

THE CONVENTION OF GRAMIDO (1847)

The Convention of Gramido ended a series of disturbances in Portugal in the mid-1840s. Many of the problems can be traced back to the work of Costa Cabral (later Conde de Tomar) as finance minister, who had introduced a wide variety of reforms and modernizations, in public administration, the military, and public health, as well as major improvements to the infrastructure of the country. While many of these benefitted the commercial activities of Portugal, others were seen as interfering with the traditional life of the countryside. Chief among these was the transfer of the costs of the road system to local câmaras and local taxpayers, the restructuring of the tax system, and the new public health/burial laws. The new tax system required the re-registration of all land which resulted in both the loss of public or communal land to private hands and the more efficient collection of taxes from everyone; the new burial laws required not just burial in cemeteries outside the towns, but also the purchase of a death certificate, often delayed until the family had also settled outstanding dues to the local parish.

A variety of disturbances or rebellions occurred in 1846-47. One was the Maria da Fonte Rebellion against these liberal reforms affecting the countryside. The government was unable to suppress this dissent and a new, more conservative ministry came into power, first under the Duke of Palmela and then the Duke of Saldanha, which rescinded most of the unacceptable reforms.

At the same time the Miguelists took advantage of the situation to stage a small comeback. Forces under Ranald MacDonell (former commander-in-chief of Dom Miguel's army in 1833) moved from Spain into the Upper Douro region. But the government forces defeated them in December 1846 and MacDonell himself was killed in a skirmish in January 1847.

The government was also dealing with continued agitation from the "Setembrists", a radical group who had taken over the government in September 1836 and had introduced a new constitution in 1838. But they had also proved unsuccessful in dealing with the economic problems and on-going factionalism of the political scene, and by 1842 had been pushed aside by a more conservative administration (which included Costa Cabral). The Constitutional Charter of 1826 was re-instated.

The Setembrists, however, were not gone, and by October 1846 the north was in open revolt. This rebellion – the "Patuleia" (a corruption of "pata-ao léu" or "barefoot") – centred in Porto, continued until the early summer of 1847. The Miguelist troubles allowed the Lisbon government to call into play the 1834 Quadruple Alliance (Britain, France, liberal Spain, liberal Portugal) which tried to negotiate (unsuccessfully) with the rebels, but then exerted military pressure with an Anglo-Spanish blockade of Porto and incursions of Spanish troops along the eastern border. The forced surrender of the rebels led to an armistice entitled the Convention of Gramido (29 June 1847), which generally included amnesties and a return to the status quo ante.

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