

# Manufacturing Consent and Dissent: Protagonists and Themes of the First Wave of Associative Congresses in Portugal (1865-1934)

*Fabricando consensos e conflitos: protagonistas e temas da primeira onda de congressos associativos em Portugal (1865-1934)*

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**Abstract:** This article analyses the emergence of a new repertoire of collective action in Portugal, the associative congresses, seeking to clarify their nature and impacts. This study comes from the census and analysis of the 304 associative congresses organized in Portugal since the 1st Social Congress, in 1865, until the imposition of corporatism, in 1934, with a total of 1733 theses debated in all of them. As a result, we were able to characterize this phenomenon as an overall process of political mobilization, distinguishing its actors, alliances, and antagonisms, and evaluating, through these sources, the evolution of different political “fields” during the crisis of liberalism. This observation is fundamental to understand the origin of the social and political polarisation that preceded the longest European dictatorship.

**Keywords:** Association; Political Mobilization; Crisis of Liberalism.

**Resumo:** O presente artigo analisa a emergência de um novo repertório de ação coletiva em Portugal, os congressos associativos, procurando esclarecer a sua natureza e os seus impactos. Resulta do recenseamento e da análise dos 304 congressos associativos organizados em Portugal desde o I Congresso Social, de 1865, até a imposição do corporativismo, em 1934, bem como de 1733 teses debatidas nos mesmos. Foi possível caracterizar este fenómeno como um amplo processo de mobilização política, distinguindo os seus atores, as suas alianças e os seus antagonismos, e avaliar, através destas fontes, a evolução de diferentes “campos” políticos durante a crise do liberalismo. Esta observação é fundamental para se compreender a origem da polarização social e política que antecedeu a mais longa ditadura europeia.

**Palavras-chave:** Associativismo; Mobilização Política; Crise do Liberalismo.

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## INTRODUCTION

The increase of International congresses from the mid-19th century onwards was recognized as a relevant historical phenomenon. The American jurist Simeon Baldwin identified them as “forces working for world solidarity”, distinguishing the intergovernmental congresses from the unofficial ones. According to the author, the latter gathered on an “equal footing”, by “natural tendencies”, “servants of no master”, and “have discovered the advantages of numbers and that they can exert great influence” (Baldwin, 1907, p. 573). On the other hand, the “unofficial” congresses also caught the attention of the scholar, John Culbert Faries, for their broadened scope, covering all spheres of social life – economic, recreational, religious and social interests – as well as industrial life, public health, charity and assistance, morals and Peace (Baldwin, 1915, p. 73).

The expansion of civil society in the 19th century has drawn the attention of historians. Within this line of research, several forms of periodization have been tried, including the first wave of international associational congresses, which ascended in the mid-19th century and was interrupted by World War I, reaching a sharp decline in the 1930s (Davies, 2014).

This first congress wave has also been subject to different categorizations. In parallel to the international exhibitions, Rasmussen stresses a growth in congresses that, due to their so-called “ideological, political or religious” nature, were not integrated into the official program, but were organized in the same cities to influence public policies (Rasmussen, 1989, p. 30). In addition to the distinction between official and unofficial congresses, the different congresses that bring together the literate elites, compared to those organized in working-class circles (Van Daele, 2005, p. 439), should also be underlined.

Finally, these differences also concern scale. Due to the availability – by the Union of International Associations – of an extensive database of international congresses organized since 1851, the historical analysis of this phenomenon has mainly focused on the transnational sphere (Grandjean; Van Leeuwen, 2019, pp. 225-242), and studies on its significance and impact in a national context are almost non-existent. The landmark study coordinated by Christian Topalov (1999) analyzed the evolution of congressional activity in modernity as a result of transnational networks and organizations, and his followers have privileged this scale.

However, the process of political mobilization initiated in the last decades of the 19th century, which has in the congresses “the most frequent occasion

of political expression” (Tilly, 2005, p. 20), with distinct national outcomes, being the corporative integration of the popular layers the most extreme one (Fernandes, 2009, p. 166). Fernando Rosas classifies this process as the “crisis of oligarchic liberalism”, translated into an “unprecedented irruption of the masses in politics, by the emergence of new social classes and groups, and new political parties, born from the wave of industrialization” (Rosas, 2009, p. 16) – the Republican and the Socialist, for example (Pinto; Almeida, 2000, pp. 3-21). However, notwithstanding the influence of these new parties, we should highlight the civic mobilization expressed in the form of associations and social movements that adopted the congress as a standard instrument of civic participation across borders.

This article results from a research project funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology (CEECIND/00764/2017), which focuses on the evolution of the collective action repertoire in the long term. This survey revealed the importance of congresses by gathering legitimate representatives of the associative movement, which approved a wide range of resolutions addressed to public authorities through rigorous elective and resolute rules. These congresses’ programs, regulations, minutes, and theses constitute a documentary corpus that has been unexplored. Their scrutiny, complemented by an exhaustive review of the associative press, had allowed for the listing of 304 congresses – between 1865, the date of the first Social Congress, and 1934, when a corporative regime was imposed – and also for the identification, categorization, and analysis of 1733 theses, which illustrate the most mobilizing topics and the different perspectives discussed.

The database created for the inventory of the Portuguese Associational Congresses was based on different theoretical and methodological references. Firstly, promoters and participants were identified, considering the growing diversification of social movements, involving different institutions and schools of thought (Topalov, 1999) as well as the variety of positions from its activists and the consequent intersection between various movements (Leonards; Randraad, 2010). The number and representativeness of delegates were also considered – the “advantage of numbers” –, according to Baldwin (1907), but also according to Tilly, who argues that modern social movements present themselves as “respectable, united, numerous, and committed” (1999, p. 257).

The application of new digital tools to the semantic analysis of congress proceedings has revealed their leading causes (Saunier, 2012), highlighting specific predominant themes, such as education or social insurance (Rodogno; Struck; Vogel, 2015; D’Haeninck; Hengchen; Verbruggen, 2017). Some of these

causes have given rise to autonomous institutions and congresses, such as pedagogy congress. However, different authors conclude that it is impossible to understand the evolution of their debates without considering them within the framework of a broader movement for social reform (Thiry; D’Haeninck; Verbruggen, 2019, p. 191). According to these benchmarks, two levels of categorization were applied to the theses. First, theses that refer to doctrinal and internal organization issues were distinguished from those that address the State and claim its intervention in the economic and social spheres. About the latter, they were then grouped according to the central themes.

This inventorying and categorization confirmed that Portugal closely follows international trends concerning the dominant movements and causes involved in this repertoire. Moreover, the qualitative analysis of the different theses allows for a deeper understanding of the social antagonisms that led Portugal to a dictatorial solution. In this article, after describing the formation and decline of the first wave of associative congresses in Portugal, identifying their main actors, we move on to a quantitative analysis of the dominant themes in the listed theses. Finally, through their qualitative research, we seek to trace the evolution of the different positions conveyed, arguing that they reflect the division of Portuguese society on the eve of Salazarism.

## THE FIRST CONGRESS WAVE IN PORTUGAL

Congress norms and practices spread in Portugal through the participation of official representatives, scientists and intellectuals in the transnational “reformer field” (Topalov, 1999), since the first hygienist and welfare congresses in the mid-19th century (Garnel, 2009, p. 231). These delegates integrated a “thick solidarity chain, where liberals, Masons, socialists and men of republican culture coexisted” (Garrido; Pereira, 2018, p. 107), among who stood out the founders of the *Centro Promotor dos Melhoramentos das Classes Laboriosas* (Centre for Promoting the Improvement of Working Classes), in 1852 (Lázaro, 2014, p. 98). This institution was the promoter of the first Social Congress in 1865, which mobilized 71 mutual society institutions of artisans and agricultural commercial, industrial, scientific, literary, instruction and charity associations (Federação, 1865-1866).

Associative institutions were gathered again during the Tricentenary of Camões, when the young Portuguese Republican Party (PRP) mobilized the population in a great manifestation of nationalism. The organizing committee for the First Congress of Portuguese Associations in 1882, which would be

repeated annually until 1885, included leaders of the young Socialist and Republican parties, and mobilized 150 different associations (Primeiro Congresso das Associações Portuguesas, 1883).

In parallel, as a reaction to the “de-Christianization” of civil society, the first Catholic Congress was organized in 1871, gathering eighteen Catholic writers and orators under the direction of D. António de Almeida, deeply connected to the papacy and the European Catholic movement (Clemente, 1989, p. 181). After that, they decided to boost the country’s regeneration through Catholic associations, newspapers and congresses, organizing four more meetings until 1885 (Gomes, 1984).

In the last decade of the 19th century, there was a diversification of protagonists and themes and a specialization of congress activity. Within the socialist influenced labour movement, the 1st Congress of Class Associations was organized (1885), with 27 delegates from 16 associations, the Mutual Society (1890), with 92 representatives from 46 associations, and the Cooperative (1894), with 18 societies. The mutualists also organized two more regional congresses, ensuring the participation of 120 associations in the Lisbon congress of 1906. On the other hand, the trade union movement was more continuous, promoting, until 1909, seven more national congresses (Fonseca, 1983).

In the last decade of the eighteen-hundreds, literate men and women from the intermediate social strata were imbued with republican ideas and engaged in causes and congresses of specific associative typologies. In 1892, they organized a delegation to the Pedagogical Congress of Madrid, with 51 members (Bernabéu Albert, 1987, p. 80). In 1907, they founded the National League of Instruction, which organized four congresses between 1908 and 1914, with the one in 1909 gathering 181 participants and 448 attendees (II Congresso Pedagógico da Instrução Primária, 1910). Integrated into the international hygienist movement, Portuguese scientists and physicians met in the Anti-tuberculosis Congresses of 1895 and 1899, giving rise to the National League Against Tuberculosis, which would organize four more meetings until 1907 (Vieira, 2018). It was also organized, in 1898, the 1st National Congress of Medicine, with 420 delegates, and in 1906, hosted in Lisbon the 15th International Congress of Medicine, with 1762 delegates from around the world (Dória, 2006, p. 2).

Nevertheless, specific causes continued to bring together different social groups and political tendencies. The First Anticlerical Congress of 1895 brought together 59 “affiliates of the socialist centres, members of federated class associations,” as well as “free thinkers from the republican field” (Catroga,

1991, pp. 308-326). The second edition, in 1900, already gathered 80 delegates from 21 civic circles, seven newspapers and four school associations. In 1908, the movement was structured nationally with the 1st National Congress of Free-Thinking organization, bringing together 392 delegates.

The first of these meetings directly opposed the Catholic movement in progress, and specifically, the International Congress hosted in Lisbon, gathering delegates from Catholic associations of 96 different countries. Then, at the dawn of the 20th century, emerged the Annual Congresses of Catholic Popular Associations, held between 1906 and 1910, which alternated with the congresses of the Nationalist Party (1903-1909), since, according to Pinharanda Gomes, their leaders were the same (Gomes, 1984, p. 18).

Among the economic elites, congress activity began by mobilizing interest groups linked to the primary sector. The *Real Associação Central da Agricultura Portuguesa* - RACAP (Royal Central Association of Portuguese Agriculture), founded in 1860, under the direct protection of the Crown, organized in 1888 the first of five agricultural congresses, gathering hundreds of farmers in preparatory meetings, and about a thousand people in the congress. The viticultural (winegrowing) congresses followed, with the first gathering 3912 congressmen (National Viticultural Congress, 1896) and the second 5021 (Congresso Nacional de Viticultura, 1902). The interest groups were also associated with a “scientific movement of imperial ideology” (Garcia, 2004). The 1st Colonial Congress of 1901 brought together several associative typologies and limited liability companies (Congresso Colonial Nacional, 1901).

It should be noted that despite this specialization, there was not yet a pronounced social polarization. On the contrary, in the Great Congress of Lisbon in 1910, the different associative typologies came together again – including the RACAP and the Workers Federation – mobilized by the republican movement and its project of national regeneration (Congresso Nacional, 1910).

After October 5, 1910, the social movements perceived a political opportunity to influence public policies, and the mobilization expanded. In the National Congress of Mutual Societies of 1911, chaired by Teófilo Braga, then President of the Republic, 297 associations were represented (Rosendo, 1996), which founded the National Federation of Mutual Aid Associations (FNASM). In the 3rd Pedagogical Congress, in 1912, directors and school inspectors were represented (III Congresso Pedagógico, 1913).

In the war and post-war period, in the framework of growing state interventionism, these movements were developed in frank partnership with the

State (Pereira, 2012). The National Mutualist Congress of 1916 brought together 206 delegations and was co-directed by representatives of the newly created Ministry of Labour and the FNASM<sup>1</sup>. The First National Cooperative Congress, in 1921, was promoted at the instigation of the director of the *Instituto de Seguros Sociais Obrigatórios e Previdência Geral* – ISSOPG (Institute of Compulsory Social Insurance and General Welfare), giving rise to the *Federação Nacional de Cooperativas* – FNC (National Federation of Cooperatives), to which 167 societies were affiliated (Freire; Pereira, 2017). Also noteworthy was the organization of the 1st Recreational Congress (1924), encouraged by the civil governor of Lisbon, bringing together 65 associations and giving rise to the *Federação Distrital das Sociedades de Educação e Recreio* – FDSER (District Federation of Education and Recreation Societies; see *Estatutos da Federação Portuguesa...*, 1925), as well as the official support to the 1st Feminist and Education Congress, in 1924, organized by the *Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Portuguesas* – CNMP (National Council of Portuguese Women; see *Alma Feminina*, 1925b).

If the growing intervention of the State strengthens the collective action of the reformer tendencies, other associative typologies would assume more radical and antagonistic positions. Symbolically, in 1914, the 1st National Workers Congress was organized, bringing together socialists and anarchists and, in parallel, the First Congress of Commercial and Industrial Associations. In the first one, 103 unions were represented, founding the *União Operária Nacional* – UON (National Workers Union). In the second one, 150 congress members from 53 employers' associations. The 2nd National Workers Congress (1919) represents the climax of the labour movement, with delegates from six industry federations and 13 local unions, representing some 150,000 members, who founded the *Confederação Geral do Trabalho* – CGT (General Confederation of Labour; see *Núcleo Congressos Operários...*, 1919). In the same year, the *Confederação Patronal* – CP (Employers Confederation) was founded, which, in its second congress, in 1921, already gathered 60 associations and the RACAP (O Século, 1919; 1921).

In the 1920s, the economic recession and the reflux of the strike wave determined the decrease of the union numbers, and the 3rd Workers Congress, in 1922, only 80 thousand workers were represented (Sousa, 1974). On the contrary, after four more employers' congresses, a “private council” was organized, creating the *União dos Interesses Económicos* (Union of Economic Interests), in 1924, in which 200 delegates were present (O Século, 1924).

Beyond class antagonisms, the conflict between the Enlightenment-



inspired movements and the Catholic movement escalated. In 1913, the young Republic hosted the 17th International Congress of Free-Thinking, at the same time as the 1st Congress of the Federation of Catholic Youth was organized, in which the future dictator, António Oliveira Salazar, and his faithful advisor, Manuel Cerejeira participated (Gomes, 1984).

The free-thinkers organized only two more national congresses (1916 and 1918). On the contrary, from 1913 to 1926, two dozen Catholic congresses were organized, mobilizing thousands of people, associations, and representatives of the political and economic elites. The first National Eucharistic Congress, in 1923, brought together nearly 3000 people and more than 100 institutions and included in its commission of honour representatives of the armed forces, public institutions, and associations, as well as members of the nobility and academia (I Congresso Nacional Eucarístico, 1924). Between May 26 and 30, 1926, the First National Marian Congress was organized in Braga, consisting of “a liturgical and theological apotheosis of national scope and repercussions” (Gomes, 1984, p. 61). In Braga, and during the event, the military forces that put an end to the First Republic left in the direction of the capital. After the military coup of May 28, 1926, the workers’ movement and the literate elites’ movement of republican inspiration, such as the hygienist or the pedagogical, declined exponentially, while the catholic and employers’ congresses maintained a certain regularity.

In sum, the first era of the congresses can be divided into three periods. First, between 1865 and 1884, the formation of the wave is characterized by the ascendancy of the scientific movement, the initiative of the elites, and the multifunctional and interclass nature of the congress members, to which must be added the plurality of political tendencies represented. Excluded from this dynamic was the Catholic Church’s reaction to the “de-Christianization” of civil society.

Between 1885 and 1913, there was an unprecedented expansion and diversification of associative and congress activity, specializing and individualizing social groups and political currents. After World War I, associative congresses reflected the polarisation that opposed the employers’ and workers’ movements, as well as the Catholic and the Republican-inspired “reformer field”. However, after the military coup of 1926, a sharp decline in this process of political mobilization was observed.



Table 1 – Number of congresses organized by association typology between 1865 and 1934

Associations	1865-1884	1885-1913	1914-1926	1927-1934	Total
Trade Unions		30	59	8	97
Catholic	5	15	30	17	67
Scientific/professional	2	13	4	11	30
Employers/interest groups		8	16	6	30
Pedagogical		5	16	4	25
Diverse typologies*	5	2	1	1	9
Regionalists			6	3	9
Free-thinkers		5	2		7
Hygienists		4	1	1	6
Mutualists		4	1	1	6
Feminists		1	2	2	5
Voluntary Firemen		1		4	5
Instruction and Recreation		1	2	1	4
Cooperatives		1	1	1	3
Protonationalists**			1		1
Total	12	90	142	60	304

\* Congresses were bringing together associations of various types, such as the Social Congress (1865), the Congresses of the Portuguese Associations (1882 and 1883), the Colonial Congresses (1901, 1924 and 1934) and the Great National Congress of Lisbon (1910).

\*\*Session in Lisbon of the 3rd Pan-African Congress (1923), hosted by the African League.

## MANUFACTURING CONSENT AND DISSENT

As mentioned, congress activities were governed by strict norms of collective action that, as Topalov (1999) argues, made them “factories of producing consensus”. The scientific congresses held in Portugal reproduced the practices observed internationally. Their regulations, drawn up by organizing committees, fixed the theme of the sessions, always reserving part of the meetings for other subjects not included in the program (Congrès international d’anthropologie..., 1884) and establishing a deadline for the submission of paper proposals (Congresso Nacional de Deontologia..., 1912). To prepare the theses to be de-

bated, rapporteurs were appointed (III Congresso Pedagógico, 1912), or peer committees were created (Congresso Nacional Agronómico, 1912).

In the associative congresses, these practices of collective construction deepened. There was a growing effort to involve the base associations, which were invited to send “any theses on matters of interest to these associations” that would constitute the congress program after being collated (*O Protesto Operário*, 1889), or to replicate a set of questions formulated by the organizing committee, to which they responded with different opinions and also new questions to be debated. Months before the meetings, the theses were published and discussed in the associative press.

In addition, delegates could present new proposals and motions during the assemblies, putting them directly to a vote. About the January 1891 Workers’ Congress, *O Protesto Operário* wrote: “those who attended the sessions of the last Congress were surprised at the avalanche of proposals sent to the table by the representatives of the various classes” (Pedindo..., 1891).

The theses analyzed resulted from a collective discussion seeking consensus, and the debates usually resulted in a final version that integrated the proposals for alterations and the reports from the advisory committees (Feminist and Education Congress, 1925). Only one case was identified in which different theses were published on the same topic (2nd Agricultural Congress, 1889), and one case of total rejection of the proposed thesis (A Batalha, 1919).

Dissensions resulted in the splitting of specific movements, with parallel congresses in which competing consensuses were manufactured. For example, beginning in 1915, Catholic physicians organized their meetings on the fringes of the hygienist movement. The “reformist” and “revolutionary” trade unionists organized separate congresses in 1909. The National League for Instruction and the elementary school teachers also held parallel meetings in 1914.

Concerning the authorship of these theses, contrary to what was expected, the systematic recording of the authors’ names did not allow us to identify the constancy and multipositionality of the protagonists, as has already been elaborated about international congresses (Leonards; Randerad, 2010). There was a greater diversity of actors on the national scale, with significant but occasional repetitions and crossovers. However, the residual participation of women, authors of only 35 theses, was highlighted in this census. In the trade union and catholic congresses, the theses were authored mainly by a joint commis-

sion, one or several associations, in contrast with the individual authorship of most resolutions of the scientific congresses and the movements with a closer relationship with the public authorities. The balance expressed by the example of the pedagogical congresses results from the union component of primary teachers' activism.

Table 2 – Distribution of the identified theses considering authorship

	Individual authorship thesis	Individual authorship thesis No authorship or collective authorship
Congresses bringing together associations of various types	82	48
Catholic Congresses	50	122
Scientific Congresses	285	46
Patronal Congresses	139	37
Free-Thinking Congresses	45	11
Feminist Congresses	36	0
Hygienist Congresses	132	7
Pedagogical Congresses	61	53
Cooperatives	5	6
Mutual Societies	44	31
Regionalists	87	21
Unions	44	300
Voluntary Firemen Humanitarian Societies	7	20
Societies of Instruction and Recreation	7	7
Total	1024	709

As far as the themes are concerned, the quantitative analysis and categorization of the 1733 theses identified illustrate revealing trends. In the doctrinal theses, scientific reflection predominates, following the Enlightenment tradition. At the same time, resolutions concerning social ideology and religious

Table 3 – Theses discussed in the associative congresses distributed by central theme and associative typology

Typology of associations	Diverse		Catholic		Scientific		Hygienist		Pedagogical		Cooperative		Feminine		Employers		Instruction Recreation		Firefighters		Free-Thinking		Mutualists		Regional		Unionist		Proto Nationalists		Total	
	n.º	%	n.º	%	n.º	%	n.º	%	n.º	%	n.º	%	n.º	%	n.º	%	n.º	%	n.º	%	n.º	%	n.º	%	n.º	%	n.º	%	n.º	%		
Scientific Doctrine			216	66	25	17																							241	14		
Religious Doctrine			24	14																									24	1		
Social Doctrine			8	5																		2	5			13	4		23	1		
Inter-institutional Relations	4	3	10	6	3	1	3	2	7	7	4	36			2	1	1	7	16	1	3	4	6	1	1	58	17		105	6		
New Institutions	6	5	22	13	3	1	1	1	3	3				2	6	4	2	13	3	7		3	5	9	12	21	6		79	5		
Governance	5	4	9	5	1				1	3	2	1		1	3	2	1		7	16		2	5	1	2	3	4	17	5		62	4
Propaganda	2	2	7	4	4	1	6	4							1							2	5	1	2	3	4	17	5		43	2
Strategy			6	3							3	27																11	3		20	1
Economic promotion and protectionism	44	38	2	1	15	5							188	79											39	51	38	11		326	19	
Political Recognition	15	13	35	20	3	1			4	4	2	18			1		3	20	4	9	1	3	15	23			31	9		114	7	
Fiscal and Budgetary Policy	1	1									1	9			9	4		0				3	8	2	3		5	1		22	1	
Education	18	16	9	5	4	1	44	31	71	67			7	20	13	5	9	60	3	7	12	31	3	5	9	12	10	3	1	14	213	12
Protection and Assistance	12	10	17	10	38	12	60	42	14	13			5	14					1	2	2	5	27	42	8	11	17	5		201	12	
Labour Relations	6	5	16	9	27	8	2	1	3	3			1	3	4	2					3	8				50	15		112	6		
Women's Rights			1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	9	18	51	6	3					6	15	2	3		23	7		62	4		
Laicisation of State and Society									3	3								18	42										21	1		
Colonized Peoples' Rights					1						1	3	5	2								3	8		4	5		6	86	20	1	
Civil Rights			2	1	7	2	7						2	1							3	8							21	1		
Housing	2	2	2	1																			2	3	1	1	3	1		10	1	
Peace					2	1															1	3					5	1		8	0	
Culture			2	1																					2	3	2	1		6	0	
Total	115	100	172	100	327	100	150	100	106	100	11	100	35	100	237	100	15	100	43	100	39	100	65	100	76	100	335	100	7	100	1733	100

doctrine are identified, in which the new liberal and socialist postulates, on the one hand, and the new social doctrine of the Church, on the other, are distinguished. Finally, a transversal set of theses relative to the internal organization of the movements was also identified, proving the activists' commitment to the regulation and normalisation of institutionalized collective action, the conviction in the potentialities of the associative model, and the increasing inter-institutional articulation.

A coeval set of representations addresses to the State stands out. The demand for economic promotion and protectionism on the part of employers' associations – and also trade unions, in a first moment – assumes the most significant absolute number of theses approved at associative congresses. In this context, demands for political recognition and representation in social consultation bodies also stand out. Finally, proposals and programs for social reform proliferate, with a particular focus on the education, social protection and the regulation of labour relations, with other related topics such as women's rights or the rights of colonized peoples.

It is worth noting that, except for doctrinal theses and those focused on the internal organization of the movements, the purpose of these theses was to ensure political influence. Along with the ones addressed to the public authorities, the proposals for social reform also sought to influence public policies, which justified the invitation and presence of government representatives in practically all the congresses analyzed, except for the ones organised by unions. In addition to political pressure, the latter also had social influence as a purpose, and congress resolutions were disseminated in specific editions or on the associative press.

If the quantitative analysis immediately induces a set of significant deductions, based on the qualitative analysis of these resolutions, one can perceive an evolution of divergent positions, which explains the growing polarisation of Portuguese civil society.

In the 1st Social Congress, following liberal doctrine, the contribution of associations to popular education was discussed, namely through the organization of elementary school evening classes, as well as in the sphere of social protection and public assistance, arguing for the need to federate mutual-aid associations as a way to enhance a welfare movement<sup>2</sup>.

The Congresses of the Portuguese Associations of 1882 and 1883 already

conveyed new perspectives centred on the intervention of the State. The theses pledge for public education reform, making it homogeneous, scientific and rational, from kindergarten to higher and professional education. It also criticized the welfare model in force, advocating the creation of more and better public hospitals. In these forums, the debate around the regulation of labour relations began, proposing the creation of labour courts, the regulation of apprenticeship with labour contracts, and the legalization of the workers' coalition (Congresso das Associações Portuguesas, 1882-1883).

The diversification of protagonists and movements in the last decades of the 19th century did not determine the change in the predominant themes, even though the opinions expressed registered relevant progress. The question of the social protection model is the most significant example. The evolution of the international mutualist movement, increasingly defending the German standard of a compulsory social insurance system, was reflected in Portugal (IVe Congrès international de la mutualité..., 1911).

The 1st Congress of Mutual-Aid Associations of 1890 recommended only exceptional official aid (O Protesto, 1890), while the regional meetings of 1904 and 1906 resulted in a representation to the Minister of Public Works, demanding state support for the organization of a retirement fund (A Vanguarda, 1906). In 1911, the recommendations of the National Congress of Mutual Societies already provided for compulsory contributions, management mediated by associations and the contribution of the State and employers (Congresso Nacional da Mutualidade, 1911). Social protection was also demanded by the Anti-tuberculosis Congresses, pledging for the creation or expansion of health and assistance services (Vieira, 2018).

In reaction to this secular interference in the sphere of social protection and assistance, Catholics condemned the “inefficacy of the means which are not inspired by the principles of the Catholic religion for the moral regeneration of the indigent”, arguing that “the treatment of the sick in hospitals and the education in nursing homes (...) should be entrusted to religious congregations, which are especially dedicated to these missions” (Pina, 1892).

The theme of education also remained transversal in associational debates, with two opposing conceptions reflected in the International Catholic and Anticlerical Congresses of 1895. Free-thinkers supported the total laicization of public education and the extinction of all religious, educational estab-

ishments (Federação, 1895). On the contrary, the Church defended religious education and its ministrations or supervision by the ecclesiastical hierarchy (Atas do Congresso Internacional Católico..., 1895), stressing the need to instill Christian values in education to ensure social harmony (IV Congresso das Associações Populares, 1910).

At the same time, primary teachers mobilized to claim labour rights and address “demands to the public authorities to ensure the progress of popular education” (Ocidente, 1897). At the congresses of the National League for Instruction, they demanded the creation of a Ministry of Education, an increase in the budget in this field, decentralization of powers, and more demanding inspection and training of teachers, along with the creation of mobile schools and ambulant teachers, the promotion of the “integral school” and incentives for school attendance.

The relevance of agricultural education was also advocated, as well as colonial and maritime training (II Congresso pedagógico da Instrução Popular, 1909), revealing the connection of this movement with the employers’ associations and interest groups that were involved in organizing the 1st Colonial Congress of 1901, which focused precisely on these demands. (Congresso Nacional Colonial, 1901). The teachers and pedagogues were also accompanied by other civic movements, which specialized in tangential themes, such as school hygiene and prophylaxis, in the Anti-tuberculosis congresses, or the laicization of education, in the Free-Thinking congresses (Congresso nacional do Livre-Pensamento..., 1908).

Once the Republic was implanted, the pedagogical movement demanded the “immediate organization of a broad and openly democratic plan for Portuguese primary education, so broad as to extend to the most remote villages, and so intense and judicious that it could soon bring about the transformation of our society” (Silva, 1912). The votes of the National League of Instruction Congress of 1912 also called for the deepening of social assistance (III Congresso Pedagógico da Instrução Popular, 1913). This program was shaped by the contributions of mutualists, in the sense of creating school welfare associations (Congresso nacional da Mutualidade, 1911) and emerging feminism, arguing for coeducation (Osório, 1908).

Finally, the issue of the legal regulation of labour relations continues to stand out. The first Workers’ Congress, in 1885, moved immediately towards



what would become the primary workers' demands during the entire period under analysis: the reduction of working hours (O Protesto Operário, 1885). The mutualists supported this claim and demanded concerning weekly rest, the protection of women's and children's work, and employers' accountability for accidents at work (O Protesto, 1890). In the 1911 National Congress of Mutual Societies, claims were also made to create a general labour and social security directorate, with officials appointed by the class and mutual aid federations (Congresso Nacional da Mutualidade, 1911). In the anti-tuberculosis congresses, the basis for the regulation of the work of women, children and adults in the industry was presented (Vieira, 2018), and the International Legal Congress of 1888 argued that the "State has, not only the right but the duty to enact protective provisions for working youth" (Congresso Jurídico de Lisboa..., 1889).

The popular Catholic movement also assumed the need to combat the harmful effects of industrialism through the teachings of *Rerum Novarum* (Atas do Congresso Internacional Católico..., 1895). The Church directed its intervention to the strata less influenced by the trade union movement, such as the peasants, the artisans (Associação Operária, 1906) or the domestic workers (II Congresso Annual das Associações Populares Católicas, 1907). Syndicalists also endeavoured, however, to extend the conquests of the factory workers to the sailors, the rural workers, emigrants (Sousa, 1974, p. 54), and even natives of colonized territories (Voz do Operário, 1909).

At the turn of the century, the employers' associations, supported by part of the scientific movement, also debated the indigenous labour regime, advocating, on the contrary, "rigorous and summary repression of vagrancy" through a "penal law for Africans (...) that punishes them, such as the penalty of public work with shackles, etc." (Congresso Colonial Nacional, 1901).

The shift from an "Enlightenment-inspired model to the formation of interest groups" (Subacchi, 1997, p. 157) took place above all in the war and post-war years when congressional activity reached its climax. Then, the emerging employers' movement was mainly interested in channelling state resources to economic development through greater utilization of overseas potentials. Together with customs protectionism, this claim would mark the entire period under analysis, progressively related to the need to reduce public spending, in growing antagonism to the "reformer nebula" (Topalov, 1999).

Regarding the unavoidable educational theme, in parallel with the already sedimented divergence between laypeople and Catholics, distinct positions were also manifested between the pedagogical movement of primary teachers and that of the employers. The former aimed for an integral and universal education, while the latter valued essentially the formation of agricultural, industrial and commercial labour (Araújo, 1923) and the dissemination of technical and scientific knowledge to support the process of effective colonization (III Congresso Nacional Nacional, 1930).

On the other hand, in the “reformer field”, the demand for public, compulsory and free education, subscribed by pedagogues (I Congresso dos Professores Primários, 1914), free thinkers (IV Congresso Nacional do Livre Pensamento, 1918), unionists (A Batalha, 1924) and mutualists, appeared associated with the need for social support. Meanwhile, in the debates of employers’ associations, criticism of teachers began to be voiced, “for spending fabulous amounts of money without producing as they should”, arguing that schools “should be given to those who preserve and improve them, since the State does not have enough staff for them”, and it is up to the State “to help private initiative” (O Século, 1922).

The same cleavage can be seen in the debates concerning social protection and assistance. The mutual society congress of 1916 supported the implementation of compulsory social insurance through mutual aid associations and the principle of employer and public accountability (Boletim da Federação Nacional..., 1916). It was accompanied by other civic movements, such as the free-thinking movement, which, in the post-war period, pledged for active state intervention in the spheres of social assistance and protection (IV Congresso Nacional do Livre-pensamento, 1918); or the feminist movement, which, within the scope of social security for women and minors, also defended Compulsory Social Insurance (Alma Feminina, 1921).

However, the Catholic movement continued to defend charity and beneficence, with the mobilization of Catholic doctors in defense of a reform of public assistance that did not ignore the role of the Church and religious service (Gomes, 1984). The patronal associations, for their part, were interested, above all, in the implementation of a public system of assistance in the colonies and the progress of tropical medicine (Costa, 1923), warning of the danger of “extinction of the autochthonous races, making it impossible to guarantee

European emigration a vast field of exploitation” (Congresso Colonial Nacional, 1901).

If these two topics reflect divergent positions on dominant themes, it was on the regulation of labour relations that the antagonisms became more acute. In post-war Portugal, despite the anarcho-syndicalist hegemony, the priority of the labour movement was to defend the eight hours of work and compulsory social insurance, enshrined in the May 1919 legislative package authored by the socialist minister of labour (Pereira, 2012).

The feminists, in their congresses, also fought for women’s right to work, for all measures to protect maternity and that future labour legislation should apply indiscriminately to both men and women (Cabete, 1923) - namely, the correspondence between equal work and equal salaries (Alma Feminina, 1925).

Still on this question, one cannot ignore the unprecedented weight of the international debates on workers’ rights in the colonies, which forced the second colonial congress to defend the idea of humanitarian and liberal colonization and combat “the campaigns raised against Portugal” (Mantero, 1924). This apology, however, was denied by the unionists, who denounced the forced labour conditions in the colonies and fought for the unionization of the natives (A Batalha, 1925).

To this reformer front, the employers’ movement immediately reacted decisively against the social legislation package of 1919 (Garrido; Pereira, 2018) and, above all, against the imposition of the eight-hour workday. That same year, the congress of the Employers’ Associations approved a thesis according to which “a legislation of this nature is unacceptable, as it is impractical, and it belongs to the constituted powers to reconsider, saving the country from a greater social disorganization than that which already exists” (Pereira; Ferreira, 1919).

At the end of the period under analysis, between 1927 and 1934, the topics raised retain a predominant relative weight, although the assessments on them changed significantly. Concerning education, the inflexion is notorious; primary teachers were no longer mobilized to debate the reform of the education system. Instead, secondary school teachers met focusing solely on pedagogical content (Federação das Associações dos Professores dos Liceus Portugueses, 1928).

Catholics continued to repudiate “the school without God” (Congresso Nacional do Apostolado..., 1930) and to commit themselves to the civilizing

mission of religious teaching. Both the missionary congress and the colonial congress, in 1930, argued that “indigenous teaching, from the moral point of view, should be given in such a way as to create for them the idea of a common homeland – Metropole and Colonies – and should be mainly given by Portuguese missionaries”. The latter also defended the compulsory nature of colonial education at all levels of education, “to create in the metropolis a colonial consciousness” (*Actas das Sessões e Teses...*, 1934).

Regarding protection and assistance, the unions still managed to create a Workers’ Commission for the Reform of the Labour Disasters Act, which resulted in a representation against the intention to close the Labour Courts (*O Proletário*, 1930). Furthermore, the mutualists organized the last congress in 1934, in which they defended the project of obligatory social insurance suspended since 1928 by the Minister of Finance – António de Oliveira Salazar (*Legado do Caixeiro Alentejano*, 1935). However, this latter gave in to the pressure from economic interest groups that favoured, as we have seen before, economic increase, which demanded the reduction of public debt, as defended by the dictator himself in the employers’ congresses even before the 1926 coup (Salazar, 1923).

The employers’ associations, however, continued to demand protection and assistance in the colonies. The thesis on the subject at the colonial congress of 1930 explained: “It is a purely economic question. Without a large and robust indigenous population, there is no production of the raw materials Europe needs, no income sufficient to pay the administration, and no consumers for European industry, which seeks markets everywhere”.

On the regulation of labour relations topic, the issue of forced labour also stands out. Despite international pressure, the employers’ associations recalled “the inconveniences of moving too fast towards the freedom of indigenous labour”, considered “a very dangerous utopia with counterproductive results”. They repudiated “any pretensions of international character concerning the regime of indigenous labour that are unacceptable to the legitimate interests of the colonies” (*Atas das Sessões e Teses...*, 1934).

Finally, in the middle of the great depression and under fierce police persecution, the union movement continued to claim the eight-hour work, public policies to mitigate unemployment (Patriarca, 1995), and also denounced the over-exploitation of female labour, demanding wage equality (A Batalha,

1931). António de Oliveira Salazar, however, already disseminated the theses that would preside over the imposition of the Corporative State, in which he refuted “the demands of material and moral order, to be achieved directly, without the intervention of the authority”, but also “the so-called minimum programs, to be carried out in the bourgeois State”, defending the transformation of the working classes “by the Christian spirit of obedience, love and resignation” (Salazar, 1930).

In sum, associative congresses developed norms of functioning tending to gather the legitimate representatives of the institutions for collective action in detriment of individualities. The same trend was reflected in the production and discussion of theses, a process that seeks to deepen democratic debate and the increasingly broader “production of consensus”.

In analyzing these resolutions, the weight of the demands addressed to the State stands out, classifying this associative wave as a process of political mobilization. This process was progressively marked first by doctrinal polarisation, opposing a “reformer field” (Topalov, 1999), of Enlightenment tradition, to the Church; and then, by social and political polarization, opposing the workers’ and civic movements of the “reformer nebula” to the employers’ lobby, in alliance with the Catholic one. This polarization was reflected in the divergence on fracturing issues, such as education, social protection and the legal regulation of labour relations, increasingly crossed by gender and race issues.

### **Conclusion**

Although there is some discrepancy, the chronology of the first wave of associative congresses in Portugal is not substantially different from that observed on a transnational scale. Comparing the data presented by Davies (2014) with the present study results, the cross-border diffusion precedes the national one. However, from the last decade of the 19th century, Portugal followed international trends, with the proliferation and diversification of social movements.

If the assembly of different associative typologies, social groups and political tendencies characterized the emergence of congress activity; this reality changed during the crisis of oligarchic liberalism. From the last decades of the eighteen-hundreds, congresses reflected the functional specialization of as-

sociative, accompanied by a greater social and political homogeneity of the movements individually considered.

At the same time, the modern State-building induced the confrontation of different perspectives on its intervention in the economic and social sphere. Thus, although the quantitative analysis of the associative congresses' theses points to the relative stability of the dominant topics throughout the period under analysis, their qualitative appreciation reflects the evolution of divergent and increasingly antagonistic positions. These antagonisms reveal themselves, above all, in the debates around education, social protection, assistance and the regulation of labour relations, which were related to conflicting priorities concerning public investment.

According to the comparative analysis of this process, the expansion of civil society “contributed to the polarisation of society, threatening to compartmentalize it between isolated and autonomous networks,” and threatening “the hegemony of traditional parties and liberalism itself” (Nord; Bermeo, 2000, pp. XIII). The decline of the first congressional wave and the collapse of social movements on an international scale coincided with the ascendancy of authoritarianism in the 1930s (Rodogno; Struck; Vogel, 2015). The results of the Portuguese case scrutiny confirm this periodization, distinguished by an early ebb of collective action in the face of international trends, determined by the military coup of 1926.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Report presented by the Director General of Social Security to His Excellency the Minister. See Social Security Bulletin, 1918.

<sup>2</sup> The minutes of the sessions were published between October 14, 1865, and the end of February 1866, in The Federation.

