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# Investigating Portugal, Salazar and the New State: the Work of the Irish Legation in Lisbon, 1942–1945

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FILIPPE RIBEIRO DE MENESES

'I leave Portugal with a definite opinion that the present regime will not last.' Thus wrote Colm O'Donovan, the first Irish chargé d'affaires in Lisbon, on 22 February 1945, after a stay of three years in the Portuguese capital. O'Donovan's mission represented the first continuous examination of Portuguese politics and society by an Irish observer since the creation of the Irish Free State. His predictions regarding the future of António Oliveira Salazar's New State were, of course, far from correct. Marcelo Caetano, Salazar's successor, would only be toppled from power in 1974 after twelve years of an unpopular, expensive, and seemingly unwinnable colonial conflict. Nevertheless, that an Irish official observer could write of Salazar's imminent demise with some confidence means that a revolution in the way the New State was considered in Dublin had taken place as a result of the establishment of a legation in Lisbon. It was not Salazar's political skill or talent that was being questioned by O'Donovan, whose admiration for the dictator, untroubled by the treatment of Salazar's political opponents, was expressed often throughout his stay. Rather, it was the practical workings of the nominally corporative regime over which Salazar presided, and which had aroused great interest in Ireland, that led O'Donovan to his pessimistic conclusion: 'I have heard on many sides that unless a peaceful change-over can be brought about in the near future there will inevitably be a very violent revolution in the country.'

The purpose of this article is to trace the evolution of Irish diplomats' growing doubts about the effectiveness and relative worth of the New State's allegedly innovative corporative arrangements. While their confidence in the ability of Salazar to lead his country remained intact, O'Donovan and his colleagues clearly feared that the New State, so often described as a model for Ireland's future, might in fact represent a dead-end fatal to Salazar's ambitions. This is of interest because Irish diplomats, as we shall see, were observing events in Portugal with a special interest not shared by their colleagues in other legations and embassies. Although the majority of Irish diplomats were not impressed by the merits of the authoritarian regimes which had appeared in the 1920s and 1930s,<sup>1</sup> those posted to Portugal were

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and Europe 1919–1948* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1988), 23, 47.

considering the positive and negative characteristics of a new political system whose emulation many in Ireland defended at a time when Germany's defeat was by no means a certainty, so that the fate of parliamentary democracies in Europe still hung in the balance: if Germany won the war would not a corporative regime like that of Portugal, with its obvious emphasis on a rejection of the class struggle and of party politics, and on a non-aggressive nationalism, provide a better platform for relations with a triumphant Hitler? This, of course, is not to argue that Éamon de Valera and his Fianna Fáil government wanted to convert Ireland into a replica of Salazar's New State, but merely to suggest that they wanted to keep abreast of the existing alternatives to parliamentary democracy at a critical and unique moment in European history.

An Irish legation was opened in Lisbon in the winter of 1941–2 because of the pivotal role assumed by the Portuguese capital during the course of the Second World War. Lisbon became a thoroughfare for all those trying to escape a Nazi-dominated Europe, as well as for information and supplies vital for the preservation of Ireland's neutrality. Moreover, Portugal was the scene of an intense propaganda struggle closely monitored by the rest of the world, and was thus an apt setting for the laying out of Ireland's diplomatic position. In the words of the *Irish Times*, Lisbon had become by 1941 'the hub of the Western Universe'.<sup>2</sup> Opening a new diplomatic mission represented a serious effort for Ireland's undermanned diplomatic service, but it became clear after the fall of France that an official presence in Lisbon was essential. Spain, which had long monopolised Irish interests in the Iberian Peninsula, was too closely identified with the Axis powers (which it might join at any moment) for the Irish mission in Madrid to act with freedom – and there was little to learn from the Francoist state, whose legitimacy derived exclusively from military might. The key role played by Lisbon in Ireland's diplomacy did not last, however, beyond the end of the conflict. After O'Donovan, Lisbon was to receive a full chargé d'affaires only in 1948, despite persistent Portuguese entreaties for a replacement (conversely, a Portuguese legation in Dublin, although created by decree in 1942, was only manned in 1946).<sup>3</sup> Most of O'Donovan's efforts in Lisbon were directed precisely towards immediate, and vital, ends: supervising the loading of essential goods on ships bound for Ireland, attempting to purchase ships for Irish Shipping Ltd, looking after the wellbeing of Irish nationals in Portugal, and explaining to the world, through the Portuguese press, the principles upon which Irish neutrality, much maligned by Great Britain and the United States, rested.<sup>4</sup> It

<sup>2</sup> *Irish Times*, 23 Oct. 1941.

<sup>3</sup> Thus, for example, the Portuguese chargé d'affaires in Dublin, Antero Carreiro de Freitas, explained to his minister, on 13 May 1946, that he had twice asked who would replace Cornelius C. Cremin (who was not a full chargé d'affaires), being told that the Irish legation would remain in the care of its secretary. Freitas stressed the manpower problems of the Irish diplomatic corps, committed to new legations in Sweden and Australia and to the upgraded embassy in the Vatican. Carrero de Freitas to Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros (MNE), 13 May 1946, M196, MNE, Lisbon.

<sup>4</sup> Two articles in the *Irish Times* provide a brief description of O'Donovan's 'interesting career': According to the first, 'as a young man, Mr. O'Donovan took part in the fight for Irish independence. When the Treaty was signed he was sent to Brussels as Consul for Ireland, among the first appointments made by Mr. Cosgrave's Government. Later he went to Germany, and then to the Holy See. When in

was hard for many pro-British Portuguese to understand how Ireland, as a member of the Commonwealth, could remain neutral at a time when Britain was fighting for its life;<sup>5</sup> O'Donovan had to use contacts in the influential Catholic press and the Portuguese propaganda service to make sure that Ireland's position was explained and respected in the Lisbon press.<sup>6</sup>

Beyond these crucial tasks, however, O'Donovan was expected to observe and comment on the workings of the New State, inaugurated by Salazar when he rose to the position of President of the Council of Ministers in 1932, and enshrined in the Constitution of 1933. This nominally corporative regime was frequently described in Ireland as a model for a new, socially progressive, and intrinsically Christian style of politics at a time when parliamentary democracy was clearly on the retreat across Europe. Numerous glowing articles on Salazar and the New State appeared regularly in conservative and religious Irish publications throughout the 1930s and well into the Second World War. In no other democracy in Europe was Salazar as idolised as in Ireland, where a corporative (or, in Irish political language, vocational) movement constituted a powerful lobby which questioned the parliamentary nature of Ireland – and which, because of its popularity in Catholic circles, could not be ignored or suppressed by de Valera.<sup>7</sup> The possibility of a German victory rendered this lobby's message all the more important. If Ireland had to change into a regime acceptable in the eyes of Berlin, would the New State, created by a devoutly Catholic professor, who had restored order to an ungovernable country, not provide the most suitable alternative? One Irish admirer of Salazar was Richard S. Devane, a Jesuit, who wrote of Salazar that 'he first attacked the philosophic foundations of the paganized liberal state and replaced them by setting down and firmly fixing the Christian principles that underlie the New State'<sup>8</sup> before concluding that Salazar was indeed 'the Saviour of Portugal – the Saviour of the Church, the Saviour of the State, the Saviour of his people'.<sup>9</sup> Michael Derrick, who contributed a piece on Portugal to the October 1937 issue of the *Dublin Review*, was another New State enthusiast: 'To all acquainted in any way with the history of Portugal during the past century, his work must seem almost incredible; and to all

Rome he made many friends, among them Count Ciano . . . with whom he played golf in pre-war days.' *Irish Times*, 8 Nov. 1941. The other article pointed out the importance of O'Donovan's connections: his brother was commissioner for County Dublin and his brother-in-law was governor of the Central Bank. *Irish Times*, 6 Nov. 1941.

<sup>5</sup> It seems that Salazar himself was amazed by de Valera's decision and Ireland's ability to remain aloof from the conflict. During Cremin's first conversation with Salazar, in December 1945, the Portuguese President of the Council stated that de Valera 'must be a very able man to have succeeded in keeping you out of the conflict', considering Ireland's geographical position and its status within the Commonwealth. He was greatly impressed, moreover, by the number of Irishmen who had fought for Great Britain. Cremin to the Secretary, Department of External Affairs (DEA), 21 Dec. 1945, Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) 313/11A, National Archives (NA), Dublin.

<sup>6</sup> There is an entire file among the DFA Lisbon papers devoted to a single incident – E.1/22, United States request for withdrawal of Axis representatives in Ireland.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion on the limits of the vocational movement in Ireland, see Keogh, *Ireland*, 76–7

<sup>8</sup> Richard S. Devane, 'The Religious Revival Under Salazar: Religion Restored to the Schools', *Irish Ecclesiastical Review*, 51 (1938), 20.

<sup>9</sup> Devane, 'Religious Revival', 35.

who base their politics on Christian principles, his work must seem wholly admirable.<sup>10</sup>

This level of praise was continued in conservative publications well into the war. Ireland and Portugal were, after 1939, bound together by a neutrality which seemed to reflect a growing identity of values (clearly present in the idealised vision of their respective countries as rural idylls held by Salazar and de Valera) and to promise an increased moral authority for both states in a postwar world. John M. Ryan, writing in the *Irish Monthly* of January 1940, denied that Portugal was a totalitarian state: the corporative system had been created by the government, but its continued dependence on the executive for direction was not desired by Salazar, who controlled 'the most honest, the wisest, the most balanced dictatorship in Europe',<sup>11</sup> and who wanted to see the system regulate itself. For Ryan, Salazar's secret was his ability to understand and evaluate the merits of the often contradictory claims made by employers, workers and consumers, working to resolve them according to the true national interest. Ryan also reminded his readership that the New State was an experiment, corporativism in Portugal having been created in a piecemeal fashion with the state acting as a foster-mother 'that encourages every sign of self-control and self-discipline manifested by its fostering'.<sup>12</sup> The differences between Salazar and Mussolini on issues such as totalitarianism, and the use of violence by the state, had already been the subject of an article by another Jesuit, Thomas O'Donnell, in *Studies*.<sup>13</sup>

A third Jesuit, W. P. MacDonagh, established a contrast between Salazar and the age he was living in, 'whose greatest art is the advertisement'.<sup>14</sup> Despite his many triumphs, MacDonagh stated, Salazar refused to publicise his actions, which, all told, entailed the sudden reversal of four hundred years of decline in Portugal which had been accentuated by an unfortunate experience of liberalism that 'had brought the country to ruin'. In this article MacDonagh trod ground familiar to Irish readers: the dismal record of the Portuguese First Republic (1910–26), Salazar's financial wizardry and a description of the institutions of the revolutionary New State, whose corporativism was state-imposed, and thus artificial, for very good reasons: 'A new system had to be imposed on a people whose whole development was stunted and far from normal.'<sup>15</sup> The already mentioned Ryan, in February 1941, praised Portugal's wartime actions, which included a strengthening of ties with the Holy See, the maintenance of a neutrality respected by all belligerents and the proud celebration of the historic 'double centenary' (1140 being considered the birth of Portugal and 1640 being the recovery of independence from Spain), 'an affirmation

<sup>10</sup> Michael Derrick, 'Portugal and Salazar', *Dublin Review*, 403 (October 1937), 271–85. Derrick was the author of a larger work on Salazar entitled *Salazar of Portugal*.

<sup>11</sup> John M. Ryan, 'Is Portugal Totalitarian?', *Irish Monthly*, Jan. 1940, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ryan, 'Portugal', 7.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas J. O'Donnell, SJ, 'Salazar and the New State of Portugal', *Studies*, 25 (1936) 131–44.

<sup>14</sup> W. P. MacDonagh, SJ, 'A Professor in Politics: Salazar and the Regeneration of Portugal', *Irish Monthly*, Aug. 1940, 417.

<sup>15</sup> MacDonagh, 'Professor', 425.

of Portugal's greatness and a stressing of her immense contribution to civilisation'.<sup>16</sup> Significantly, Ryan lamented the absence of an official Irish presence at the celebrations. The centenary celebrations were also the subject of an article by Thomas O'Donnell, who chose to concentrate on their religious significance: in May 1940 a Concordat was signed between Portugal and the Holy See, to the delight of the Irish writer. O'Donnell finished the article with a quotation from the pope: 'The Lord has given to Portugal a chief who has won for himself the love of his people, especially of his poorer people, and the respect of the whole world. All credit to him.'<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps the most significant of these laudatory pieces on the New State was a lecture delivered by yet another Jesuit, P. J. Gannon, entitled 'Salazar and his work', which was distributed to his cabinet colleagues by the Minister for Industry and Commerce, Séan MacEntee, in March 1940. Gannon was a clear convert to the New State, from which, he said, there was much to learn: 'Portugal has the honour of presenting us at the moment with the most successful attempt yet made to solve the problems which are troubling all peoples simultaneously and menacing our very civilisation'.<sup>18</sup> Salazar, according to Gannon, seemed to have discovered 'the way out of the labyrinth in which we all just now seem hopelessly lost'. Gannon's evaluation of Salazar's achievements was typical: a description of the condition in which Portugal found itself as a result of the constitutional chaos of the Republic, with forty governments and sixteen revolutions in sixteen years of government by 'gangsters' that led to a 'horror of parliamentary democracy'; a biography of Salazar, showing how, by 1928, 'there was no hope' for Portugal 'save him'; and finally a list of his triumphs, with an explanation of the workings of the new institutions. At the heart of these were the corporations, which grouped all who worked in a given industry. These vertical associations were founded on the belief that 'the class-war is an idiotic, as well as wicked, proposition, because it undermines the prosperity of the whole industry'. Corporations also reduced competition to a minimum. Gannon thought the system ideally suited for Portugal, having only one fault: although based on Catholic principles, Salazar's regime was being built on quicksand, for the Portuguese, after decades of masonic-liberal rule, had been dechristianised, and the process of their reconversion had not yet begun in earnest. He added, however, that Salazar was undoubtedly aware of this contradiction and would soon resolve it. As for Ireland, there was no need to abandon its democratic nature, which suited it well. However, corporativism could not be ignored. Its advantages seemed endless and its application to Ireland was desirable: 'Beginning with homes, it aims at making the country one home, one harmonious house-hold, not rent, in the name of liberty, into so many millions of unco-ordinated (sic) beings very like ants when their hive is destroyed'. Democracy, argued Gannon despite his earlier reference to the Irish case, was perfect in theory but imperfect in practice, and Salazar was working on the best alternative to it so far devised: 'it may

<sup>16</sup> John Ryan, 'Catholic Portugal in 1940', *Irish Monthly*, Feb. 1941, 71.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas O'Donnell, SJ, 'Portugal: A double centenary', *Studies*, 30 (1941), 272.

<sup>18</sup> 'Salazar and his work', Department of the Taoiseach S 11601A, NA, Dublin.

be the *via media* of the future: it, or some modification of it dictated by the environment, tradition, needs and character of the various peoples.<sup>19</sup>

A number of key factors concerning the New State and its corporative face were absent from these favourable articles. The fact that the New State was a repressive regime which, defended by the armed forces and a secret police (the Police for the Vigilance and Defence of the State, or PVDE), sent political prisoners into exile or to the Tarrafal camp in Cabo Verde was not, of course, mentioned. The New State benefited in this respect from the poor international record of the First Republic, which it had replaced, and which by 1926 had become a byword in Europe for disorder and political instability. Moreover, as can be expected, Salazar's presence in power was not an act of will on the part of a leader who had imposed himself on a nation, a view popular in the personality-dominated 1930s. Rather, Salazar's elevation was the result of a complex set of compromises between political, economic and even military groups, momentarily allied to each other in the face of a hostile foreign environment and domestic enemies. Portuguese corporativism was not, for industrialists, latifundist estate-owners and nationalist officers, an end in itself, but was rather the means by which to attain a number of objectives, many of which, notably the repression of the urban and rural working class, were in fact in opposition to the ideals of the vocational movement in Ireland. Even for Salazar, some historians have argued, corporativism was an ideological flag of convenience, allowing him to enjoy foreign adulation and an undeserved reputation as a socially aware reformer.<sup>20</sup> The New State existed above all to protect order, by force if necessary, and to provide a façade of legality, legitimacy and modernity while articulating the interests of its supporters. It used Catholicism, nationalism and colonialism as mobilising forces through which to build a mass following, while a spiralling bureaucracy kept the lower middle class employed. Salazar's commitment to the wellbeing of the Church in Portugal clouded the judgement of these Irish commentators, whose articles and lectures, as we shall see, were not based on first-hand observations.

As Ireland debated the merits of a vocational reorganisation of its political and economic life, the example of Portugal's New State was paraded before its populace as a shining example of what corporativism had to offer. It is worth noting that, as Dermot Keogh has pointed out, these defenders of Salazar's regime spoke without fear of contradiction, because no-one else – not even the state – was in a position to obtain information about what was going on in Portugal.<sup>21</sup> Father Gannon had asked 'those responsible for building up the New Ireland' to keep a close eye on developments in Portugal.<sup>22</sup> Irish interest in the New State was a reality, and was

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Tom Gallagher, *Portugal: A Twentieth-century Interpretation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 73–4.

<sup>21</sup> Keogh, *Ireland*, 112. Keogh returns to this point later in the same work: 'Salazar's Portugal had exercised a strong influence over many Irish advocates of vocationalism in the 1930s. The absence of Irish diplomatic representation in Lisbon, until mid-1942 [sic], left the government without sustained political reporting on the development of the corporate system there'. Keogh, *Ireland*, 174–5.

<sup>22</sup> Gallagher, *Portugal*, 73–4.

clearly reflected in Eamon de Valera's very first communication to Salazar proposing the establishment of an Irish legation in Lisbon, dated 27 August 1941: 'The Irish Government has watched with sympathy and admiration the great work of reconstruction which you have carried out in Portugal and, naturally, it wishes to observe it more closely.'<sup>23</sup> Announcing his decision to open the legation in Lisbon to Dáil Éireann, de Valera, the Taoiseach and Minister for Foreign Affairs, stated that 'we have all heard of the great advances which Portugal has made' under the leadership of Salazar, mentioning as well 'the progressive and Christian outlook of the Portuguese Government in handling its economic and other domestic problems'. This outlook had, according to de Valera, 'attracted attention and admiration throughout the world and, not least I think, in this country'.<sup>24</sup> This did not mean that de Valera himself was a supporter of corporative ideologies. He could not, however, be seen to break openly with them either. As J. J. Lee puts it, de Valera 'could hardly publicly denounce an ideology commended by the papacy'.<sup>25</sup> The possibility of an Axis victory in Europe might also mean the sudden need to refashion Irish politics along corporative lines. Colm O'Donovan certainly understood the observation of the workings of the New State to be a part of his brief. As he met Salazar for the first time, O'Donovan stressed the Irish government's interest in Salazar's reforms, being assured by Salazar – who, like de Valera, was both Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs (and also, until September 1944, Minister of War) – that all government departments would provide the Irish legation with the information required to allow O'Donovan to carry out his mission. Even during his first round of meetings, however, the Irish chargé d'affaires could see that not all was well in the way in which Portugal was governed. One of his very first conclusions about Portugal was that power was unusually centralised in the hands of Salazar. 'I get the impression', he wrote, 'that decisions on all matters, even of no special importance, are made at the top.'<sup>26</sup> In this he was absolutely correct. Salazar shunned cabinet meetings, preferring to meet individually with the other members of his government,<sup>27</sup> and by the end of the war, there were, within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, no junior ministers, no secretary general, and no directors general: below Salazar there was a large administrative gap until the heads of service were reached. O'Donovan's early interlocutors stressed that the social and economic difficulties caused by the war were making the New State's existence more difficult, and should be taken into account, but among these contacts the regime had some bitter critics. One unnamed Portuguese religious figure told O'Donovan that 'we [the Irish] 'had nothing to learn here, that there was no country in the world where there was so much poverty'.<sup>28</sup> Other diplomats had described Salazar's task as

<sup>23</sup> De Valera to Salazar, 27 Aug. 1941, DFA 317/40.

<sup>24</sup> 'Draft Statement for Minister', 1 Dec. 1941, DFA 317/40.

<sup>25</sup> J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 272.

<sup>26</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 4 Mar. 1942, DFA 219/81.

<sup>27</sup> Gallagher, *Portugal*, 66.

<sup>28</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 4 Mar. 1942, DFA 219/81. According to one contemporary source, Portuguese per capita income in 1941 stood at one half that of Ireland and one third that of Great Britain. George O'Brien, 'The Financial Policy of Dr. Salazar', *Studies*, Vol. 30 (1941), 358. The



'hopeless', because of the lack of 'good lieutenants' and the 'remarkable backwardness' of Portugal.<sup>29</sup>

Over his three years in Portugal O'Donovan would warn Dublin that the New State was not in any conceivable way a model to follow. This was not because of the dictatorial and repressive nature of the regime, rarely mentioned in O'Donovan's correspondence. What struck the Irish representative most was the New State's inability, through a mix of inefficiency and corruption, to cope with the most pressing problems affecting Portugal – notably poverty and its causes. O'Donovan concluded from his observations that not all the protagonists in the New State viewed the regime as a genuine attempt to establish a new political organisation; rather, it was the case that overt support for Salazar permitted a series of covert frauds which debased the principles upon which the New State was founded. The most obvious problem for the Portuguese was the lack of food in wartime. This was not a new problem. Portugal had long been in the paradoxical position of being an agricultural country unable to feed itself.<sup>30</sup> The agricultural character of the country was being deliberately preserved by Salazar, wary of an industrial development which might corrupt moral values the dictator believed to be intrinsic to the Portuguese. Salazar, moreover, refused to countenance any notion of agricultural reform, even one which, like the break-up of the southern latifundia estates, might increase production. The inviolability of land ownership was assured under the New State. The Second World War aggravated the food shortages, which in peacetime could be overcome through imports.

O'Donovan was amazed to find that rationing was not in place when he first arrived in Lisbon. Rationing of essential supplies had been well understood, in the First World War, to be essential in the maintenance of good domestic morale, through the creation of the idea that all, whatever their wealth, were making equal sacrifices.<sup>31</sup> In Portugal, rationing had not been introduced during the First World War, and the resulting social strife had been considerable.<sup>32</sup> The New State, however, felt sufficiently confident in its production and distribution arrangements not to introduce rationing. Salazar's government predicted that the country could produce enough to feed itself and see to it that this produce reached the consumer. This, at least, was the message O'Donovan received when he first enquired about the rationing of essential goods such as bread, flour, eggs and sugar.<sup>33</sup> On 15 January 1943, O'Donovan described the mechanics of the distribution of essential goods

Apostolic Nuncio was in agreement with this Portuguese priest. See O'Donovan to Secretary, 8 May 1942, DFA, Secretary's Office P 12/9, as well as Keogh, *Ireland*, 174–5.

<sup>29</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 8 May 1942, DFA, Secretary's Office P 12/9.

<sup>30</sup> In this, thus, Portugal differed totally from Ireland. As J. J. Lee has written, Ireland, during the war, 'had the good fortune to be, for practical purposes, self-sufficient in food'. Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985*, 234.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, John Horne, ed., *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe During the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>32</sup> See Filipe Ribeiro de Menezes, *União Sagrada e Sidonismo: Portugal em Guerra, 1916–1918* (Lisbon: Cosmos, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> O'Donovan to Dr Paula Brito, MNE, 1 Oct. 1942, DFA, Embassy Lisbon, Files about Portugal 6/10.

(which, at the time, were held to comprise sugar, salt cod, rice and pasta). This was to take place through the joint effort of the co-operative organisations (*grémios*) of wholesalers and of retailers, working to quotas fixed on the basis of 1940 levels of consumption. The system was based on the notion that there would be enough to eat if foodstuffs were properly distributed and smuggling to Spain did not take place. Very quickly the system was shown to be inadequate: by June 1943 the Irish legation was being informed of the introduction of orthodox rationing measures, and in October O'Donovan received the first ration cards, which related to the purchase of bread.<sup>34</sup> Ration cards for other products would follow as the war continued, but the damage had already been done. The problems the New State's reputation faced during the war was summed up in February 1946 by the interim chargé d'affaires, C. C. Cremin: whereas the *grémios* controlled 'all supplies in their particular branch of business', they had not ensured that prices were kept 'within reasonable limits'; moreover, the existence and action of the *grémios* had not done away with the black market, where all products could be found at a much higher price than that set by the *grémios*. As the Irish diplomat explained, 'the inference drawn (logically on the premises) is that those in the "Grémios" are exploiting the organisation for their personal profit'.<sup>35</sup>

In September 1943 O'Donovan described the state of apprehension and doubt that was gripping Lisbon, stressing the importance of the supplies question and the inadequacy of the government's response: 'There have been many arrests and punishments of firms found to have been hoarding but these measures, though popular, do not tackle the root of the problem, which lies in the failure of the Government to introduce an effective system of rationing.'<sup>36</sup> If something serious was not done soon, O'Donovan warned, the food situation would provoke 'more serious disorders in the future'. The introduction of rationing did not resolve the food shortages because of the corruption which permeated the corporative organisation in the country. There were also allegations that foodstuffs were indeed being exported, at premium prices, to the Axis powers. The monarchist newspaper *A Voz* criticised the working of the *grémios* in January 1945, in an article which attracted the attention of the Department of External Affairs.<sup>37</sup> Sending a translation of the article, O'Donovan pointed out that

it is hardly necessary to add that press criticism of the corporative organisations on general or fundamental grounds would not be permitted by the authorities here. But the public outcry against the inefficiency [sic] and corruption of the 'Grémios' and certain official organisations during the present emergency was on such a scale that it was doubtless thought wise to assent to the limited criticism contained in these articles.<sup>38</sup>

In his final report, in February 1945, O'Donovan contrasted the privations undergone by Portuguese workers, whose bread ration was down to 300 g. per day, with

<sup>34</sup> Notice received from the MNE Protocol, DFA, Embassy Lisbon, Files 6/10.

<sup>35</sup> Cremin to Secretary, DEA, 19 Feb. 1946, DFA, Embassy Lisbon, Files 6/6.

<sup>36</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 20 Sep. 1943, DFA 219/81.

<sup>37</sup> Secretary, DEA, to chargé d'affaires, Lisbon, 7 Jan. 1945, DFA, Embassy Lisbon, Files 6/6.

<sup>38</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 19 Jan. 1945, DFA, Embassy Lisbon, Files 6/6.

the 'very easy' life of 'those who have money'.<sup>39</sup> This corruption and its demoralising effects also provided the basis of a report sent by Patrick J. O'Byrne, the secretary of the legation, on 5 March 1945. What disappeared from the official channels of distribution, O'Byrne pointed out, turned up in other ways; in the case of potatoes, 'it seems phenomenal how, in presence of acute shortage, large sacks of them come to light from no one knows where to be sold under the noses of the authorities in the city of Lisbon itself at fancy prices'. To the Irish diplomat, it was clear that 'the lucky person with money to spend can obtain a sack with little difficulty at a price which is 70–90 per cent above the official rate'.<sup>40</sup> Three months later, O'Byrne claimed that the whole food distribution system was 'a long-standing joke with the public'.<sup>41</sup> The impression made on Irish observers of the New State by this most basic of failures was poor indeed, and it would be compounded by other obvious faults, leaving O'Donovan and his colleagues with the worst of opinions regarding the New State and its possible replication in Ireland.

As can be expected, the crisis of foodstuffs led to social unrest. This, for the New State, was especially embarrassing, because Salazar's greatest achievement, as perceived at the time both at home and abroad, was the restoration of order to Portugal: political order, exemplified by the longevity of his cabinets, and order in the streets, achieved by the banning of political parties and independent trade unions and the arrest or exile of political opponents. Organised protests revealed to observers that workers did not see in the existing corporative arrangements a fair and just mechanism by which to resolve their problems, resorting instead to traditional – but now illegal – forms of protest. Occasionally these protests had direct implications for Ireland: a dock workers' strike in November 1942 threatened the smooth operation of Irish Shipping Ltd in Lisbon, and news of the event quickly made its way through Irish government departments.<sup>42</sup> In February 1943 Salazar was forced to adopt extreme measures in order to maintain the smooth running of vital sectors of the economy. All workers in the fields of war materials, postal, telegraph and telephone services, transport, mining, energy, ports and naval construction, chemicals and vital food processing plants were made subject to the possibility of militarisation of their activity. What this potentially meant was the sudden introduction of military discipline in the workplace and the subsequent elevation of strike activity to military desertion. In June that year these draconian powers were first used against coal miners, although O'Donovan was not able to identify the circumstances as a result of which such a drastic step had been taken.<sup>43</sup> These measures were not in themselves sufficient to restore calm, and another tack was soon taken – that of momentary appeasement through wage increases.

<sup>39</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 22 Feb. 1945, DFA 313/11.

<sup>40</sup> O'Byrne to Secretary, DEA, 5 Mar. 1945, DFA, Embassy Lisbon, Files 6/10.

<sup>41</sup> O'Byrne to Secretary, DEA, 1 Jun. 1945, DFA, Embassy Lisbon, Files 6/10. According to Fernando Rosas, all of the solutions adopted by the government – including rationing – served only to increase bureaucracy through the proliferation of 'institutes' and 'regulating commissions'. Fernando Rosas (coordinator), *Portugal e o Estado Novo (1930–1960)* (Lisbon: Editorial Presença, 1992), 321.

<sup>42</sup> Boland to Leydon and Flynn, 9 Nov. 1942, DFA 219/81.

<sup>43</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 16 Jun. 1943, DFA 219/81.

O'Donovan reported in January 1944 that a 20 per cent increase had been approved in relation to the salaries of civil servants, the military and local authorities. The reason for this sudden generosity was, according to the Irish diplomat, fear of open revolt by troops weary of seeing their quality of life worsen through inflation and the black market. In O'Donovan's words, 'these concessions were wrung from the government virtually at the point of a pistol, the twice repeated rioting and strikes of the past twelve months and open revolt among the troops in the Azores having forced them to take action'.<sup>44</sup> O'Donovan saw in this course a reluctance to face up to the real problems affecting the country, and suggested that the sudden increase in wages would inevitably be matched by an increase in prices: but, he warned, 'there will undoubtedly be further unrest if something effective is not done to keep down the prices'.<sup>45</sup>

Another source of complaint from O'Donovan was the corruption and inefficiency of the lowly paid civil service, which matched that of the *grémios*. In May 1943, for example, he blamed the inability to provide a detailed report on economic and social conditions, as requested by Dublin, on the fact that 'the collection of necessary data has been much delayed by the slowness of the departments concerned'.<sup>46</sup> On another occasion O'Donovan mentioned the frustration felt by foreign correspondents stationed in Lisbon, who complained about the length of time needed to obtain the official permission to transmit their dispatches. As O'Donovan put it, 'it would seem to be largely a question of the incorrigible dilatoriness normal to Government offices here' clashing with the journalistic desire for speed.<sup>47</sup> When he left Portugal O'Donovan was even more blunt: 'The war is of course the great alibi of the authorities in regard to everything that is amiss but I think it cannot be doubted that a very large part of the difficulties arises from the system.'<sup>48</sup> Every question that arose was disputed by competing agencies, each proposing a different course of action 'so that endless time is lost in conferences and arguments and nothing is done'. For the common citizen, the only way to negotiate the system was to bribe systematically the badly paid public officials who stood in the way of a desired end 'in order to reduce the unconscionable delays that would otherwise ensue'. The result was a long string of prosecutions for these irregularities among traders, civil servants and officials in the *grémios*, which, however, failed to put an end to corruption.

Another example of the lack of initiative and drive to be found in the New State, according to O'Donovan, was the União Nacional. This was the political movement that was meant to embody and mobilise public support for the New State and the 'national revolution' it was supposedly carrying out. Because of Salazar's avowed anti-totalitarianism and the regime's elitism, however, it had no clear role to play. Unlike a democratic party, the União Nacional had no grassroots and no ability

<sup>44</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 8 Jan. 1944, DFA 219/81.

<sup>45</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 8 Jan. 1944, DFA 219/81.

<sup>46</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 13 May 1943, DFA, Embassy Lisbon, Files 6/3.

<sup>47</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 21 Dec. 1943, DFA 233/301.

<sup>48</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 22 Feb. 1945, DFA 313/11.

to generate policy, and unlike the Fascist and Nazi parties membership was not a prerequisite for high office. In a country ruled by a professor, it was the university that supplied the governing cadres of the New State. From within the União Nacional appeared the deputies to the National Assembly, who essentially rubber-stamped the government's legislation, and during the Spanish Civil War the União Nacional obtained permission to form an armed militia, the *Legião Portuguesa*, whose role was monitored and restricted by a jealous army. In January 1944, O'Donovan reported that the União Nacional, which for the past ten years had been essentially a 'dead letter', was to host a congress to debate some of the burning domestic, colonial, and international issues of the day.<sup>49</sup> Such an event was to be a part of a new drive in Portuguese political life, and the sudden awakening of the party might be interpreted as a desire to give the regime a less dictatorial aspect in the wake of the Azores agreement (which allowed the Allies to use the Lajes airfield), itself made possible only by Salazar's belief that an Allied victory was now assured. As the congress neared, however, O'Donovan's scepticism grew: 'it seems now to be the general view in circles which should know what is going on that the Congress will be more or less devoted to window dressing.'<sup>50</sup> For all the press coverage of the work of the various committees, it seemed clear to O'Donovan that 'nothing of great consequence will emerge from the Congress'.<sup>51</sup> This is not surprising, considering the emasculated role played by the União Nacional in Portuguese politics. Moreover, the União Nacional seemed incapable in 1944 even of performing its most basic function – that of associating eminent men with the regime: 'I have heard of a number of cases in which people who had been invited to speak or present papers had, through lack of interest, declined to do so.'<sup>52</sup> O'Donovan duly sent Dublin the congress resolutions in June 1944 but cast cold water on their importance, claiming that for all the attention focused by the press on the congress 'before and especially during its session', the public had never really warmed to its debates: the Portuguese, in fact, had followed much more closely the unfolding events in Normandy, where the fate of the continent was being decided.<sup>53</sup> Although a new course was indeed set for the regime at this time, as we shall see, it was the end of the war – and the Allies' victory – which determined the change.

The only branch of government whose efficiency was admired by Colm O'Donovan was the Propaganda Secretariat. Beginning with a discussion of a book published by F. C. C. Egerton, which praised Salazar and the New State without any real criticism, O'Donovan reflected on how little independent writing on

<sup>49</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 8 Jan. 1944, DFA 219/81.

<sup>50</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 31 Mar. 1944, DFA 219/81.

<sup>51</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 31 Mar. 1944, DFA 219/81.

<sup>52</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 31 Mar. 1944, DFA 219/81.

<sup>53</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 9 Jun. 1944, DFA 219/81. According to Fernando Rosas, 'the União Nacional continued to exist as a mere electoral support for the regime, an organism devoid of its own political life, which was reactivated or agitated . . . whenever such reactivation or agitation was convenient to the interests and objectives of those in power, and in particular served the strategy and tactics of Oliveira Salazar in order to ensure both the strengthening of his personal power and, above all, the continuity of the regime'. Rosas, *Portugal e o Estado Novo*, 54.

Portugal had actually been carried out. The Portuguese state, according to the Irish chargé d'affaires, was incredibly successful at promoting favourable articles and books whose facts were taken directly from Propaganda Secretariat publications. 'For instance', he explained, 'none of the writers of articles on Portugal in Irish periodicals appears to have any direct personal knowledge of Portugal.' O'Donovan's views on this trend were clear: no great harm would come from the usual Irish authors writing in praise of Salazar, 'but unfortunately they sometimes appear to write in favour of a system of government of the workings of which they know nothing'.<sup>54</sup> During the war, favourable pieces on the subject of the New State continued to appear in Ireland's conservative publications, written by the usual authors, who ignored, deliberately or otherwise, the difficulties Portugal was experiencing.<sup>55</sup> As far as O'Donovan was concerned, this lack of rigour when writing about Portugal was dangerous because of the discussion in Ireland concerning vocational organisation. In November 1944 O'Donovan sent a strong letter to Dublin complaining of not having been consulted by the Committee on Vocational Organisation (established by de Valera in 1938), whose report, published in August of that year, he had just read, and in which it was stated that the war had made it impossible to obtain official information from Portugal concerning its corporative institutions. The legation's very existence rendered false such a statement. O'Donovan's conclusion was especially damning in relation to the New State: Irish censorship should prevent the publication of the by now usual articles that praised the Portuguese regime without carrying out a critical evaluation of its achievements.<sup>56</sup> He added:

I cannot claim that I am competent to pass judgement on the system but I know enough to be perturbed that a public opinion in favour of this type of corporativism should be allowed to be created by persons of apparently no special competence at the time when the whole question was, as it were, *sub judice* at home and had certainly not emerged from the trial stage here.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 8 Jan. 1944, DFA 219/81. See also Memorandum for the Government (Department of Finance) Department of the Taoiseach S 11601A, which details the economic and financial policy of Portugal. As its authors readily and naively admit, 'the following quotations are taken from statements by Dr. Salazar . . . and from articles in the official bulletin, "Portugal", issued in English and French editions by the Portuguese Secretariat of National Propaganda'. The lack of rigour and hard facts when dealing with Portugal had already been identified by one of the regular contributors to *Studies*, Edward J. Coyne, in a review article in 1939: 'Portugal is still very much in the news in Catholic circles, judging by the number of new books and long articles published almost monthly. Yet of concrete, detailed and useful information about the political and economic life of present-day Portugal there is very little in English. There is practically nothing that is of sufficient critical and well-informed quality to enable one to judge the success or failure of Salazar's efforts in the various departments of social, economic and political life.' Coyne, book review, *Studies*, 28 (1939), 168–70.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, John M. Ryan, 'Portuguese Corporativism Now', *Irish Monthly*, March 1944.

<sup>56</sup> According to Dermot Keogh, the Commission on Vocational Organisation's report was badly received by politicians and civil servants, and made little impact as a result of both their criticisms and the Second World War, caused, after all, by many of the countries whose workings were covered by the report. Keogh, *Ireland*, 176.

<sup>57</sup> O'Donovan to Secretary, DEA, 27 Nov. 1944, DFA 219/81.

That the New State was still in a trial phase was demonstrated by the fact that the corporations, independent bodies regulating a specific industry, had not yet been created, despite the many claims to the contrary which, incredibly, had been published in Ireland.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, O'Donovan argued, it was possible to separate Salazar from this failed experiment: 'Salazar's main achievements, which are in the spheres of financial internal order, public works, and international affairs, have nothing whatever to do with the corporative system.'<sup>59</sup> O'Donovan urged the Irish government to heed his warning when taking any decision relating to vocational organisation and corporativism in general.<sup>60</sup> He was even more critical of the system's viability in his final report from Portugal: 'It does not appear to have taken root as one might expect it to have after ten years of trial if it was a healthy plant.' The idea that the corporations could exist without the strong state's support was false, and even the Corporative Chamber – the consultative upper house of parliament, supposedly representative of the economic interests of the country – was made up essentially of 'professors, lawyers and members of the learned professions', reflecting thus the failure of the whole experiment. The strength of O'Donovan's reaction to the report on vocational organisation suggests that at least in some official circles the transformation of Irish political life to suit the possibility of a German-dominated Europe had been discussed.

There was, of course, another set of reasons for O'Donovan's doubts about the New State's long-term prospects. Although not as closely related to the Axis powers as Franco, Salazar, as a dictator, was undoubtedly on the defensive as the Second World War's outcome became increasingly predictable. A war against fascism and dictatorship was being won, and the activity of the democratic opposition within Portugal was increasing with the expectation that no longer would any European dictatorships be tolerated. The first mention that the regime's future was questionable as a result of the war's course came in 1943, when Mussolini was cast aside by both the Fascist party and the king of Italy. According to O'Donovan, this piece of news 'was received here with great satisfaction by the populace, probably because of the prospect it seemed to offer of the shortening of the war rather than because of any effect that it might be thought to have on the regime here'.<sup>61</sup> That the government was ill at ease with the news and the intense discussions it provoked 'in the streets, trams, cafés etc.', however, was shown by the fact that 'cafés and bars' had been forced to close early by the police on two successive nights and by the strident tone of the pro-Salazar press. The *Diário da Manhã*, rightly taken by O'Donovan to be the mouthpiece of the government, fooled nobody by its strident proclamation that 'we Portuguese, at least among Europeans, have the best reasons

<sup>58</sup> The corporations were only created in 1956, by which time, as Tom Gallagher points out, 'almost all the impetus had gone out of the corporative revolution'. What had existed in their place were the 'state-run agencies known as Organisations of Economic Co-ordination'. Gallagher, *Portugal*, 73.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> In this he was not alone. For the political and official response to the report, see Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985*, 275–7.

<sup>61</sup> O'Donovan to DEA, 29 Jul. 1943, DFA 219/81.

of any people for receiving with serenity the departure of the Fascist chief'.<sup>62</sup> A telegram sent in October 1944 spoke of the foreboding with which the Portuguese authorities viewed the destruction of Germany and Russia's victory.<sup>63</sup> As the war came to an end, and the Allied powers began to put pressure on Franco to quit his position in Spain, speculation was rife in Lisbon over whether or not Salazar could survive the forced removal of the Spanish *Caudillo*. There is plenty of evidence in the Irish diplomatic archives of the pressures that Salazar was coming under at the time of the end of the war. Describing the way in which V-E Day was celebrated in Lisbon, O'Byrne mentioned the size of the crowds and the way the Western Allies' flags – symbols of a longed-for democracy – were enthusiastically waved by the population.<sup>64</sup> The situation worsened as the Labour Party came to power in Britain, a development which hinted at a hardening of attitudes against Franco,<sup>65</sup> and as the Potsdam communiqué, which included a harsh indictment of Franco, was published.<sup>66</sup> It is interesting to note that these events were not held to pose a direct threat to Salazar, but rather only an indirect danger via the possibility of a change of government in Spain.<sup>67</sup> C. C. Cremin, describing his first round of meetings with other colleagues in Lisbon, passed on the views of the Danish minister, who had been in Lisbon since 1941: 'some kind of trouble in Spain is inevitable and . . . developments there could not but fail to have a direct influence' in Lisbon.<sup>68</sup>

On 22 February 1945, as we have seen, O'Donovan related the contents of his final round of meetings in Portugal. He began with his meeting with Salazar. Once again the Irish chargé d'affaires brought up de Valera's interest in Portugal's corporative experiment, this time in order to obtain Salazar's own views on its results. According to the dictator, the war was hampering the development of the system, having prevented, for example, the creation of the corporations. Asked what the greatest difficulties he had so far encountered had been, Salazar replied, according to O'Donovan, that 'the greatest danger we have encountered has been the monopolistic tendency of the organisations', which obstructed the appearance and development of rival enterprises. In other words employers, united in the *grêmios*, used their official connections and status to stifle any competition. It was significant, according to O'Donovan, that Salazar had replied with the word 'dangers' to a question that mentioned only 'difficulties'. Other entities, not surprisingly, were more pessimistic than Salazar. Cardinal Cerejeira, head of the Roman Catholic Church in Portugal, expressed his concern both for the continued

<sup>62</sup> O'Donovan to DEA, 29 Jul. 1943, DFA 219/81.

<sup>63</sup> O'Donovan to DEA, 23 Oct. 1944, DFA, Secretary's Office P 12/9.

<sup>64</sup> O'Byrne to Secretary, DEA, 5 Jun. 1945, DFA 313/11.

<sup>65</sup> Cremin to Secretary, DEA, 2 Aug. 1945, DFA, Embassy Lisbon, Files 6/5. See also Cremin to Secretary, 30 Sep. 1945, DFA, Secretary's Office p 12/9.

<sup>66</sup> Cremin to Secretary, DEA, 11 Aug. 1945, DFA, Embassy Lisbon, Files 6/5.

<sup>67</sup> The view held by foreign diplomats in Portugal was that whatever course Spain followed would be replicated soon thereafter in Portugal. Thus, if Spain succumbed to communism, the Portuguese Communist Party would capture power; but if Spain managed a transition to a parliamentary monarchy, then the same could take place in Portugal as well. See, for example, Cremin to Secretary, DEA, 21 Sep. 1945, DFA 313/11.

<sup>68</sup> Cremin to Secretary, DEA, 23 Aug. 1945, DFA 313/11.



poverty in Portugal and the high levels of corruption; from his careful phrasing O'Donovan inferred that 'he [the Cardinal] implied that the trouble might be inherent in the system'. Cerejeira also reflected on the inability of the corporative organisations to stand on their own two feet, as Salazar had originally intended. The reason advanced by the prelate was the absence of trained individuals not in the employment of the state. The harshest of all verdicts was, however, passed by the apostolic nuncio: 'He regarded the corporative state in Portugal as a camouflage and all imposture and holds out that it will collapse without Salazar.' Moreover, 'it had not "caught on" with the people, on whom it was imposed by force', and 'it had nothing in common with the ideals behind the encyclicals, despite propaganda claims in that direction'. The nuncio urged O'Donovan to encourage the British Foreign Office to intervene in Portugal if it wanted to save Salazar and the country from a violent revolution. The seriousness with which such a warning, coming from the Vatican's diplomatic service, was received in Dublin should not be underestimated – and this report, the culmination of O'Donovan's work in Portugal, was clearly meant as the final nail in the coffin of the New State's respectability and value as a model for adoption in Ireland.

Doubts about the survival of the regime did not mean that Irish diplomats – O'Donovan and his successors – looked with satisfaction at the prospect of Salazar falling from power. To the Irish, and to other foreign commentators, Salazar was indeed the saviour of Portugal, even if the men who surrounded him were not of the same calibre. Leading opposition figures were either unequivocally linked with the First Republic (being former politicians or their sons) or tainted with the communist brush. With the war coming to an end, Salazar announced the intention of revising electoral procedures and permitting elections 'as free as those in free England'. Cremin was sure that the new international climate was behind this move, and wondered how the regime could cope with the existence of a permanent opposition: once tolerated, and applauded by some abroad – those whom Cremin, with some disdain, collectively described as 'foreign "democratic" criticism' – the opposition in Portugal could not be easily suppressed. These elections were scheduled, by decree of 6 October 1945, for 18 November that year.<sup>69</sup>

An electoral contest then developed between the sluggish União Nacional and an

<sup>69</sup> On 7 Oct. 1945 an article appeared in the *Observer* claiming that Salazar's moves should not 'be taken as indicating a revival of democracy in the Peninsula, for in Portugal, as in Spain, elections do not count for much . . . In the last six years the regime has adopted the worst features of Nazism and Fascism, with a Gestapo, political persecutions, deportations, political prisons, secret prisons, rigid censorship, and absolute control of the Press.' Cremin, commenting on the article, stated that it did not take into account the latest electoral legislation, adding laconically, 'it is clear that the writer does not like the system here and consequently tends to exaggerate certain aspects of it; but there is no doubt a fundamental justification for his criticism if one starts from the viewpoint that all non-democratic systems are condemned without justification.' Cremin to Secretary, DEA, 11 Oct. 1945, DFA, Embassy Lisbon, Files 6/14. The following day Cremin sent a brief telegram following a conversation with the British ambassador, an Irishman named O'Malley. According to the ambassador, the *Observer* article had probably been written 'by Jew named Deutscher', and O'Malley had written to the Foreign Office 'to say this type of article harmful and spoils atmosphere required for his business'.

opposition coalition, the Movimento de União Democrática (MUD).<sup>70</sup> In the MUD were ranged all political opposition forces, from anarchists and the Portuguese Communist Party to the republicans ousted in 1926 and their followers. Press restrictions were momentarily lifted, one newspaper in particular, *A República*, becoming quite openly the mouthpiece of the MUD.<sup>71</sup> Just before the election, however, the MUD called on its supporters to boycott the poll, exasperated by the government's actions, which included the refusal to prolong the campaign period, the refusal to allow for a new period of voter registration (essential, as the MUD saw it, because for over ten years of dictatorship only Salazar's supporters had deigned to register),<sup>72</sup> and the violent seizure of lists of MUD supporters by the PVDE. This move allowed for the full weight of repressive measures to be quietly applied to those who had become involved in the MUD at any level. All of these machinations were observed by the Irish diplomats, but no condemnation was made. In fact, Cremin seems to have been unduly harsh on the MUD, judging it by standards applicable to an opposition in a parliamentary democracy. He wrote, in one instance, 'the opposition has not hitherto come forward with anything in the manner of a positive programme. Briefly stated, their programme is the restoration of individual liberty and the abolition of certain features of the present regime – the 'grémios' and corporative system generally, and all measures restricting individual freedoms.'<sup>73</sup> It is clear from such a programme that the MUD merely wanted to remove Salazar and the New State in order to restore parliamentary democracy, before breaking up into its constituent parts; but so great was the lack of faith in Portuguese politicians' ability to work such a system that Cremin unfairly preferred to focus on the movement's lack of concrete policies. Against this he contrasted the 'excellent record' of the government 'in the spheres of finance, public works, foreign affairs and internal political stability'.<sup>74</sup> The duality of treatment continued in Cremin's assessment of the strength of support for the MUD, which, he initially estimated, had the potential to become a strong opposition, 'particularly among the classes subject to foreign ideas and influence' and among the 'lower classes (whose lot has not been markedly improved by the "New State")'.<sup>75</sup> Some time later Cremin, who like other observers was at a loss to understand why Salazar had decided upon the holding of the elections in the first place, reported that both Salazar and the opposition leaders themselves were surprised at the MUD's strength, Salazar feeling 'that he is the victim of gross ingratitude'.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>70</sup> The MUD's initial manifesto was essentially concerned with the running of the elections, calling as it did for total freedom of the press, of assembly and of propaganda, an amnesty for all political prisoners, an equal share in the process of electoral registration, a presence in the voting areas and the ability to supervise the count.

<sup>71</sup> Cremin to Secretary, DEA, 13 Oct. 1945, DFA, Embassy Lisbon, Files 6/14.

<sup>72</sup> A recent estimate is that only 12 per cent of the population was registered to vote. Rosas, *Portugal e o Estado Novo*, 58.

<sup>73</sup> Cremin to Secretary, DEA, 19 Oct. 1945, DFA, Embassy Lisbon, Files 6/14.

<sup>74</sup> Cremin to Secretary, DEA, 19 Oct. 1945, DFA, Embassy Lisbon, Files 6/14.

<sup>75</sup> Cremin to Secretary, DEA, 19 Oct. 1945, DFA, Embassy Lisbon, Files 6/14.

<sup>76</sup> Cremin to Secretary, DEA, 10 Nov. 1945, DFA, Embassy Lisbon, Files 6/14.

The União Nacional duly won the elections after the MUD's early withdrawal, providing all 120 deputies for the National Assembly, with 60 per cent of the electorate, according to official sources, having participated in what had become essentially a plebiscite. Cremin, while stating that there was 'no way of measuring the validity of the figures', contradicted himself by arguing that the figures showed that the opposition had no ground for the claim, made during the campaign, that it had 50 per cent of the Lisbon electorate on its side.<sup>77</sup> Similar partiality would mark the coverage of the 1949 presidential elections by another Irish diplomat, Count O'Kelly de Gallagh.

With the war over, the very reasons which had led to the legation's establishment disappeared: normal trade conditions and the freedom of movement were slowly restored in western Europe, and censorship was lifted, while the dream of a high moral authority to be enjoyed by the neutral nations dissipated in the face of an absolute victory by one of the contending parties. Ireland and Portugal dealt with the new diplomatic reality in different ways, which, not surprisingly, considering the very different nature of their respective neutralities, saw their paths diverge. What the correspondence from the legation in Lisbon makes clear, however – apart from the real economic significance that Portugal held for Ireland during the war – is that the very great attraction that the New State once held for Irish eyes faded significantly through close observation by Colm O'Donovan and his colleagues. Corruption, inefficiency and poverty were terms now indelibly attached to the picture official Ireland had of Portugal. This did not mean that approval of Salazar's actions had vanished; it was still very much in place, for the New State continued to provide a bastion of stability, order, Catholicism and anti-communism. Even Portugal's colonialist stance was not yet a hindrance to Irish–Portuguese relations. Nevertheless, the New State was no longer seen as a pioneering regime, capable of presenting Ireland with a new way forward and a successful solution to the problems of the age.

<sup>77</sup> Cremin to Secretary, DEA, 24 Nov. 1945, DFA, Embassy Lisbon, Files 6/14. Fernando Rosas calls the MUD the 'biggest organised and mass movement against the New State that the opposition created during the existence of the regime toppled on 25 April 1974'. Rosas, *Portugal e o Estado Novo*, 59.