

Propaganda at Home (Portugal)

By [Noémia Malva Novais](#)

Propaganda, like censorship, is legitimized by states at war due to the alleged superior interest of the nation. Through censorship, states prevent, or seek to prevent, newspapers from publishing inconvenient news as far as the war is concerned. Through propaganda, they promote the mobilization of public opinion in favour of the war. Propaganda is, therefore, an important weapon of governments during wartime. Propaganda was employed in all belligerent nations during the First World War, be they the Allies or the Central Empires. Portugal was no exception.

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Introduction

During the First World War, all throughout Europe, [propaganda](#), just like [censorship](#), was legitimized by the states at war with reference to the alleged superior interest of the nation. Through censorship, states prevent, or seek to prevent, newspapers from publishing inconvenient news to the war effort. Through [propaganda](#), they promote the mobilization of public opinion in favour of the war. Propaganda and censorship are thus weapons of choice of successive wartime governments; together, they compromise [press](#) coverage of the war – and therefore popular understanding of the conflict. Both the Allies and the Central Empires resorted to propaganda and censorship to achieve their specific goals. [Portugal](#) was no exception to this phenomenon.

In Portugal, as soon as the idea of the inevitability of global conflagration became evident, two opposing positions emerged: the interventionist stance, favourable to Portugal's participation in the war alongside the Allies, and the anti-interventionist stance, contrary to the involvement of the country in the armed conflict. Interventionists and anti-interventionists presented their arguments in [parliament](#) and in the press, attempting to rally public opinion to their respective causes. This difference of opinion provoked a conflict within Portuguese society which remained open until 1918 and even beyond, persisting as a source of political antagonism well into the post-war period.

Interventionists and anti-interventionists sought to "influence, through speeches, newspaper articles, pamphlets and brochures, the less enlightened masses regarding the War in which, two years later [1916], Portugal would actively participate".^[1] Before the fighting started in the trenches, the clash in Portugal was already under way, and with such intensity that it is generally considered "the great bone of contention of the First Republic".^[2] There could be no consensus between interventionists (most of whom supported the Allies, while a minority favoured [Germany](#)) and anti-interventionists.

This absence of consensus within Portuguese public opinion of the time – however, these debates revolved around a small portion of the population limited almost exclusively to the cities of Lisbon and Porto – resulted in pitched battles between newspapers. These quickly adhered to the different camps, some being interventionists (notably *O Mundo*, *República*, and *Século*) and others anti-interventionists (*A Luta*, *O País*, and *Portugal*). The interventionists assumed "the defence of national interests and international objectives ... such as the protection of the colonial integrity in Africa, of national sovereignty in the face of Spain and the international prestige of the regime as well as internal objectives", taking advantage of the international situation created by the war since "only an external threat and a military intervention in a large-scale war could justify all the internal fractures and factions to the benefit of national interest and unity".^[3] The anti-interventionists – which consisted of most of the monarchists, republican unionists, some sectors of the army and some independents – refused to intervene in the war within the framework of the Anglo-Portuguese alliance, for they considered that this alliance was purely defensive. Faced with the strong possibility of Portugal entering the hostilities, they stressed that "if we absolutely have to go to war, we should do so in Africa, where we are neighbours with the Germans: in the west, in Angola, and in the east, in Mozambique".^[4]

Censorship and Propaganda

This cauldron of passion and conflict regarding the participation of Portugal in the war was reignited every day on the pages of newspapers. It awoke the government to the need to strengthen monitoring and control over the press through [censorship](#), and to inform and shape, through propaganda, public opinion in favour Portugal's participation in the war alongside the Allies.

Early in the war, before the introduction of censorship, a few suspensions and seizures of newspapers occurred, some of them entirely unrelated to the armed conflict; being motivated instead by the accusation that certain articles contributed to insecurity, disorder and domestic unrest. Later, faced with the multiplication of complaints from newspaper directors who accused the government of causing economic damage and social problems as a result of journalists, printers and distributors becoming unemployed, the government ultimately established preventive censorship.

The introduction of censorship in Portugal through Law N.º 495 on 28 March 1916 occurred after Germany's declaration of war against Portugal and led to a return to a concept of absolutist-type censorship whereby the state asserted that what matters is public safety, not opinion. In other words, censorship was presented as a guarantee of national defence, and public opinion was considered vulnerable in the hands of a press that was corrupting the public through supporting invisible or unmentionable interests. Certain political thinkers and rulers set out a duty not to "abandon the public opinion to itself" or to the forces perverting it, proposing the use of preventive censorship alongside state propaganda. Censorship was adopted "as a normal auxiliary to governance" and used for purposes that went well beyond the "circumstances of war".^[5]

In this context, through a press controlled by censorship, public opinion ended up being directed and mobilized in defence of the national interest, not only against the external enemy, but also against those accused of being Germanophiles and described as internal enemies. While censorship controlled the press and, by controlling the news flow, ultimately controlled public opinion, state propaganda was expected to do the rest. Namely to manipulate the newspaper readers into believing that there was no more favourable course for Portugal than to go to war, not only in [Africa](#) where Portugal had been fighting since August 1914, but especially in Europe, the main theatre of military confrontation. As in other Allied countries, the Portuguese government directed human and material resources into propaganda to convince the public of the need for war, arguing that Portugal, by aligning itself with the Allies, would be fighting for the freedom of humanity against the barbarism of the Central Powers.

After the ambiguous [neutrality](#) that characterized Portugal's [diplomatic](#) stance after the outbreak of war – during which time, and in order to defend the colonies of Angola and Mozambique, a Portuguese expeditionary force fought German troops in Africa – and once the *pimentista* dictatorship (25 January 1915 – 14 May 1915) was overthrown and General [Joaquim Pimenta de Castro \(1846-1918\)](#) was removed from office, Major [José Norton de Matos \(1867-1955\)](#) took over the ministry of war on 22 July 1915. Norton de Matos put an end to the policy of neutrality, preparing Portugal for the large-scale military conflict to come, and was thus crucial to the continuation of Portuguese interventionism.^[6]

War Propaganda of the Sacred Union

The governments of the [Sacred Union](#), headed by António José de Almeida (1866-1929) from 15 March 1916 to 25 April 1917 and [Afonso Costa \(1871-1937\)](#) from 26 April 1917 to 5 December 1917, with Norton de Matos in charge of the ministry of war, \$Propaganda at Home (Portugal) - 1914-1918-Online

were responsible for the war propaganda effort in Portugal aimed at both the public and the families of combatants in Africa and on the [Western Front](#). To this end, Evolutionists and Democrats shared the responsibility of governance and the Portuguese intervention in the war, with most republican intellectuals rallying behind the interventionist policy, such as [Jaime Cortesão \(1884-1960\)](#), [João Chagas \(1863-1925\)](#), [Raul Proença \(1884-1941\)](#), and [Câmara Reys \(1885-1961\)](#). These men regarded Portuguese belligerence as an opportunity to reassert Portugal's place among the European powers and to liberate it from its century-old situation as a British quasi-protectorate.

Norton de Matos appointed Captain Almeida Santos to lead his cabinet, which included captains António de Almeida, Florentino Martins and Salvador José da Costa, as well as Lieutenant José Fernandes to deal with the military-technical domains. He also called on painter [Sousa Lopes \(1879-1944\)](#) and photographer [Arnaldo Garcez \(1885-1964\)](#) to coordinate war propaganda. Aware of the importance of disseminating imagery of the Portuguese war effort, the minister created the Photographic Service of the [Portuguese Expeditionary Corps \(CEP\)](#) and the Film Section of the army in 1917.

While serving the CEP, [photographer](#) Arnaldo Garcez recorded every movement of the troops, from the military training of the Division of Instruction in Tancos, to the departure for Brest and, once on the battlefield, the military exercises, the battalions en route to the front, the daily life of the "mountain people" in the trenches, the encounters between army staffs, the ministerial and presidential visits, and even the Portuguese army parades on the Champs Elysees on 14 July.^[7]

Garcez' work constitutes a thorough record of the reality of war in [France](#). It exalts the effort and the pride of the combatants while depicting aspects of everyday life in the trenches. It also depicts the presence of politicians in the Portuguese sector, emphasizing victories and playing down defeats. It does not shy away from showing the destruction caused by the Germans, but covers up the bloodshed, [mutilations](#) and all those realities that belong to the macabre side of trench warfare, which might provide ammunition to the anti-interventionist cause.

These photographs by Arnaldo Garcez, which today we find in the most relevant books of [historiography](#) of World War I, were published in one of the most important periodicals of war propaganda – the illustrated magazine *Portugal na Guerra*, edited by [Augusto Pina \(1872-1938\)](#). It was published fortnightly in Portuguese and French, printed in Paris and distributed in France, Portugal and [Brazil](#) between June and November 1917, eventually being suspended in December 1917 by the government of [Sidónio Pais \(1872-1918\)](#). *Portugal na Guerra* was funded by the Portuguese government with the aim of promoting the war effort, enhancing the behaviour and sense of [honour](#) among the soldiers, generating admiration toward government and state leaders, and forming a public opinion that was favourable to the war.

In addition to *Portugal na Guerra*, the illustrated newspaper *O Espelho* was published and printed in London, in Portuguese. It was funded by the Trade Association of Brazil, and distributed in [Britain](#), Portugal and Brazil. *O Espelho*, however, was not an original product like *Portugal na Guerra*. *O Espelho* was identical to the English illustrated newspaper *The Sphere*, essentially republishing the content (text and pictures) produced by the latter. This condition was not unique and reveals, above all, the existence of a joint strategy of propaganda between the Allied countries, where the Portuguese language and Portugal played an important role.

Meanwhile, interventionist newspapers disseminated the news that the ministry of war sent to the newsrooms, both as telegrams and photographs. The anti-interventionists were prevented by censorship from publishing any news that might affect the conduct of the war. Invariably, reportage based either on the Allied wire services, validated by the ministry of war, or on the ministry's own despatches, always sought to justify the participation of Portugal in the armed conflict, pointing out the strength, bravery, altruism, and other alleged qualities of the Portuguese fighting men at the front. Newspapers often published reports from the trenches written by soldiers themselves; since journalists had no place on the battlefield, the soldiers themselves became [war correspondents](#) once their [letters](#) had passed the stringent control by the ministry of war.

However, as mentioned above, Norton de Matos had created the Film Section of the army, and the government did not neglect [cinema](#) as a means of war propaganda. According to the data advanced by José de Mattos Cruz,^[8] in 1914, fourteen out of thirty-five films made in Portugal were about the war, in 1916, nineteen out of seventy-four films produced were war-themed, and in 1917, sixteen movies about the war were produced, eight of them by the army's Film Section.^[9] The titles of these films attest to the government's objectives, such as *Participation of Portugal in the War*, *Final Trials of the Students of the School of War*, *Transport of Troops to France* and *Portuguese Troops on the Front*.

Propaganda Under Sidónio Pais

Sidónio Pais' coup in December 1917 introduced no change to the diplomatic status of Portugal, but a new course was initiated as regards the war policy, as several historians point out. Sidónio Pais reduced the CEP to a single division, tactically dependent on the British High Command, and left Portuguese soldiers in Flanders without the possibility of *roulement*, which caused physical and psychological decay of the CEP and hence the disaster of [La Lys](#) on 9 April 1918.

While the troops and the fighting ceased to be so much of a priority, the same cannot be said about propaganda. However, the focus shifted from the war to propaganda in favour of the regime. In this context, the Photographic Section and the Film Section of the army were merged into a single service, which started to work for the exclusive benefit of the personal image of the leader and of his regime. Paris based journalist [Francisco Homem Cristo Filho \(1892-1928\)](#) was appointed to lead the new Direction of Information and Propaganda of the Portuguese Republic in the Friendly and Allied Countries. Headquartered in the French capital, it was charged with promoting Portugal, or, in reality, the dictatorship and personality of Sidónio Pais. This organization was heir to the war propaganda services created within Norton de Matos' ministry of war under the *Sacred Union* governments.

Conclusion

During the First World War in Portugal, as in the rest of Europe, propaganda and censorship were legitimized by the state as being in the interest of the nation.

Censorship was intended to prevent the publication of news that could negatively influence the course of the war. Propaganda sought to mobilize public opinion in favour of the war, the country's war effort, and the quality, honour, and bravery of the fighting men. Censorship and propaganda were powerful "weapons" used by successive ministries of war.

The life of interventionist newspapers, early advocates of Portugal's participation in the armed conflict, was made easier by censorship as they accepted both the imposition of preventive censorship and the role that was expected of them as disseminators of war propaganda, almost always mixing information about the war with war propaganda. In fact, journalistic information and war propaganda went hand in hand in these interventionist newspapers. Anti-interventionist newspapers, opposed to the country's participation in the war, were watched closely by the censors and found it increasingly difficult to disseminate anti-war views; despite the fact that, in theory, they were supported by the majority of the population who did not understand the motivations behind the decision to go to war and were generally more concerned with the increasingly difficult living conditions in Portugal. However, this vast majority of the population did not read newspapers, with most of the readership concentrated in urban areas, particularly in Lisbon and Porto.

However, the press still wielded much power, so the state directed its propaganda in part at the pages of the newspapers, even creating illustrated newspapers of war propaganda, and dispatching a photographer to the trenches of Flanders and publishing many of his war photographs. Film was also used as an instrument of propaganda, as the moving image could be more powerful than those printed in newspapers, magazines, flyers, brochures, posters or postcards, which had been published and circulated in Portugal since the beginning of the conflict. The propaganda output grew in intensity after Germany's declaration of war on Portugal on 9 March 1916 until Sidónio Pais' coup on 5 December 1917. From then until the end of the conflict, war and propaganda became second tier concerns, with priority being given to the dictatorship and person of Sidónio Pais.

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Notes

1. ↑ Novais, Noémia Malva: João Chagas. A Diplomacia e a Guerra 1914-1918 [João Chagas. Diplomacy and War 1914-1918], Coimbra 2006, p. 57.
2. ↑ Medina, João: Guerristas e Antiguerristas [Warriors and Anti-warriors], Lisbon 1986, p. 35.

3. ↑ Teixeira, Nuno Severiano: Portugal na Guerra [Portugal in the War], in: História do Século XX [History of the 20th Century], volume 2, Lisbon 1995, p. 178.
4. ↑ Camacho, Brito: Rescaldo da Guerra [Aftermath of War], Lisbon 1936 pp. 227-228.
5. ↑ Barreto, António / Mónica, Maria Filomena: Dicionário de História de Portugal [Dictionary of Portuguese History], volume 7, Porto 1999, p. 275.
6. ↑ Novais, Noémia Malva: Dicionário da História da República e do Republicanismo [Dictionary of the history of the republic and republicanism], forthcoming.
7. ↑ Sousa, Jorge Pais De: O Fascismo Catedrático de Salazar. Das origens na I Guerra Mundial à intervenção militar na Guerra Civil de Espanha [Salazar's Professorial Fascism. From the Origins in the First World War to Military Intervention in the Spanish Civil War], Coimbra 2011, p. 33.
8. ↑ Cruz, José de Mattos: Prontuário do Cinema Português [Portuguese Cinema Handbook], 1896-1989, Lisbon 1989, pp. 20-25.
9. ↑ Sousa, Jorge Pais De: A Propaganda do esforço de guerra nos governos da União Sagrada e a sua transformação em máquina de propaganda política ao serviço do ditador Sidónio Pais (1915-1918) [The propaganda of the war effort in the Sacred Union governments and its transformation into a propaganda machine at the service of the dictator Sidónio Pais], forthcoming.

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