

## **Mario Soares Fought for Democracy and Won**

**Remarks by Carl Gershman at the Frank Carlucci Memorial Dinner**

**The Estoril Political Forum June 3, 1024**

I'm humbled to speak at this celebration of the centenary of the birth of Mario and Maria Barroso Soares - and to do so in the presence of their daughter and son, Isabel and Joao, and on the occasion no less of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Carnation Revolution – Revolucao dos Cravas.

It happened that in 1974, the year of the Carnation Revolution, I became the Executive Director of Social Democrats, USA, which was the U.S. member party in the Socialist International. Seymour Martin Lipset developed the concept of "American exceptionalism" to explain why the United States was the only advanced democracy in the world without a major Socialist party. But it had a minor one, the Social Democrats, and I was chosen to direct its affairs at the very moment Portugal had entered a period of historic change.

Though we were a small movement, we were closely allied to the AFL-CIO, the major U.S. labor federation that was America's de facto mass social democratic movement. Like the AFL-CIO, we were committed to supporting democracy around the world and strongly opposed communism as well as rightwing authoritarianism. My goal as the SD's new director was to position our movement at the forefront of the global struggle for democracy and human rights.

The mid-1970s was not a good time for democracy. The communists triumphed in Vietnam and Cambodia, military regimes had taken over throughout Latin America, Indira Gandhi had suspended democracy in India, and isolationism was on the rise in the U.S. Daniel Patrick Moynihan famously said on the occasion of the U.S. bicentennial in 1976 that democracy was where the world was, not where it was going.

It was in that context that Portugal emerged quite suddenly in 1975 as the epicenter of the global struggle for freedom. Senator James Buckley, the brother of the famous conservative William F. Buckley, said that there was nothing going on anywhere in the world that was "half so important and ominous as the communist drive for power in Portugal." When Mario Soares visited the State

Department as Portugal's new foreign minister in late 1974, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger told him that Portugal was lost to the communists and that he, Soares, would be his country's Kerensky, the hapless Russian Menshevik leader who was deposed by Lenin in the October Revolution. When Soares protested, saying that he didn't want to be Kerensky, Kissinger shot back, "Neither did Kerensky."

Kissinger sent Frank Carlucci to Lisbon as the U.S. ambassador with the mission of getting the communists out of the Portuguese government and keeping them out. When Carlucci got on top of the evolving situation in Portugal, he realized that Kissinger was far too pessimistic. He advised Washington that the forces unleashed by the revolution could not "be stuffed back into the tube" but had to be "tempered," and that the Socialist leader Mario Soares was "the only game in town," leaving a nonplussed Kissinger to grumble to his staff, "Whoever sold me Carlucci as a tough guy?"

For our social democratic movement, the struggle for democracy in Portugal was a symbol of hope at a dark time. The fact that it was being led by democratic socialists increased our enthusiasm, and we threw ourselves into the battle to support them. During May and June in 1975 when the conflict between the Socialists and Communists came to a head in Portugal, we organized three demonstrations in New York, the first immediately following the May Day rally in Lisbon when the Socialists broke through Communist barricades shouting "Socialism, yes! Dictatorship, no!" That was the slogan we, too, chanted as we marched from the Portuguese tourist office in midtown Manhattan to the Portuguese Consulate and U.N. Mission. That first demonstration turned into an all-night vigil as six members of our group spent the night on the streets of crime-plagued New York demanding democracy in Portugal.

The subsequent demonstrations on May 22 and June 23 coincided with mass rallies in Portugal protesting the closing of the independent newspaper *Republica* by the Communists. Bayard Rustin, the famed civil rights leader who was our National Chairman, read a statement calling for the immediate reopening of *Republica*, saying that "By their actions, the Portuguese Communists have shown themselves to be totalitarians in the true Leninist tradition. The eyes of Americans and Europeans," he said, "are now focused on Portugal. If the

Communists, aided by Moscow, behave in Portugal today as they behaved in Prague in 1948 and Petrograd in 1917, Socialists and other democrats throughout the world will draw the inevitable conclusions about Communist objectives today.”

In addition to these demonstrations, we also issued an “Appeal for Democracy in Portugal” that was signed by over 100 leading intellectuals and trade unionists and prominently displayed in the pages *The New York Times* and other newspapers and magazines, including *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New Leader*, and *The Portuguese Times*. The Appeal rattled leaders in the Revolutionary Council, and the Portuguese Minister for Social Communication, a leftist naval officer named Jorge Correia Jesuino, mailed a large packet of materials to every signatory of the appeal. The packet included a cover note complaining that Western democracies, which had remained silent during the Salazar years, were now all of a sudden criticizing “the first popular government in contemporary Portuguese history,” as if it was not the Portuguese people themselves who were rising up against the threat of a new dictatorship.

In January 1976, not long after the abortive leftist coup on November 25 that signaled the defeat of the Communists, Soares visited Washington and stopped by the AFL-CIO to see the Secretary-Treasurer Lane Kirkland. Kirkland, a personal friend and strong supporter of the SD, asked me to join the meeting, at which Soares invited me to visit Portugal. I did so a couple of months later, bringing with me a \$2500 check for the Socialists Party from the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union.

When Soares visited the U.S. a year later, after he’d been elected Prime Minister, we held a reception in his honor that was attended by over 400 Social Democrats, trade unionists, and U.N. ambassadors. It was a glorious victory celebration for freedom and democracy in Portugal, and I can vividly remember how warmly everyone cheered when Rustin told the gathering that “after the fascists were overthrown and a new set of tyrants tried to snatch away from the Portuguese people the freedoms they had just won, it was Mario Soares who stood up to the Communists and said, ‘There will be no Czechoslovakia here, there will be no Poland here. Socialism, Yes! Dictatorship, No!’”

In his remarks that day, Soares lauded the Portuguese people for resisting the Communist threat. When the Communists “were on the brink of occupying

the whole state machinery,” he said, “when they controlled the mass media and infiltrated the armed forces...and were on the brink of forming a new political police, it was the spontaneous resistance of the Portuguese people who, as by miracle, came out into the streets, and in the streets of Portugal, in the factories, in the schools, and in the fields unanimously struggled to defend the threatened freedom.... This was a spontaneous movement,” Soares said, “since the Portuguese people had had the experience of fifty years of dictatorship and were not willing to return to a new dictatorship.” He called the solidarity in defense of freedom of the worldwide social democratic movement “the greatest moral and political strength which exists in the world today.”

While this was the high point of our relationship of solidarity with Soares, it was not the end of it. A decade later, after Soares had become President of Portugal and I had become the leader of the fledgling National Endowment for Democracy in Washington, Soares made a surprise appearance at our first international conference, accompanied by Frank Carlucci who was then the U.S. National Security Adviser under President Reagan. Soares felt right at home, saying that he could recognize in the gathering “a number of old friends, freedom fighters from a long time back who are still suffering under the throes of dictatorship” in the Soviet Union, Afghanistan, Chile, South Africa and other countries. His message was powerful and direct: We in Portugal, he said, “were engaged for 32 years in a long struggle against dictatorship” and “have won our freedom.” We must now continue to wage that struggle “with determination. Wherever we do not have freedom and liberty, we must continue to fight for it.”

A decade later, when Soares had retired from public office after serving two terms as Portugal’s President, the NED’s International Forum for Democratic Studies joined with the Mario Soares Foundation to organize a series of lectures on the future of democracy. The lectures were delivered in Lisbon and Washington by prominent statesmen, scholars and religious leaders and led to the publication of a collection of 13 essays entitled *The Democratic Invention* that was co-edited by Marc Plattner and Joao Carlos Espada. The authors included Samuel Huntington, Seymour Martin Lipset, Larry Diamond, and Polish Foreign Minister Bronislaw Geremek, as well as His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Soares himself.

The lecture by Huntington that launched the series was an important event in Portugal, where he had become well known for having written a seminal study that identified the Carnation Revolution as the beginning of what he famously called “the third wave” of democratization, the largest expansion of democracy in human history. He dramatically opened his lecture by drawing a breathtaking analogy comparing the inauguration by Portuguese leaders and thinkers five centuries earlier of the age of discovery with the actions taken by Mario Soares and his colleagues in inaugurating another “new phase in human history, the age of democracy.” Larry Diamond reinforced the tribute to Soares when he said that democratic progress is not simply driven by grand historical forces but is a consequence of struggle, courage, and vision, and that no political leader in our time has more “vividly embodied this lesson” than Mario Soares.

But is it true that the Carnation Revolution inaugurated an “age of democracy?” It may have seemed that way in the late 1990’s, the period immediately after the Cold War that Charles Krauthammer called “a vacation from history.” Some of the essays in *The Democratic Invention* saw dangers lurking ahead, for example in the spread of globalization that could exacerbate inequalities and introduce new divisions in the world, and even in the erosion of moral and cultural standards in the long-established democracies of the West, leading to conditions, so painfully evident in the United States today, of “the decline of civility, the vulgarization of high culture, and the degradation of popular culture,” in the words of Gertrude Himmelfarb.

It was Soares, though, more than anyone, who emphasized the vulnerability of democracy, which he called “a frail and precious flower that needs care and permanent vigilance.” He warned that liberal democracy was no more secure in the triumphal aftermath of the fall of communism than it was in the early 1900s when the delusory optimism of Woodrow Wilson and others about the future of democracy was followed by the carnage of World War I and the subsequent rise of fascist and communist totalitarianism that unleashed a frenzy of unimaginable violence, including the Holocaust.

He spoke as “an old fighter against dictatorship” who had been arrested 12 times under Salazar and been tortured and forced into exile. He said that he belonged to “a generation that learned from experience the value of democracy

and the importance of liberty, a generation that knows what it means to be subject to dictatorship and deprived of basic human rights.” He added that “this painful experience of almost half a century makes it a moral imperative for us to fight, day after day, to perfect our democracy” and “to share our experience with the younger generations, so that they can understand that life without freedom makes no sense.”

Soares’ awareness of the unending threat to democracy and his determination to fight for freedom and to defend it wherever it is threatened are what made him the father of Portuguese democracy and a figure of singular greatness.

I have spoken tonight about Mario Soares and not about his wife Maria Barroso, whom I didn’t know. She was clearly his political partner in every respect, a co-founder with him of the Socialist Party in 1973 and an ardent foe of the Salazar dictatorship, in addition to being a famous theater and cinema actress. She was also the President of the Foundation dedicated to honoring the memory of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, the Portuguese consul-general in Bordeaux when the Nazis invaded France in 1940 who was punished by the Salazar regime for signing visas for tens of thousands of refugees, as many as 10,000 of them Jews fleeing the Holocaust.

Maria Barroso’s commitment to redeeming the legacy of Sousa Mendes - Portugal’s Raoul Wallenberg - shows the depth of her belief in justice. Sousa Mendes died in poverty in 1954, socially banished and disgraced. But interest in his epic story of courage and conscience grew after 1966 when he became the first diplomat to be recognized by Israel’s Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial as one of the Righteous Among the Nations. The momentum culminated 1995 at a week-long national homage to Sousa Mendes when President Soares proclaimed him to be “Portugal’s greatest hero of the twentieth century.” Mario Barroso herself paid homage to Sousa Mendes at the United Nations when she read in his honor the poetry of Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen, a fellow Socialist and fighter for justice who was called “Lisbon’s poetic soul.”

As I stand back and reflect on the story I have just told about Mario Soares and Maria Barroso, I am struck by the relevance of their moral and political outlook to the future of democracy - in fact, to the future of human civilization.

We are now at a very dangerous historical moment. The world's autocratic and lawless countries - what Iran calls the Axis of Resistance - are more united and aggressive than ever before. Among the established democracies, including above all the United States and now including even Portugal itself, a populist and illiberal reaction to accelerating globalization and technological change is gaining momentum. And after October 7, the sinister force of anti-Semitism has once again reared its ugly head, with ominous implications for the future of freedom everywhere. As my friend Irwin Cotler, who heads the Raoul Wallenberg Center in Canada, has said, anti-Semitism is "the bloody canary in the mineshaft of global evil," and it never remains local.

It is unrealistic to expect that events in Portugal might spark another "new phase in human history" that could reverse or alter current trends. But it is not unreasonable to believe that the legacy of Mario Soares and Maria Barroso could point a way forward at this perilous time. They provide a model of vigilance in defense of freedom and devotion to the values of justice and human dignity; of opposition to all forms of dictatorship and oppression; and of humility and empathy combined with the determination to resist demagoguery, hatred, and intolerance. It's an example of simplicity and strength. The challenge will be for the world's democracies - or at least some of their leaders and others engaged in the political and ideological battle for democracy - to find the wisdom to appreciate their example and the will to follow it.