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The New State of António de Oliveira Salazar

The aim of my thesis is the analysis of the Portuguese New State, which represented a particular civil dictatorship established and ruled by António de Oliveira Salazar. I purpose to investigate this topic, in order to underline the structural elements which characterized the New State and distinguished it from the other European dictatorships. Indeed, it is too often assimilated to the fascist regimes, although its roots can be found in the same crisis of liberalism and parliamentarianism, which took place in the early decades of the twentieth century. This research covers the first years of the regime, between the end of the Twenties and the beginning of Thirties and intends to demonstrate the authoritarian and conservative nature of Salazar's government. The study of the edification of the New State and the issue inherent to its classification, as an authoritarian regime, required the use of some historiographical sources, as the works of Bizzarri, Egerton, Ferrarin and more recent studies of Costa Pinto, Adinolfi, Ivani, Serapiglia, as well as many other historians who made contributions to the debate about Salazarism.

The first chapter of the thesis contains an historical profile of contemporary Portugal, useful to better understand the process of transition from liberalism to authoritarianism. As a matter of fact, it is necessary to point out that Portugal was affected by many serious political and economic problems, which continued even after the fall of the old monarchy, in 1910, after a coup, which led to the instauration of the liberal-democratic

Republic. However, even this new form of government was torn by many struggles among parties, by corruption, social and economic difficulties, that weakened the liberal political system and strengthened the forces of the radical right wing, which was impatient to restore order and stability, with the aim to stop the spread of communism.

A particular emphasis is given, within the first chapter, to the Revolution of May 28, 1926, which marked the beginning of a military authoritarianism that dismissed liberalism. In fact, the army, under the command of General da Costa, seized power by means of a coup and founded a military dictatorship. It prepared the context in which Salazar made his appearance on the political scene. In this period, Salazar became part of the government as Minister for Finance, but he could not apply his technical skills, due to internal conflicts within the military junta. Consequently, his experience lasted only a few days. In 1928, Salazar was re-appointed Minister for Finance, by General Oscar Carmona, in order to avoid the economic collapse of the nation, although he perceived his position as a duty. Nevertheless, he was delighted to serve his nation.

In the same chapter, the historical events are interlaced with those of the human life and political rise of António de Oliveira Salazar, the builder of the New State. For a deeper understanding of Salazarism, it is important to show the aspects of the leader's personality, which influenced both his political action and the features of the New State. Thus, he was born in a small and rural village and he studied as a seminarian, but he soon realized that his real attitude was teaching and so he left the seminary. Subsequently, he attended Coimbra University, where, after a few years, he became Professor of Economic Sciences. He was deeply religious and led a very austere and religious life, in particular he was always devoted to teaching. In fact, throughout his life, he was convinced that politics alone was not enough to solve the problems of the nation. He strongly believed in the importance of education in order to change people and their mentality and to make them proud of their glorious past. The spiritual revolution, which Salazar strongly desired for his people, is particularly emphasized in M. Eliade's studies. Such revolution was founded on three essential elements: religion, family and nation.

At first, when he was a student, he participated actively in the Academic Centre of Christian Democracy, in order to face the anticlericalism of the liberal-democratic Republic and to defend the right of the Catholic Church to act freely in the social field. Then, Salazar was one of the founders of the Portuguese Catholic Centre, a party

through which he became known for his lectures, in defence of the interests of the Church. In 1921, he was elected Member of Parliament among the ranks of his party. However, his experience at the Chamber of Deputies lasted only one day, yet it was fundamental to reinforce Salazar's belief that the Parliament was useless to solve the problems of the country. In fact, when he became Minister for Finance he claimed more power, over other ministries in order to balance the national debt with a severe economic policy, which consisted in a reduction of public expenditure and higher taxation. It required sacrifices and effort from the people, however it was very successful since he managed to harmonize the budget of the state.

The success of this policy allowed him to acquire more power, which resulted in his becoming Prime Minister, in 1932. The statesman was a firm opponent of both liberalism and communism. For this reason, he believed that liberalism was responsible for having taken away the individual from the family and the society in which he lived. In this way, the state would have to be rebuilt starting from the family, which represents the cornerstone of the nation. Consequently, Salazar's anti-liberalism resulted also in a deep anti-parliamentarianism. Therefore, he was convinced that parliamentary democracy was, definitively, in crisis and that it had generated the instability and the corruption of the former Republic. As concerns communism, it was regarded as a step backwards for humanity, by the dictator. In fact, according to him, it was not possible to remove the spirit of private property from the individual.

If in the first chapter the historical context which led, firstly, to the military dictatorship and then to the so-called "finance dictatorship" of Salazar was analysed, the second chapter is developed in order to examine the most significant acts with which the leader built the New State. There were a few stages in the making of it, which started with the new Constitution, declared in 1933, according to which Portugal became a unitary and corporative Republic. The "*Estatuto do Trabalho Nacional*" specified the particular characteristics of the New State, especially its corporative catholic character. All social classes and groups had to work together, avoiding conflicts, in order to contribute both to the national interest, which was considered superior, compared to all the other particular interests and to the solution of class conflict.

Although Salazar had become the ruler of the nation, he still maintained the control of the entire economy. Therefore, during the first years of the dictatorship, the Portuguese economy was characterized by a strict dirigisme.

In the central part of the thesis, attention was also paid to the condition of the economy, in the early years of the regime, by reviewing each sector in which Salazar intervened to regulate and control them directly. First of all, Portugal was still a rural country, so far from an industrialization process which characterized the other European countries. Thus, Salazar's regime celebrated the hard agricultural work, the peasant family and a simple lifestyle, while it contemned every form of progress and modernization, which could contaminate the authentic Portuguese tradition. For this reason, the government performed an economic autarkic policy to defend domestic goods from the competition of those foreign. This policy was made possible thanks to the exploitation of Portuguese colonies, producing raw materials through which the domestic demand was satisfied. In addition, the dictatorship acted also in industry by setting the size of the companies and promoting the creation of cartels. Moreover, Salazar's regime encouraged the rise of industrial monopolies through its economic legislation, which was in favour of them.

Hence, the government, to demonstrate its greatness, invested in infrastructures. Not only were railways and roads developed, but also harbours were modernized and neighbourhoods were built. These measures were not sufficient to assure better living standards to people, who continued to live in poverty and underdevelopment, compared to other European populations. Therefore, after completing the financial recovery of the country and setting out the principles on which the New State would have to be based, Salazar strengthened the role of the entire government, generating a conservative authoritarian regime, but not totalitarian.

Salazar's New State can be classified as an authoritarianism, adopting the definition given by the political scientist J. Linz, because Salazarism contains the peculiar elements, considered essential by the scholar, to identify this kind of regime. Firstly, it does not have an ideology totally absorbing every aspect of human existence. Secondly, masses were not continuously involved in a great mobilization plan, which could assure their active support to the regime. Furthermore, the reserved nature of the leader never allowed an intense and direct communication with Portuguese people, who rarely listened to his voice, since he preferred dealing with state affairs in solitude, instead of appearing in public, during mass rallies. Another essential feature of the New State was the absence of a one-party, which dominated the entire political process of the nation. Therefore, there was never a complete fusion between the party and the state, as occurred in the totalitarian regimes. Indeed, within the political system, the National

Union was the only organization, which was admitted. It was established in 1930, in order to serve the nation and to support Salazar's political action. Thus, Salazar was always free to take his own decisions, regardless of the guidelines of any party, because both the Revolution, which took place on 26<sup>th</sup> of May and his political career were not promoted by a party, unlike in the other dictatorships.

During the research, we have also identified the conservative nature of Salazar's regime for its reference to the defence of order and traditional values, summarized in the triad "God, Nation and Family", on which the dictator wanted to set the state. The final part of the second chapter is widely dedicated to the propaganda system, created to obtain the approval and that of the repressive, used to eliminate every form of hostility, towards the regime. These systems allowed Salazarism to become one of the longest dictatorial government of contemporary history.

The historian G. Adinolfi explores, in his studies, the role of the "Secretariado da Propaganda Nacional", in obtaining the approval to the regime. The Secretariat established in 1933, was directly responsible to the dictator. It was coordinated by António Ferro, one of the principal supporters of Salazar. It was the main instrument of the propaganda, which had the function to oversee the entire information system. This organism was designed to enhance the activities of the regime, through the publication of celebrative works and the organization of public events.

Cinema and theatre played an important propaganda function and, as they were itinerant, they could reach every corner of the Portuguese territory with their performances. The propaganda glorified the rural and maritime tradition of the country, in order to emphasize its glorious past, as a great colonial empire.

Unlike what happened in totalitarian regimes, the radio did not have a widespread diffusion within the country, since Salazar's dictatorship always preferred to keep the masses away from political life, requiring only a passive support.

As regards the instruments for the repression of dissent, at the end of the second chapter, the hardness and the violence, with which the regime exercised control over cultural and civil life, is underlined. For example, the government strictly controlled the press, through commission of censorship, directed by the Interior Ministry. The implacable blue pencil inflicted cuts on sentences, items and satirical cartoons, whose contents were deemed offensive towards the highest offices of the state. In addition,

ensorship also hit the news related to crimes, political attacks, deportations and exiles, with the aim to show off Portugal as a healthy and stable country. For this reason, even topics, which were considered offensive to religion, were suppressed. These repressive methods proved that Salazarism limited, strongly, the freedom of expression and thought and led the country into an intellectual paralysis, which affected above all writers, journalists and artists.

Besides, the dictatorship ordered the political police to persecute its opponents fiercely. The police, through its informants, spread a real climate of terror that reigned in the places of daily life and which, continuously, generated mutual suspicions among the population. Furthermore, citizens who committed political crimes were subjected to exhausting interrogations, which often ended in physical and psychological tortures.

In the third chapter, an attempt of comparison between Salazarism and Italian Fascism is proposed, to identify both the elements of affinity and those of diversity. This comparison is made in reference to the types, coined by the historian of Fascism R. De Felice. Salazarism had a series of characteristics in common with Italian Fascism. Among these, we note the exaltation of the national community, the corporative organization of the state, the economic autarky, the repressive system and the use of propaganda. Unlike Mussolini's regime, the New State lacked of a one-party and a direct relationship between the leader and the masses.

In conclusion, at the end of this research is clear that Salazarism represented the authoritarian reaction to the crisis of Portuguese liberalism. In relation to the conservative nature of the dictatorship, on one hand it promoted the strengthening of the executive power, the restoration of the political and social order and the return to the Catholic, Latin and Lusitanian tradition of Portugal, on the other hand it isolated the country from the progress and modernization, but it protected people from the sufferings of World War II and the subsequent dramatic reconstruction.