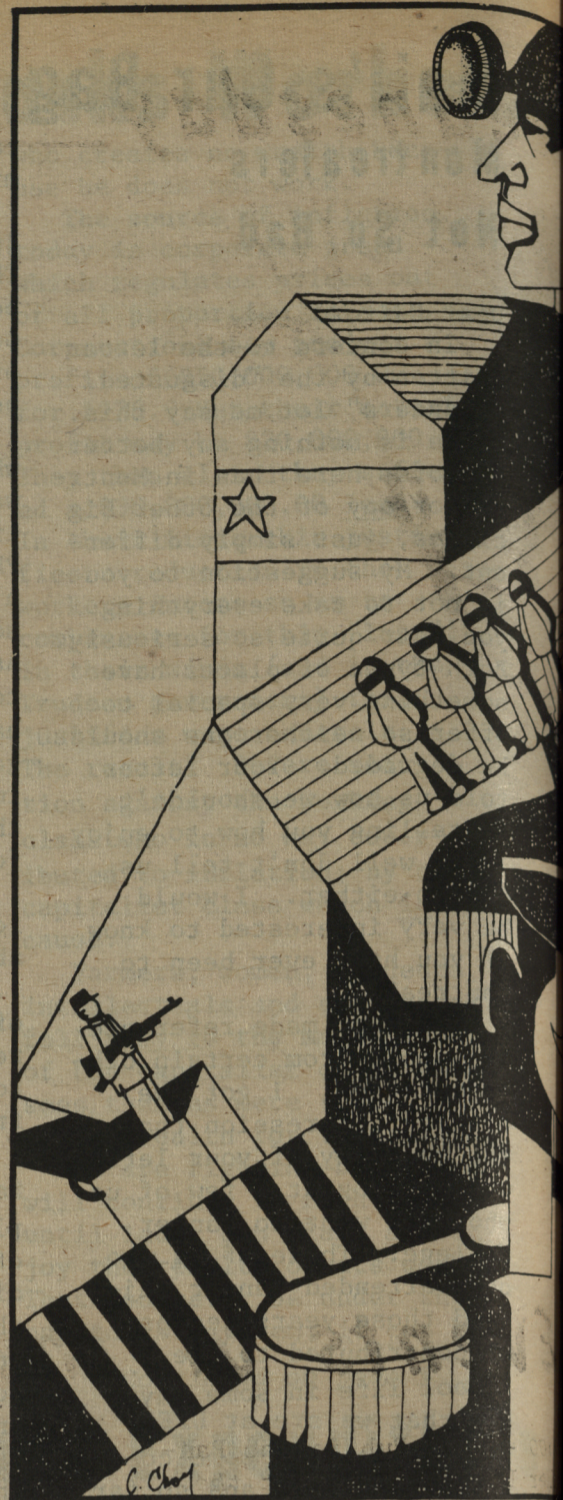
But by May 19 the mailers and clerical staff were behind the printers. They again tried to publish on their own.

Thousands of PS demonstrators surrounded Republica's building, throwing stones and threatening the workers. COPCON, the now-extinct military security force, had to rescue them at 6am, and few copies were distributed.

COPCON ordered the paper closed.

The PS demanded the military guarantee Rego's continued control. The party threatened to leave the government - at that time dominated by leftist military figures and the Communist Party - if it didn't agree.

But by July 10 Republica's workers had formed solid links with other workers' organizations, and declared their intention to publish again. The government sided with Rego, but faced with widespread popular support for the workers, COPCON soldiers



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