

Version 1.0 | Last updated 05 August 2019

# Labour (Portugal)

By [Ana Carina Gerardo da Silva Azevedo](#)

**This article describes the main characteristics of Portuguese production structures and the national labour force during the First World War. In addition to highlighting the impacts of the conflict on industry, it also portrays some of the war's effects on workers and how the world of work was influenced by the challenges of this time period. The years of World War I were witness not only to a brutal repression of the labour and unionist movement, but also an important production of legislation on the world of work.**

## Table of Contents

- [1 Introduction](#)
- [2 The Impact of the War on Economy and Industry](#)
- [3 Industrial Mobilisation and Conscription](#)
- [4 Salaries and Cost of Living: Social Conflict and Reforms in Labour Legislation](#)
- [5 Migration and Replacement of the Work Force in Belligerent Countries](#)
- [6 Conclusion](#)

[Notes](#)

[Selected Bibliography](#)

[Citation](#)

## Introduction

The [labour](#) force in [Portugal](#) during the First World War has not been deeply or systematically analysed as an independent subject of study. However, there are some works that provide essential contributions to research on the subject. Some studies focus their attention on political, economic, and social evolution during the First Portuguese Republic and integrate matters related to labour during the war.<sup>[1]</sup> Others are concerned with the evolution of trade unionism and the labour

movement,<sup>[2]</sup> as well as with industry and agriculture in the decade of 1910 alongside the matter of emigration.<sup>[3]</sup> Studies about women are also useful, although they do not provide in-depth discussion of women as workers.<sup>[4]</sup> It is necessary, however, to take into account that most of these works are not focused on the specific period of World War I, which greatly complicates the task of studying the impact of the war on the world of work.

The historical sources available include legislation and parliamentary debates of the time, which provide us with the [government's](#) responses to the circumstances of the period, as well as official publications related to labour issues and domestic production sectors. Statistics of the time often have significant shortcomings, which derive from the inaccuracy of their bedrock concepts. Regarding the industrial sector, a statistical survey, *Estatística Industrial* (Industrial Statistics), was only conducted in 1917. Labour and employer publications also constitute important sources of information about the subject, as they provide insight into the opinions of both employers and employees about the impact of the war on their daily lives.

This article seeks to demonstrate the main characteristics of Portuguese labour during the First World War and how it was affected by changing circumstances brought about by both the outbreak of the conflict and the Portuguese response to it. Thus, the article begins with a description of the impact of the war on the national economy and industry; it then considers the effects of military conscription and industrial mobilisation on the work force; finally, it highlights changes in labour legislation and the impact of emigration.

## The Impact of the War on Economy and Industry

In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Portugal was an essentially rural country. Agriculture was the main productive sector, with industry playing a lesser role in the country's productive structure, despite making a notable contribution to exports. As such, the number of industrial workers was only one third of the total number of agricultural workers.

The textiles industry held an important place among the different industrial sectors, as did the [food](#) industry, which saw significant growth during the war period. The increase in demand for canned goods led to an increasing number of factories, as well as a growth in exports, especially of sardines, which would become the second-largest Portuguese industrial export. Much like the incipient and underdeveloped metallurgy industry, Portugal did not possess a modern steel industry due to the small size of its internal market, national energy shortcomings, and the lack of nationally-produced [raw materials](#), which forced the import of almost all high-quality steel.

The outbreak of the First World War affected the Portuguese economy and the nation's productive capabilities. Supply difficulties hindered the regular functioning of various sectors. At the same time, some of these sectors struggled with the need to increase production due to the difficulty of importing goods.

Nonetheless, against the backdrop of war and benefiting from a lack of mechanization, nearly all manufacturing industries gained momentum.<sup>[5]</sup> Those sectors more inclined to exports were the ones which benefited the most from the opportunities made available by the conflict. Canned goods almost doubled production from 1914 to 1918, followed by sugar, textiles, chemicals, and cement.<sup>[6]</sup> At the same time, wartime conditions and the impossibility of importing required materials led to the development of artisanal manufactures which would not have been viable otherwise.

The army's production facilities were pressured by mobilisation to manufacture quantities of armaments, ammunition, and [equipment](#) that they were not always capable of meeting. The number of facilities linked with uniform, ammunition, and [food](#) production quickly expanded. However, while demand for products increased, output was limited by the fact that many skilled workers and engineers were mobilised to assist the *Corpo Expedicionário Português* ([Portuguese Expeditionary Corps](#)), forming teams specializing in armament repair.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Industrial Mobilisation and Conscription

Workers were adversely affected by the disturbances brought about by the First World War, such as the shortage of foodstuffs, supply difficulties, and rising prices. These were further intensified by hoarding and black market dynamics, which contributed to the devaluation of real wages and were at the core of the episodes of great [social unrest](#) after 1917.<sup>[8]</sup> Some workers transferred from agriculture or other industrial sectors to munitions factories. The male work force decreased in a time of increasing demand for goods produced by some sectors. Although not as pressing an issue as in other national contexts, this situation allowed women to take up jobs previously held by men. One should note that this situation by no means brought about significant improvements in working conditions, as female workers remained lower-paid than their male counterparts, subject to long working hours, and without any maternity protection.<sup>[9]</sup>

The difficulties caused by the outbreak of the First World War raised awareness of the need to protect domestic productive sectors, mainly those that were considered essential to the war effort, such as the chemical and fertilizer industries.<sup>[10]</sup> The government acknowledged the importance of industry and attempted to step in, justifying that decision with the need to avoid a standstill which would bring about inevitable losses to the national economy. The bill presented to parliament on the mobilisation of private industries necessary to the war effort, whenever state-held industries were deemed insufficient, should be considered in that light. Through decree no. 2027, of 6 November 1915,<sup>[11]</sup> four months before Portugal joined the Great War, the state reserved the right to take possession of fertilizer and chemical factories, regardless of prior compensation, as a way of protecting the farming and ammunition sectors. This bill was strongly criticised by the Portuguese Industrial Association. Its head, [António de Aboim Inglês \(1860-1941\)](#), denounced it as a counterproductive and unreasonable measure which could discourage the creation of new industries. In spite of the objections, no industry ever actually denied the services requested by the

government.<sup>[12]</sup> For the government this was simply a way of ensuring that the state could legally seize factories, if necessary, as would eventually happen with the mobilisation of the paralysed fertilizer factory in Póvoa de Santa Iria, near Lisbon.<sup>[13]</sup> Although widely regarded as unjust competition against private investment, and as inimical to development and modernisation,<sup>[14]</sup> the bill was eventually approved and enacted on 12 March 1916, a few days after [Germany's](#) declaration of war against Portugal.

Two months later, on 24 May, a decree imposing a draft on all citizens aged twenty to forty-five years old was enacted.<sup>[15]</sup> Like the industrial mobilisation law, this decree also received its fair share of criticism from industrialists, who viewed it as damaging to the domestic economy since it diverted the necessary work force away from the productive sectors. Even before the enactment of the law, some industrialists had warned the government about this issue. The chairman of the Portuguese Industrial Association, in a letter dated 11 May, reminded the minister of war, [José Maria Mendes Ribeiro Norton de Matos \(1867-1955\)](#), that the drafting of specialised technical personnel and industrial workers could result in halting domestic production.<sup>[16]</sup> The impact of conscription was visible in the shipbuilding sector, where the military draft led to particularly severe difficulties. This motivated [Jaime Daniel Leote do Rego \(1867-1923\)](#) to propose a bill to the chamber of deputies, aimed at preventing the recruitment of skilled workers and the retention of those with irreplaceable skills, whose absence would lead to a standstill at the shipyards.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Salaries and Cost of Living: Social Conflict and Reforms in Labour Legislation

On the eve of the First World War, a Lisbon worker earned around 63 *centavos*<sup>[18]</sup> per day, rising to 1 *escudo* in 1916 and to 2 *escudos* in 1919, due to the devaluation of the national currency and to workers' demands.<sup>[19]</sup> Wages reflected geographical differences: workers outside Lisbon earned lower salaries than those working in the capital. In general, wages evolved from an index of 100 in 1914 to 140 in 1915, 180 in 1916, and 225 in 1917. Nevertheless, market shortages of basic products, agricultural difficulties, and distortions resulting from hoarding and speculation further contributed to rising prices. The index of the cost of living evolved from 100 in 1914 to 111 in 1915, 137 in 1916, and up to 162 in 1917.<sup>[20]</sup> This exponential increase in the cost of living led to major moments of social conflict. The repression of [strikes](#) and demonstrations as well as a wave of arrests led to the president of the ministry, [Afonso Augusto da Costa \(1871-1937\)](#), being nicknamed *racha-sindicalistas* (unionist-breaker).<sup>[21]</sup> Labour struggles reached new heights in 1917 and 1918 and their repression mirrored their level of violence.<sup>[22]</sup>

Year	Lisbon Index	Rest of the Country Index
1914	100	100
1915	150	140

1916	190	167
1917	235	225
1918	290	270

Table 1: Wage Index in Lisbon and in the Rest of the Country<sup>[23]</sup>

Year	Average Wages (in <i>centavos</i> )
1914	35
1915	37
1916	42
1917	58
1918	85

Table 2: Average Agricultural Wages of Male Workers on the Continent<sup>[24]</sup>

The relationship between the government and workers was not only characterized by repression. The republican regime dedicated several pieces of legislation to industrial and [urban](#) workers in order to improve working conditions, mostly regarding working hours, workplace accidents, and employment-related disputes. Laws 295 and 296,<sup>[25]</sup> which set the length of the working day for each sector – seven hours for clerks and bankers, eight and ten for factory and garage workers, and ten for shop workers, with two hours for lunch – were enacted on 22 January 1915. These laws also established rules regarding salaries; female and [child](#) labour; overtime work; and the maximum length of night-time work in industry, administrative offices, mining, and unhealthy or toxic workshops.

The contents of such laws were difficult to put into practice, especially outside the cities, where inspections were scarcer and workers' organisations were weaker. In addition, the obligation to extend office clerks' eight-hour work day to the whole territory – the forty-eight-hour week – only emerged in 1919, as a result of decree number 5516 of 7 May.<sup>[26]</sup>

These laws were a result of workers' demands and were vehemently criticised by the industrial associations that represented employers. Immediately, in July 1915, the journal *O Trabalho Nacional* attempted to point out the inconsistencies of the law that regulated working hours. Among other complaints, the inconsistency of attributing shorter work hours to jobs that required less physical effort was highlighted, along with the accusation that such policy might improve the conditions for foreign competition and even lead to a need to lower workers' wages.<sup>[27]</sup> However, Portugal's participation in the Great War, in March 1916, would bring about the creation of the ministry of labour and social security, entrusted with overseeing the enforcement of regulations pertaining to work, occupational health and safety, daily wages, contractual issues, employment conflicts, and workplace accidents.<sup>[28]</sup>

# Migration and Replacement of the Work Force in Belligerent Countries

One of the most significant wartime phenomena that affected the workforce pertained to [migration](#). Despite a decrease in migration numbers after 1914, the war opened new prospects for emigration to belligerent countries which were in dire need of an imported work force to replace drafted workers and expelled foreigners. After 1915, a new migratory trend towards London and Morocco began. Many workers, mainly farmers, also crossed the border into Spain. As a result, the ministry of the interior received several letters from landowners requesting that the borders be watched by competent authorities and that the issuance of passports be made more difficult, in order to minimise the damage this exodus caused in the weak agricultural sector, which was struggling to cope with a shortage of available manpower.<sup>[29]</sup>

In 1915, [France](#) began requesting contingents of foreign workers in order to make up for drafted workers and to prevent its ammunition plants from stopping production. The Portuguese government eventually accepted the request of the French state, which it regarded as a component of industrial collaboration between allies.

Emigration led to the loss of around 16,000 workers of military age. This worried the employers' association, mainly due to France's interest in the same specialised work force that was also needed in domestic industry. A significant number of workers outside military age, as well as women and children, also emigrated for family reunification purposes.<sup>[30]</sup> The wave was interrupted in November 1917 and resumed in February 1918, after new requests from France.

## Conclusion

The First World War affected Portuguese production and industry. Even before Portugal joined the war in 1916, new international conditions regarding [transport](#) and supply influenced the country's industrial productive capability, as it was largely dependent on raw materials and energy sources from abroad. Conversely, exceptional wartime conditions allowed for the development of industries which would have otherwise had no economic viability.

Labour faced trials brought about by the conflict and contemporary conditions in two different ways. On the one hand, a large part of the population was harshly affected by the shortage of food, social unrest, and military conscription. On the other hand, workers were compelled to contribute to the [war economy](#) in the course of a conflict which required the intensification of productivity.

While attempting to protect the domestic productive sectors and keep the unionist movement out of the spotlight, the government seized the opportunity to introduce some pieces of labour legislation in reaction to workers' demands, notably imposing hardly enforceable working hours. The legislation was bitterly criticised by employers' industrial associations. The ministry of labour and social security was also established during the war, only days after Germany's declaration of war on Portugal.

Workers were generally deemed essential to the survival of the country during the war. Conscription and emigration turned skilled factory workers into a treasured economic asset.

Ana Carina Gerardo da Silva Azevedo, Universidade Nova de Lisboa

Section Editor: [Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses](#)

## Notes

1. ↑ Pires, Ana Paula: Portugal e a I Guerra Mundial. A República e a Economia de Guerra [Portugal and the First World War. Republic and War Economy], Casal de Cambra 2011; Samara, Alice: I Grande Guerra. A questão económica e social [The First World War. The Economic and Social Issues], in: História 68 (2004), pp. 20-27; Telo, António José: A busca frustrada do desenvolvimento [The Frustrated Pursuit of Development], in: Reis, António (ed.): Portugal Contemporâneo [Contemporary Portugal], volume 3, Lisbon 1990, pp. 123-170.
2. ↑ Oliveira, César: O Operariado e a Primeira República (1910-1924) [The Working Class and the First Republic (1910-1924)], Lisbon 1990; Pereira, José Pacheco: Lutas (As) operárias contra a carestia de vida em Portugal. A greve geral de Novembro de 1918 [Workers' Struggles Against the High Cost of Living in Portugal. The General Strike of November 1918], Porto 1971; Samara, Maria Alice: Verdes e Vermelhos. Portugal e a guerra no ano de Sidónio Pais [Greens and Reds. Portugal and the War in the Year of Sidónio Pais], Lisbon 2003; Oliveira, César: Os limites e a ambiguidade. O movimento operário português durante a guerra de 1914-18 [Limits and Ambiguity. The Portuguese Labour Movement During the War of 1914-18], in: Análise Social 10/40 (1973), pp. 679-702; Pereira, Joana Dias: Sindicalismo Revolucionário - A história de uma Ideia [Revolutionary Syndicalism – The History of an Idea], Master's Thesis, Universidade Nova de Lisboa 2008.
3. ↑ Alves, Jorge Fernandes: Operários para França e Inglaterra (1914-1918). Experiências da emigração portuguesa intra-europeia [Workers to France and England (1914-1918). Experiences of the Portuguese Intra-European Emigration], in: História 2/5 (1988), pp. 317-336; Pereira, Miriam Halpern: A política portuguesa de emigração, 1850 a 1930 [Portuguese Emigration Policy, 1850 to 1930], Lisbon 1981.
4. ↑ Raposo, Maria Manuela: A imprensa feminista e feminina e a Grande Guerra [The Feminist and Feminine Press and the Great War], Lisbon 2001; Baptista, Virgínia do Rosário: As mulheres no mercado de trabalho em Portugal. Representações e quotidianos (1890-1940) [Women in the Labour Market in Portugal. Representations and Everyday Lives (1890-1940)], Lisbon 2000, 1999; Guinote, Paulo: Quotidianos femininos (1900-1933)[Women's Everyday Lives (1900-1933)], volume 1, Cruz Quebrada 2000, 1997.
5. ↑ Oliveira Marques, A. H. de / Rollo, Fernanda: O surto industrial [The Industrial Surge], in: Oliveira Marques, A. H. de (ed.): Nova História de Portugal. Portugal da Monarquia para a República [New History of Portugal. Portugal from Monarchy to Republic], volume 11, Lisbon 1991, p. 131.
6. ↑ Ibid.

7. † Tavares, João Carlos Moreira: A Indústria Militar Portuguesa no tempo da guerra (1961-74) [The Portuguese Military Industry during the war (1961-1974)], Lisbon 2002, p. 21.
8. † Pires, Portugal e a I Guerra Mundial 2011, p. 372.
9. † Guinote, Quotidianos 1997, pp. 250-251, 286-287.
10. † Pires, Portugal e a I Guerra Mundial 2011, p. 151.
11. † Decree no. 2027, 6 November 1915, in: Diário do Govêrno [Government Gazette], Series I, no. 227, 1915, p. 1, 220.
12. † Pires, Portugal e a I Guerra Mundial 2011, pp. 153-154.
13. † Ordinance no. 518, 10 November 1915, Diário do Governo, Series I, no. 230, 1915, p. 1, 240.
14. † Pires, Portugal e a I Guerra Mundial 2011, p. 175.
15. † Decree no. 2407, 24 May 1916, Diário do Governo, Series I, no. 102, 1916, pp. 489-490.
16. † Pires, Portugal e a I Guerra Mundial 2011, p. 236.
17. † Diário da Câmara dos Deputados [Gazette of the Chamber of Deputies], 105th session, 22 August 1917, p. 2.
18. † The *escudo* was the coin that started being used in Portugal during the period of the First Republic. One *escudo* was equivalent to 100 *centavos*.
19. † Oliveira Marques, A. H. de: A sociedade e as instituições sociais [Society and Social Institutions], in: Oliveira Marques, A. H. de (ed.): Nova História de Portugal. Portugal da Monarquia para a República [New History of Portugal. Portugal from Monarchy to Republic], volume 11, Lisbon 1991, p. 217.
20. † Telo, A busca frustrada 1990, pp. 143-144.
21. † Guinote, Paulo: Afonso Costa. O orador parlamentar [Afonso Costa. The Parliamentary Speaker], Lisbon 2014, p. 277.
22. † Pereira, José Pacheco: As lutas operárias contra a carestia de vida em Portugal. A greve geral de Novembro de 1918 [Workers' Struggles Against the High Cost of Living in Portugal. The General Strike of November 1918], Porto 1976, pp. 37-39.
23. † Medeiros, Fernando: A sociedade e a economia portuguesas nas origens do Salazarismo [The Portuguese Society and Economy in the Origins of Salazar's Regime], Lisbon 1978, p. 136.
24. † Oliveira Marques, A sociedade 1991, p. 195.
25. † Law 295, 22 January 1915, Diário do Governo, Series I, no. 16, 1915, p. 115 and law no. 296, 22 January 1915, Diário do Governo, Series I, no. 16, 1915, p. 115.
26. † Oliveira Marques, A sociedade 1991, pp. 207-209.
27. † O Trabalho Nacional, 1915, pp. 21-22.
28. † Law no. 494, 16 March 1916, Diário do Governo, Series I, no. 51, 1916, pp. 263-264.
29. † Pires, Portugal e a I Guerra Mundial 2011, p. 268.
30. † Alves, Operários para França e Inglaterra 1988, p. 327.

## Selected Bibliography



Alves, Jorge Fernandes: **Operários para França e Inglaterra (1914-1918). Experiências da emigração portuguesa intra-europeia (Workers to France and England. Experiences of the Portuguese intra-European emigration)**, in: Revista da Faculdade de Letras 2/5, 1988, pp. 317-336.

Baptista, Virgínia do Rosário: **As mulheres no mercado de trabalho em Portugal. Representações e quotidianos (1890-1940) (Women in the labour market in Portugal. Representations and everyday lives (1890-1940)) (thesis)**, Lisbon 1999: Organizações Não Governamentais do Conselho Consultivo da Comissão para a Igualdade e para os Direitos das Mulheres.

Fraga, Luís Alves de: **Portugal na Grande Guerra. O recrutamento, a mobilização e o roulement nas frentes de combate. Factos e números (Portugal in the Great War. Conscription, mobilisation and troop rotation on the combat fronts. Facts and numbers)**: Separata das Actas do VII Colóquio 'O Recrutamento militar em Portugal' (Separate version of minutes of the 7th conference 'Military conscription in Portugal'), Lisbon 1996: Comissão Portuguesa de História Militar.

Guinote, Paulo: **Quotidianos femininos (1900-1933) (Women's everyday lives (1900-1933))**, volume 1, Lisbon 1997: Organizações Não Governamentais do Conselho Consultivo da Comissão para a Igualdade e para os Direitos das Mulheres.

Lains, Pedro: **Os Progressos do atraso. Uma nova história económica de Portugal (The progresses of underdevelopment. A new history of the Portuguese economy)**, Lisbon 2003: Instituto de Ciências Sociais.

Lains, Pedro; Reis, Jaime: **Portuguese economic growth, 1833-1985. Some doubts**, in: Journal of European Economic History 20/2, 1991, pp. 441-454.

Lains, Pedro / Silva, Álvaro Ferreira da: **História económica de Portugal, 1700-2000 (Economic history of Portugal, 1700-2000), 3 volumes**, Lisbon 2005: ICS, Imprensa de Ciências Sociais.

Ministério das Obras Publicas, Commercio e Industria / Direcção Geral do Comércio e Indústria / Repartição do Trabalho Industrial (eds.): Boletim do trabalho industrial (Industrial labour bulletin), Lisbon 1914-1926: Imprensa Nacional

Oliveira, César: **Os limites e a ambiguidade. O movimento operário português durante a guerra de 1914-18 (Limits and ambiguity. The Portuguese labour movement during the war of 1914-18)**, in: Análise Social 10/40, 1973, pp. 679-702.

O Trabalho Nacional (The national labour), Porto 1915-1918: Associação Industrial Portuense

Pereira, Joana Dias: **O Sindicalismo Revolucionário. A história de uma idéia (Revolutionary syndicalism. The history of an idea)**, Lisbon 2011: Caleidoscópio.

Pereira, José de Campos: **Portugal industrial. Características, números, comentários (Industrial Portugal. Features, numbers, comments)**, Lisbon 1919: Livraria Profissional.

Pereira, Miriam Halpern: **A política portuguesa de emigração (1850 a 1930) (Portuguese emigration policy (1850-1930))**, Lisbon 1981: Regra do Jogo.

Pires, Ana: **Portugal e a I Guerra Mundial. A República e a economia de guerra (Portugal and the First World War. The republic and the war economy)**, Casal de Cambra 2011: Caleidoscópio.

Teixeira, Nuno Severiano (ed.): **Portugal e a guerra. História das intervenções militares portuguesas nos grandes conflitos mundiais (séculos XIX-XX) (Portugal and the war. History of the Portuguese military interventions in the great world conflicts (19th and 20th centuries))**, Lisbon 1998: Colibri.

Telo, António José: **A busca frustrada do desenvolvimento (The frustrated pursuit of development)**, in: Reis, António (ed.): Portugal contemporâneo (Contemporary Portugal), volume 3, Lisbon 1990: Publicações Alfa, pp. 123-170.

### Citation

Azevedo, Ana Carina Gerardo da Silva: Labour (Portugal) , in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2019-08-05.  
**DOI:** [10.15463/ie1418.11370](https://doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.11370).

### License

This text is licensed under: [CC by-NC-ND 3.0 Germany - Attribution, Non-commercial, No Derivative Works](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/de/).