

## **The Liberal Revolution of 1820 (A revolução Liberal de 1820)**

**Bilingual book by José Luís Cardoso**

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José Luis Cardoso's admirable bilingual book - The Liberal Revolution of 1820 - walks us through the steps leading up to Constitutionalism in Portugal. This short review aims at summarising the meaning and scope of what actually took place during this very unstable and intricate time in Portuguese history.

On 24th August 1820, the Portuguese troops based in Oporto gathered together to show their opposition to the Regency that governed the country in the name of King Joao VI. They demanded the return of the king to Portugal from Rio de Janeiro and the entrusting to a provisional governing body the mandate of preparing a new Constitution for the country. Those working towards this new regime preferred the word "Regeneration" to the word Revolution which had many negative connotations, one of which was the circular route leading back to its starting point. If the violent anti-monarchical, anti-clerical and anti-aristocratic fight against the "ancien régime" typified the French Revolution of 1789, the protagonists in Portugal were adamant that they wanted to establish peacefully new universal rights for most of the citizens and to disengage the country from the yoke of English commercial domination.

The substantial increase in productivity and prosperity associated with the British Industrial Revolution, the ever-growing use of capital and technology applied to the industrial sector, the introduction of the steam engine and its practical motive-power applications in all walks of life, and the new forms of organisation and use of labour were all leading to a significant increase in the supply of manufactured goods. These required new markets, new consumers and new trade agreements worldwide. Adam Smith's essay "The wealth of Nations" published in 1776 was a major milestone in the new science of "Political Economy". In Spain, the proclamation of Cadiz pumped new life into liberal political ideas throughout southern Europe and Greece involving secret societies and pressurising Austria into disengaging itself from Italy after the Congress of Vienna.

Portugal at the time was ruled by a Regency (King Joao and his court having left for Brazil in 1807 with British assistance, when the arrival of the French in Lisbon was imminent). The Regency was politically and militarily dominated by Great Britain, the power that had helped the country to fight and win the Peninsular war (1807-1814) against Napoleon. For Britain, Portugal held strategic importance because of its ports and the richness and potential of its colonial empire – especially Brazil. The king's departure to Brazil was used to justify renewed trade relations between Portugal and Great Britain via a "friendship treaty" signed

in February 1810 and the subsequent Royal Charter of March 1810, masterminded by great Portuguese statesman Dom Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho.<sup>1</sup> Portugal did not fare well under this agreement, which gave Britain preferential access to Brazilian markets and to Brazilian ports.

Another bone of contention for the Portuguese was the pressure put on Portugal by the British to comply with the abolition of the slave trade – English compensation being largely insufficient to counterbalance the loss of wealth generated by the trade for the Portuguese. In 1815, the creation of the “United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil and the Algarves” put an end to the colonial status of Brazil but was doomed from the very beginning. Protests were voiced on both sides of the Atlantic and in London, especially, by the Portuguese community and by diplomats serving there.

The British were supporting financially a huge military deployment in Portugal after the expulsion of the Napoleonic troops in 1812 and 1813 and they felt that as the Portuguese army was under the command of a British officer, William Carr Beresford, and the British Ambassadors (Charles Stuart or George Canning) were instrumental in the daily running of the Regency government, they had a right to dictate policies and oversee political, judicial and economic affairs. Of course, many Portuguese felt humiliated by this state of affairs and turned first to Gomes Freire de Andrade, a well-respected, well-versed military commander to lead a conspiracy to change the situation but his role was discovered and he was brutally executed with eleven other army officers. The Campo de Martires da Patria in Lisbon still speaks today of that tragic episode of Portuguese History.

Gomes Freire de Andrade's ill-fated uprising in 1817 did not dampen the spirit of those who believed that change was possible. Magistrates, businessmen, intellectuals, merchants, tradesmen and, later, military commanders were instrumental in secretly creating the “Sinédrio” that published a first Charter in 1818, followed in 1820 by another one that was sent to the King and Court in Rio de Janeiro. The Liberal triumph in Spain and signing of the Cadiz Constitution by King Ferdinand VII served as a kind of “green light” for the reformers to go public. The “Manifesto à Nação”, drafted by Manuel Fernandes Tomas, basically asked King Joao VI to return to Portugal as “saviour of a homeland in tatters, the guarantor of national unity”.

At this stage, the opposition requested no major change in the prevailing political order (respect for the Throne, the House of Braganza and the Altar) but did establish a “Provisional Board of the Supreme Government of the Kingdom” in the name of the King, thus *de facto* ousting the Regency. What had started as a joyful, peaceful uprising in Porto

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secret\\_Convention\\_on\\_the\\_Transfer\\_of\\_the\\_Portuguese\\_monarchy\\_to\\_Brazil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secret_Convention_on_the_Transfer_of_the_Portuguese_monarchy_to_Brazil)

was then followed by a proclamation in Lisbon's Rossio Square stating that the protagonists were responsible "for a political body provisionally in charge of the direction and public administration and the preparatory work for the calling of Parliament, at which time their work would cease once and for all and the said body be dissolved as solemnly promised and sworn" (Araujo 1846, 139).

The Martinhada – a vintista movement that opposed the military faction and the faction of enlightened magistrates within the Liberal Revolution showed that all was not plain sailing for the Regenerators and that there were numerous political tensions to be contended with within their ranks. But the first session of the Constituent Assembly sat on 29 January 1821, presided by Manuel Fernandes Tomas, who presented "A Report on the State and Administration of the Kingdom" outlining key reforms to be undertaken in the future. This was well received by the Liberals within the country and in countries around the Mediterranean. The Holy Alliance (Austria, Prussia, Russia and later England) took a much sterner view on developments, not wanting to see a repeat of the French Revolution or any movements which might jeopardise their own domestic autocratic regimes.

The final Constitution, comprising two hundred and forty articles, was formally approved on 23rd September 1822, having been "accepted" by the King in Rio de Janeiro on 26th February 1821. His attitude contrasted with the strong animosity shown by Queen Carlota Joaquina, the Regency and the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon, who point-blank refused to sign any such document.

The ship that carried King Joao VI and the Royal Family back to Portugal arrived in Lisbon on 3rd July 1821. Inevitable tension arose when the Constitution was discussed with the King and when Freedom of the Press was referred to, but there was no turning back, or so it seemed.

The counter-revolutionary press, benefitting from this newly granted freedom, would soon be decisive in demolishing the Regeneration's political project, preparing public opinion for the Vilafrancada absolutist coup of Prince Miguel that was soon to put a stop to the Liberal Revolution. Another coup de grâce was the proclamation of Independence of Brazil on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1822, only a few days before the approval of the Portuguese Constitution. Brazil had *de facto* become economically self-reliant when the 1808 decree opened Brazilian ports to international trade, controlled by the British navy. Protests were staged against the King; growing support was being voiced for the Liberal cause in Continental Portugal; leaving Prince Pedro behind in Brazil resulted in two separate but friendly constitutional monarchies having to work together on the basis of a common political legacy born of the same dynastic legitimacy.

Once again it was news from Spain that was to have an impact on the Liberal Revolution, leading D. Miguel to head an insurrection designed to restore the absolutist legitimacy of the royal House of Braganza in Portugal. He managed to successfully repeal the measures that had been decreed by the Liberal movement but the lessons of this political experience certainly initiated the first phase of Portuguese Constitutionalism and were not lost. The 1820 Revolution was indeed a decisive step towards the construction of a modern constitutional monarchy in the aftermath of the Civil War of 1832-1824.

As the bicentenary celebrations of the 1820 Liberal Revolution begin, it is important to be able to reflect on the changes that paved the way for Portugal to be the amazing country we know today.

José Luís Cardoso's bilingual book of 200 pages is of high quality and excellently presented. Philatelists should note that it also includes copies of the commemorative stamps issued to celebrate the Bicentennial.

A brief presentation of the book can be viewed and downloaded (12mb) at:

<https://www.ctt.pt/contentAsset/raw-data/327398d3-b031-472a-8da6-74b342244309/ficheiro/1ea27773-8bab-417b-8b5e-67f5cafbf004/export/Divulga%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20Livro%20A%20Revolu%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20Liberal%20de%201820.pdf>

The book can be purchased (€37) at CTT branches or online at <https://www.ctt.pt/femce/sku.aspx?shopCode=LOJV&itemCode=20193819599>

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