The AFL-CIO and Portuguese Labor in the Wake of the 1974 Coup

On April 25th, 1974, Portugal's over four decades old dictatorship suddenly fell to a well-planned and almost bloodless military coup by the Movimiento das Forças Armadas (MFA, Armed Forces Movement). This top-down beginning of the post-dictatorship period, however, was no indication of what was to follow. Instead, within a few short weeks, the Portuguese grassroots was astir with organizing, activism, demands, and projects, from shanty-town resident associations occupying social housing blocs to workers taking over factories to establish worker-managed workplaces.[1] While international observers mostly focused on the shuffling and reshuffling of governments, there was some sense that the country's future was intimately tied to the grassroots level. Thus, the U.S. Ambassador to Portugal, observing the situation about two weeks after the coup, noted that "focus of political activity appears to be labor sector at moment. Moderate views seem to be prevailing at Intersyndicate meetings of [union] leaders, but militancy of worker commissions, which do not appear to be controlled by their syndicates, continues."[2]

The Ambassador's assessment regarding the importance of the labor sector was shared by the international policy wing of the American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)—indeed, the AFL-CIO was probably at least partly the source of the Ambassador's view. Two visitors from the AFL-CIO's International Affairs Department, Irving Brown and Michael Boggs, attended the meeting the Ambassador's report concerned.

[1] Charles Downs, *Revolution at the Grassroots: Community Organizations in the Portuguese Revolution* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); Pedro Ramos Pinto, "Urban Social Movements and the Transition to Democracy in Portugal, 1974–1976," *The Historical Journal* 51, no. 4 (2008): 1025–1046; John L. Hammond, "Worker Control in Portugal: The Revolution and Today," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 2 (1981): 413–453; John L. Hammond, *Building Popular Power: Workers' and Neighborhood Movements in the Portuguese Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988); Nancy Bermeo, "Myths of Moderation: Confrontation and Conflict during Democratic Transitions," *Comparative Politics* 29, no. 3 (April 1997): 305–322. By early 1975, similar action was taking place in the countryside, with land seizures and the establishment of collective farms; Nancy Bermeo, *The Revolution within the Revolution: Workers' Control in Rural Portugal* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

[2] Telegram from American Embassy Lisbon (Scott) to Secretary of State, May 13, 1974, doc # 1974LISBON01884, U.S. Department of State, *Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973–1979*, Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State, National Archives, Washington, DC, `http://aad.archives.gov`. Henceforth cited as *CFPF*.

Besides representing American labor at this symbolically important post-dictatorship union conference attended by foreign delegates from many European unions, they hoped to get a sense of the political leanings of Portuguese labor and of the possibilities of promoting non-Communist trade unionism in Portugal. At the meeting, which brought together representatives of over 40 Portuguese unions to begin building new union structures to replace those inherited from the Salazar-Caetano corporatist regime, the Americans contented themselves with making a cautious, low-key pledge of support of American labor to their Portuguese brethren.[3]

This paper offers a preliminary examination of the attitude and actions of the AFL-CIO toward the Portuguese Revolution and the Portuguese labor situation in the wake of the coup. It forms part of the recent trend toward more nuanced examinations of American labor's foreign adventures that take into account both the differences of opinion within American labor and the complexity of the local context, along with the agency of local actors.[4] For all its cooperation with the U.S. foreign policy establishment, the AFL-CIO's power was limited. This was particularly true on the European scene: European unions, no weaklings themselves, often had their own international aspirations and the resources to pursue them. Their "softer" and more socialistically inclined attitudes also tended to fit better in the European landscape than the AFL's hard anti-communism. On the other hand, both European and American labor leaders viewed the events in Portugal from something like a birds-eye perspective, emphasizing the international significance of the form Portugal's labor movement would take over engagement with the shop-floor concerns or political and social aspirations of Portuguese workers.

[3] *The New York Times*, May 10, 1974, p. 6. Henceforth cited as *NYT*.

[4] Some examples of this scholarship include e.g. Hugh Wilford, "American Labour Diplomacy and Cold War Britain," *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 1 (January 2002): 45–65; Robert Anthony Waters Jr. and Gordon Oliver Daniels, "'When You're Handed Money on a Platter, It's Very Hard to Say, 'Where Are You Getting This?'': The AFL-CIO, the CIA, and British Guiana," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 84, no. 4 (2006): 1075–1099; and the essays in Geert Van Goethem and Robert Anthony Waters Jr., eds., *American Labor's Global Ambassadors* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

Background and context

The April 25th Revolution of the Carnations had taken the international community, including the United States, completely by surprise—the U.S. Ambassador to Portugal was not even in the country when the coup occurred. The U.S. foreign policy establishment scrambled to form something approaching a clear understanding of the new players in Portugal; while it never contemplated supporting right-wing aspirants to a countercoup, over the coming years it consistently searched out the people whom it viewed as the most "reliable" and offered them support.[5]

The AFL-CIO, though it by this time had some thirty years of foreign policy expertise under its belt, also found itself rather unprepared with regard to the new reality in Portugal, and, true to its Cold War outlook, did not exactly welcome it: as Irving Brown fumed in his initial assessment, "it is not the best time for the U.S. to deal with this kind of a new revolutionary situation while Nixon, with his low profile, sinks more and more below sea level."[6] On the other hand, international labor federations had monitored the labor situation in Portugal (as well as in the other European dictatorships, Spain and Greece) reasonably closely over the years, occasionally publishing condemnations of abuses.[7] They had also maintained relations with the Portuguese Socialist Party (PS) of Mario Soares, which had

[5]The initial assessment by the American embassy in Lisbon of the military junta that governed in the first days of the new regime was "that this is a group of basically conservative men who, although there is no reason to doubt the genuineness of their commitment to civil liberties, are not going to stand for any nonsense." The embassy's attitude toward this was essentially approving: "they [the Junta] undoubtedly feel, as do we, that they have taken Portugal on a giant step toward genuine democracy," but if "the far left seeks to take too great advantage of the changed climate, we expect that the junta will quickly make clear the limits of thier [sic] tolerance." Telegram from American Embassy Lisbon (Post) to Secretary of State Washington, Apr 27, 1974, p. 4, *CFPF*. In the months and years that followed, the U.S. government worried about the participation of the Communists in the government and had reservations about the Socialists, hoping to strengthen the hand of men like General Francisco Costa Gomes (prime minister after the resignation of Antonio Spinola) or, later, José Pinheiro de Azevedo (who became prime minister in 1975). See e.g. Telegram from American Embassy Madrid (River) to Secretary of State, Oct 14, 1974, *Declassified Documents Reference System* (Gale). Henceforth cited as *DDRS*. On U.S. view that right-wing coup attempts were doomed to failure and would only redound to the left's benefit, see e.g. Telegrams from American Embassy Lisbon (Carlucci) to Secretary of State, Feb 4 1975 and Apr 2, 1975, both in *DDRS*. On American policy regarding Portugal in the wake of the Revolution in greater detail, see Bernardino Gomes and Tiago Moreira de Sá, *Carlucci Versus Kissinger* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011).

[6]"Visit to Lisbon," unsigned report almost certainly authored by Irving Brown, May 13, 1974, RG18-004, box 32, file 32/15, *George Meany Memorial Archives*, Silver Spring, MD, Archives now transferred to the University of Maryland. Henceforth cited as *GMMA*.

[7]See e.g. Anthony Carew et al., eds., *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), 358–359.

operated in exile; Soares himself had spent time in France and Italy, in particular. Furthermore, Portuguese emigrant workers were numerous in both France and Germany, providing further contact between Western European and Portuguese workers. Thus, when the Salazar-Caetano regime fell, international labor observers quickly sent representatives to investigate the situation and offer aid.

For both the European and the American labor movements, the role of the Communist Party in the Portuguese Revolution and the Portuguese labor scene was an issue of serious concern. After the coup, the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) was practically the only reasonably well-organized political force in Portugal, and it quickly moved to express its support of the leftist military officers who had orchestrated the overthrow of the dictatorship. Of more direct concern to the foreign unionists viewing the Portuguese labor scene was that the PCP was also the only effective force in the unions.

During the regime of António Salazar and his successor Marcelo Caetano, labor had been organized into a corporatist occupational structure; membership in these corporatist unions was mandatory, but their ability or willingness to represent workers' concerns was minimal at best. During the 1960s, however, the PCP had managed to infiltrate some of these structures, with some real benefits for workers on the shop floor. The Intersindical, an umbrella organization that emerged in the 1960s but was quickly declared illegal, continued to operate clandestinely with the leadership of Communists; after the coup, it quickly reemerged as the main organization with a claim to being the common voice of the workers, a position it jealously defended. Thus, after the coup, the PCP (and particularly individual Communist activists) had some prestige among workers, and it dominated the only existing union structures. At the same time, the PCP was concerned with the general political situation much more than with fomenting labor activism: deciding to participate in the provisional governments, it was concerned to maintain its "respectability" as well as its control over workers, and did not wish to risk either by allowing workers free rein to organize and

strike. Thus, most strikes emanated from local workers' committees and there was substantial dissatisfaction with the PCP's grip on the structures of the Intersindical.[8]

Meanwhile, the Socialist Party was mainly a "party of notables" that had paid little attention to workers' concerns, as international observers noted.[9] Beyond the issue of political affiliation, the other main problem facing anyone interested in shaping the Portuguese labor movement was the splintered nature of the existing organizational structure. The structure inherited from the Salazar-Caetano era was not only occupational but extremely divided, so that in some industries representation might be divided into hundreds of unions. Revamping these structures was going to be a major task no matter what else happened.

GETTING THE LAY OF THE LAND

Both European and American unions sent observers to Lisbon within only a couple of weeks of the coup. The two Americans to arrive were major figures in American labor's international affairs: Irving Brown had been "there at the creation," so to speak, having been the main executor of American labor's efforts to support non-Communist labor in postwar France, and directing the AFL-CIO's African American Labor Center, which worked with African unions, in the late 1960s. Described as a persuasive and sociable fellow with a "common touch," Brown had considerable experience of maneuvering in the Cold War climate of international union politics.[10] Michael Boggs, too, was an important figure in the AFL-CIO's foreign policy apparatus: he worked at the organization's International Affairs Division, particularly with its Latin American and Brazilian projects. He was also fluent in Portuguese.

Irving Brown's initial assessment of the situation was very cautiously optimistic. Noting that "the communists have a tremendous headstart" in the unions, besides "playing a very clever game" politically by "not pushing any demands too forcefully," he nevertheless con-

[8]See e.g. Raquel Varela, "The Portuguese Communist Party and the Labour Movement in the Beginning of the Carnation Revolution (April–September 1974)," *Twentieth Century Communism* 3 (2011): 92–113.

[9]This was the way the party was described in e.g. the comments in the report cited in note 18 below.

[10]The description of Brown as a man with the common touch comes from labor attaché Dan Horowitz, quoted in Ted Morgan, *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone: Communist, Anti-Communist, and Spymaster* (New York: Random House, 1999), 154.

sidered that "there is still a good opportunity to begin to sort out the positive forces which may exist." What made this rather complicated, though, was that the main alternative for the Communists consisted of the Mario Soares' Socialist Party, which was "very weak in trade unions" and also inclined to appease the Communists politically. The "best bet," Brown felt, was to begin to build up union contacts, especially in the large textile industry, and to make use of the AFL-CIO's contacts in Africa, as that might enable the Americans to be useful to the Portuguese government and thus gain more influence. Meanwhile, it was best to tread carefully—in particular, Brown warned, "it would be unwise to involve any institution dealing primarily with Latin America in this Portuguese situation" since there was "great sensitivity on the part of the Portuguese relative to Brazil," where the AFL-CIO was toiling away more or less in cooperation with the dictatorship. Still, he ended on a hopeful note: "I do believe that in spite of some hostility towards the American government's role in the past, the American unions could do a lot."[11]

Brown's initial report thus captured most of the AFL-CIO's worries about and problems regarding Portugal: that the Communists were active while the Socialists were weak and unreliable, that U.S. power in the world was increasingly under attack and critique, and that American unions' foreign policy initiatives were hamstrung by "hostility," partly resulting from its own longstanding role in the U.S. government's foreign adventures. And indeed, Brown identified problems that certainly complicated American unions' ability to create effective programs in Portugal.

Americans and Europeans on the Portuguese scene

Michael Boggs and Irving Brown stayed in Portugal for some two weeks (though Brown was not there for the whole time). During this time, they attended the conference of Portuguese unions, held discussions with representatives of the Intersindical as well as with journalists and politicians, and met with General Spinoza. The same routine was also followed by a number of European trade union representatives.

[11] "Visit to Lisbon," unsigned report almost certainly authored by Irving Brown, May 13, 1974, RG18-004, box 32, file 32/15, *GMMA*.

The AFL-CIO and the German DGB (*Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund*, the German Confederation of Trade Unions) did discuss the possibility of joint projects in Portugal, but on the whole it seems that the Europeans preferred their own channels, working particularly closely with Mario Soares and the Portuguese Socialist Party.[12] Thus, the ICFTU sent two representatives, Dieter Wagner of the DGB and a Spanish trade unionist living in Toulouse, Manuel Simon, to Portugal in the summer of 1974 to hold meetings and a brief seminar with Portuguese trade unionists. The participants in the seminar were mainly white-collar and highly skilled workers, many from unions in the process of formation, and many closely associated with the Socialist Party. The report that Wagner prepared on the seminar emphasized that there was great desire to build trade union unity, but the prospects for it were slim, given the political divisions. While the report stressed that if unity would ever be achieved, one needed to work without regard to "any political or ideological influence" and to maintain relations with the Intersindical, the aim of the project was clearly to strengthen the Socialists, whose prospects in the textile workers' union were deemed "excellent" and in the teachers' union "somewhat encouraging." The main conclusions of the seminar were that a training program should be established, ICFTU training material donated, and an ICFTU representative assigned to Portugal. Even more concretely, the seminar set up a study group on fomenting union activity, the Centro de Estudos para a Criação de Novos Sindicatos (CECNS), to be headed by the national secretary of the Socialist Party, Marcelo Curto.[13] Later in the year, the CECNS was renamed the Centro de Estudos Sindicais (CES), reflecting the desire of the PS not to appear to be interfering excessively in the internal affairs of unions and its hope to also pursue wresting power away from the Communists from within the Intersindical.[14]

The AFL-CIO apparently had no involvement in the ICFTU's seminar or in the creation of the CECNS. And indeed, though the general thrust of the seminar with its emphasis

[12]On talks about joint projects, see a mention in Telegram from American Embassy Paris to American Embassy Lisbon, May 9, 1974, doc# 1974PARIS11270, *CFPF*.

[13]"Report on the visit made to Portugal by brothers Dieter Wagner and Manuel Simon from 24 June to 7 July 1974," n.d., RG18-004, box 32, file 32/15, *GMMA*.

[14]José Barreto, "O Partido Socialista e o Movimento Sindical Português," in *O Partido Socialista e a Democracia*, ed. Vitalino Canas (Oeiras: Celta, 2005), 245–271.

on organization and nonpolitical activity would have been acceptable to the AFL-CIO, its rather clear association with the Socialist Party might have been less welcome. Moreover, the seminar concluded on a note that the AFL-CIO would certainly not have approved: namely, that the new organizational push should aim "to create trade unions equipped to fight against the capitalist system," which should "not restrict themselves merely to bringing about improvements in the workers' working conditions and standards of living; nor should they promote their integration in the capitalist system, but fight against this system."[15]

Such language was not part of the AFL-CIO vocabulary—certainly not the vocabulary of the long-time Cold Warriors who staffed the organization's International Affairs Division. The AFL-CIO, always suspecting the Europeans of a tendency to be overly soft on Communism, was worried about the *Ostkontakte* being pursued from the 1960s on by German unions in particular. As Anthony Carew has astutely observed, where the Americans took anti-communism as the main mission of international trade union work, for most European labor leaders "the challenge posed by communism was simply the context in which basic economic trade union activity took place."[16]

Overall, the AFL-CIO had kept slightly aloof from the European scene in the 1960s and early 1970s, focusing more on projects in Latin America and Africa; on the eve of the Portuguese Revolution, the organization had only just reassigned Irving Brown to Europe and begun to take a more active role in European affairs. In the European trade union world, the AFL-CIO's main ally was the French *Force Ouvriere* (FO), the non-Communist alternative to the other major French labor federation, the Confédération générale du travail (CGT). The AFL's support, orchestrated by Irving Brown in his first overseas assignment to postwar Europe, had been an important force in creating the FO, and the organization remained one of the few European confederations vocally opposed to European unions' pursuit of detente.[17] The AFL-CIO enlisted the cooperation of the FO in its attempts to influence Portuguese unionists: this, it hoped, would give it an avenue to work within Portugal through a reliable

[15] "Conclusions: Project for Trade Union Activity," p. 3, in "Report on the visit made to Portugal by brothers Dieter Wagner and Manuel Simon from 24 June to 7 July 1974," n.d., RG18-004, box 32, file 32/15, *GMMA*.

[16] Anthony Carew, "Conflict Within the ICFTU: Anti-Communism and Anti-Colonialism in the 1950s," *International Review of Social History* 41 (1996): 179.

[17] Carew et al., *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions*.

European intermediary, something that might be more palatable to the Portuguese, especially as the FO envoy worked closely with the Portuguese immigrant workers in France. The report the FO's representative provided the AFL, besides containing a wealth of detail on the PCP and the PS as well as on the situation in the Intersindical and the union world in general, also drew a line between his own efforts and those of the ICFTU representatives, whom the FO representative did not think much of. His impression of Wagner and Simon was that they were "completely disoriented in Portugal" and complaining that their attitude toward the FO was very cold.[18]

Nevertheless, it seems that the "completely disoriented" Europeans with their close cooperation with the Portuguese Socialist Party had more success than the Americans in shaping the Portuguese union movement. Their breakthrough came in 1979, when the Intersindical finally got a competitor, the Socialist-oriented Uniao Geral de Trabalhadores de Portugal (UGTP).[19] It was clear that the leadership of the Portuguese Socialist Party was an active player in this process since the beginning, as indicated by the participation of e.g. Marcelo Curto in the July 1974 ICFTU seminar; indeed, it is hard to say how much of the initiative in the promotion of Socialist- rather than Communist-oriented unions and the in creation of the UGTP could be attributed to the ICFTU rather than squarely to Portuguese Socialists.[20]

Obstacles to AFL-CIO influence in Portugal

The Americans were hampered in their on-the-ground efforts in part by their association with the CIA and in part by their unwillingness to work through party-affiliated channels.

The late 1960s and the growth of the opposition to the Vietnam War, besides eating away

[18]"*Mon impression a été qu'ils étaient complétement désorientés au Portugal.*" "CIOSL/DGB allemande," part of unsigned undated report by a person identified as "G" in "Addendum to G's report," August 29, 1974, RG18–004, both in box 32, file 32/19, *GMMA*. The addendum also notes that G. worked closely with the Portuguese immigrant workers in France which "has become a very useful base for operations back into Portugal." The "G" in question is in all likelihood Eleutério Gervasio of the Bureau Portugais of the CGT-FO; see Eleutério Gervasio to Paul Barton, April 13, 1975, RG18-004, box 32, file 32/15, *GMMA*.

[19]Carew et al., *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions*. Unfortunately the documents in the AFL-CIO files do not extend beyond 1977, but there is little indication that the Americans had a significant role in the creation of the UGTP.

[20]For more on the development of unions leaning toward the PS and the creation of the UGTP, see Barreto, "O Partido Socialista e o Movimento Sindical Português."

at the image of American foreign policy generally, had also resulted in increased scrutiny of the seedier side of the foreign policy establishment, particularly the CIA. A number of exposés had also explored the longstanding links that the American labor's foreign efforts had with the CIA, and the European left and labor press sometimes published angry reports of the activities of Brown and other American labor representatives.[21] This did not exactly make the AFL-CIO a welcome partner—even the American Embassy in Lisbon sometimes thought that it might be for Irving Brown to stay away and leave union work to the international trade secretariats, as the Lisbon press was writing about Brown as a CIA agent or at least a reactionary.[22] Unsurprisingly, the Socialist Party, too, worried that accepting any aid from the Americans would taint the party by association and do little good. Although the U.S. embassy felt that by 1976 the situation in Portugal had "evolved to the point where attacks [associating the AFL with the CIA] are more a help than a hindrance," the Socialists continued to meet the AFL-CIO's advances regarding the creation of a labor center or other joint projects with vacillation and suggestions that perhaps aid could be channeled through European unions like the FO.[23]

As a result, by 1977 the AFL-CIO described the Portuguese situation in almost exactly the same terms as the report by the FO representative had done in late summer 1974: "The major task is to secure a team of workers trained in the essentials of organization," and therefore a training center ought to be created, with particular focus on training new union leaders in those industries where the Communists were strong, like the metal industry, though an even more important criterion were the chances of success, since successes would lay the groundwork for any potential progress in the "difficult" areas.[24] The AFL-CIO continued to see the Socialists as the main alternative to Communist influence in Portuguese unions, and

[21]The best known of the exposés is probably Ronald Radosh, *American Labor and United States Foreign Policy* (New York: Random House, 1969); for an example of material in the European press that porrayed the visits of Irving Brown to this or that European country as CIA-inspired efforts to split labor's ranks, see e.g. report of an article in the Italian *Pamorama* in Telegram from American Embassy Rome (Volpe) to Secretary of State, Sep 16, 1976, doc# 1974ROME12719, *GMMA*.

[22]American Embassy Lisbon (Scott) to Secretary of State, Nov 16, 1974, doc# 1974LISBON05013, *CFPF*.

[23]Dale Povenmire to Irving Brown, Nov 5, 1976. On keeping AFL assistance secret and on delay, see e.g. Dale Povenmire to Irving Brown, Feb 23, 1977 and Pelágio Madureira to Irving Brown, Apr 13, 1977, all in RG18–004, box 32, file 32/15, *GMMA*.

[24]Undated, unsigned report [accompanied by cover letter from Irving Brown to Dale Povenmire, Aug 11, 1977], RG18–004, box 32, file 32/15, *GMMA*.

repeatedly contacted party representatives in hopes of cooperation. Yet it always stressed that any AFL-CIO support for a labor training center in Portugal would need to not be tied to a single party and would need to be "directed and under the supervision of trade unionists" rather than, one presumes, politicians.[25] Moreover, it was never quite comfortable about supporting the Socialists, and, like the U.S. foreign policy establishment, tended to prefer the more centrist Partido Popular Democrático (PPD, later the Partido Social Democrata or PSD).

COLD WAR GRASSROOTS

There is some irony in the contrast between the vibrant grassroots environment in Portugal and the pessimism of the international labor emissaries hoping to rebuild the Portuguese labor movement. Interestingly, while the militancy of the workers' committees was noted in some early U.S. embassy cables, it did not seem to form any major part of the deliberations of either European or American labor unionists as they worked to undo Communist domination of the unions. One might have thought that as organizations professing their commitment to the independent and forceful assertion of power by workers, the European as well as the American unions would have been eager to seek out a new, emerging leadership organically connected to the local-level grassroots rather than relying on politicians and leaders long in exile and with a clear political agenda for building their contact network. But in this, the European and American unionists resembled their PCP counterparts: Cold War power politics took primacy over grassroots concerns like power on the shop floor.

The inattention to grassroots desires is particularly ironic given the Europeans' and Americans' detailed and quite well-founded critique of the Intersindical's authoritarian style that subordinated workers' shop-floor concerns and democratic hopes to a larger political agenda. In their July 1974 report, Dieter Wagner and Manuel Simon had complained of "the Communist Party's policy of sectarian hegemony" that drove a number of large unions

[25] Irving Brown to Pelagio Madureira, Apr 22, 1977, RG18–004, box 32, file 32/15, *GMMA*.

away from cooperation with the Intersindical.[26] In 1976, a long report denounced the Intersindical's maneuvering to keep PCP members in charge of the organization despite union elections that gave substantial representation to non-Communist unionists as well as the Intersindical's nonchalance toward workers' preferences, as witnessed by its approval of a strike law that severely limited strike actions, its opportunistic approval or condemnation of strikes according to whether the PCP was in government or not, and its failure to make progress on refashioning the union structures inherited from the dictatorship era.[27]

In this roundabout manner, then, both American and European trade unionists recognized the necessity of being relevant to the needs of the Portuguese workers.[28] Yet their own policy was in some ways quite as insensitive to those needs as they accused the PCP and the Intersindical of being. For the Americans, in particular, this inattention to the grassroots and to militant organizing rather poignantly mirrored the situation in the United States itself. The model of non-political collective bargaining that the AFL-CIO was so eager to export was by the early 1970s showing severe cracks in the United States, while the new and aggressive organizing that might have saved it was not much in evidence, and certainly did not top the agenda of the men who made the AFL-CIO's foreign policy. While it was of course less clear at the time than it is now, the time of the Portuguese Revolution was also a time when U.S. real wages had begun to stagnate and fall, the political climate had started lurching increasingly to the right, and union membership had commenced the downward slide that has by now brought the U.S. to the lowest union density in a century,

[26] "Report on the visit made to Portugal by brothers Dieter Wagner and Manuel Simon from 24 June to 7 July 1974," n.d., RG18-004, box 32, file 32/15, *GMMA*.

[27] "Presidium meeting, Item 6, Portugal," Aug 27, 1976, esp. p. 2; in RG18-004, box 32, file 32/15, *GMMA*. The authorship of the report is unclear—possibly it comes from one of the international trade secretariats; the spelling is British.

[28] In his 1977 report on the possibilities for creating a trade union center in Portugal, Irving Brown added to this a slightly backhanded compliment to the Communists, noting that where they were popular with workers, this was not necessarily due to ideology but to the workers' "confidence in those leaders who appear to represent them in a militant and aggressive fashion." See citation in footnote 24.