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# The reality of national unity

*SPEECH DELIVERED BY PROF. OLIVEIRA SALAZAR AT THE  
HEADQUARTERS OF THE "NATIONAL UNION" ON  
EMPOWERING THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, ON JULY 4th 1957*

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INCORPORAÇÃO

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We have come here today to install the new executive committee of the National Union. I at least ought to have come only to thank the former committee for their services and to greet those who have expressed their willingness to take their place. Even though our political life lacks, in the opinion of many people, spectacular activity and is not disturbed by events which would excite the public's curiosity, because any divergence or disagreement there might be would be subordinated to the spirit of service, the truth is that the constant care of the organization and that kind of permanent vigilance which the holders of such posts are obliged to maintain wearies the strongest natures. It is only just that this fact should be realized and situations modified accordingly.

Those who are laying down their functions do not need my praise, nor those who are taking them up any incitement to the fulfilment of duty. All of them can present their long records of services given and await the justice owed to them, but I cannot do other than express my most sincere thanks to the former executive committee in the person of its chairman, Eng. Cancela de Abreu, for their complete devotion and so entire fidelity of their service in the common cause.

To those who are taking up these duties, I can only add, together with my best wishes for their success, that to serve is

certainly a sacrifice, but it is also an honour. Bearing in mind our principles, I find it hard to say which of them deserves most to be emphasised. In their struggles, our forefathers fought to occupy the positions of greatest danger.

## I

Here I should really put a full stop to my remarks, but if I have to say a few words more, they shall be dictated by the chief idea which has brought us together here at this moment.

We have to make a survey of the series of circumstances and problems which at present constitute the world's life, many of which are embedded in our own interests as a nation. Not only in Europe but also in the other continents, radical changes have taken place in the last twenty or thirty years. The great powers that guide and control the interests of the world are no longer those we used to know. Many countries have risen to independence and occupy prominent seats in the international assemblies before which an attempt is being made to bring a great part of the life of the Nations. Communism has seized and subjugated a large portion of the earth and aims to continue a revolution which has proved to be impossible in the economic and social spheres, but which is still practicable in the political field. Subversive elements, mixed up with evident economic motives, are agitating in peoples as yet unprepared for emancipation, that is the present-day seductive formula of the new servitudes. Independence built on political or racial hate is formed in national units that lack the economic and technical help that could give them value and make them progress. Rash and excessive nationalisms provoke the fall of peoples that only friendly co-operation could save. The mirage of the unlimited increase of wealth excites all imaginations: we confide in a technique which is said to possess limitless possibilities and we

are blasted by a wind of economic ambitions at all levels, in individuals, in peoples and in mankind. Meanwhile, everywhere we see that men are disappointed, anxious and restless, as if riches and distractions did not bring consolation or peace to their souls. The rights of the human being that are now so sought after and which many think they have lately discovered seem to have as their aim above all the confused, de-humanised, impersonal mass and not man in the completeness and fullness of his being, his nobility and his infinite value.

I would say again that we must examine as deeply as possible these facts and these tendencies. They condition the external activity of the State and our life as a Nation, and also, to some extent, its activity at home. There are in all this unalterable positions, tendencies that are to some extent fatal, clashes of interests, deceptive aspirations, mistakes and contradictions. We have to deal with them in order to preserve our national individuality, to lead it forward and for it to assert itself among the nations. It is just that the opportunity for sounding them will come later as we approach more closely the choice of the new National Assembly. At this moment I would like merely to consider with you whether the formula of *national union* has still a present value or whether, in the face of circumstances, it has lost its political effectiveness.

## II

We have been accused of not maintaining a high degree of certain public liberties.

Although this accusation is arguable in many of its aspects, many gauge the structure of the State by it, that is, they classify the regime itself, which is a separate problem.

It is axiomatic that unlimited liberties bring about their own destruction. For this reason, they are everywhere more or less restricted and granted with certain conditions. When we are

working on the plan of absolute sincerity, the greater or lesser restrictions which accompany their legal expression depend on various social factors. The standard which defines them, the institutions which the law calls upon to guarantee them are not the essential point: what is essential is to make them live. Liberties exist to the extent to which they are a current practice of life. And that practice must only be governed, as it in fact is, by the real danger it may represent for other liberties or the higher possessions of man or of society, among which we must count security, stability of power, not to be confused with the life of governments, and order.

This is the link between certain public liberties and the political regime, but I will not deal with the former today.

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Our aim has been to create, not only a set of institutions functioning efficiently and regularly to the good of the common weal, but also a certain political atmosphere, considered necessary for the regular progress of those very institutions. To achieve this aim it was necessary: first, not to recognize parties as organs, whether constitutional or otherwise, but in any case as indispensable to political life; second, to put aside all questions over which the Portuguese might be seriously divided and the solution to which was not indispensable to that of other national problems; and finally, to call on all men of good will to set them to work in the task of common salvation, quite independently of their political past or of their ideologies. I will begin by the last of these.

Some time ago, Dr. Marcello Caetano stated in a speech that if we gave our careful attention to the subject we should see that in the various governments that have been in power since the Revo-



lution of the 28th of May there have served Ministers who would, under a party system, probably be grouped in different sectors or parties. This would seem to be true, but, so far as I remember, he did not emphasize the difference, which is essentially the absence of external discipline or of any explicit mandate or representation of any groupings whatever. Each member in the Government finds himself faced with problems with his ability and his conscience. He has at his disposal bureaucratic means of information, experts' studies, he follows a common guiding principle of political thought, but he does not depend in his activity nor in his life as a Minister on agreements or interests foreign to his own function. The obstacles we may see certain countries struggling with would be easily overcome merely by an appeal to the numerous élite they have at their command, once it were possible to free that élite from the mesh which entangles it.

In order to work in such conditions it is necessary to discover a common denominator, which is the *national interest*, interpreted and served as it can be by individuals freed from the preoccupations of party, of political interests or of ideological standpoints. And if men struggle to make them effective, it is therefore in this direction that we must ask for, and make, sacrifices.

I believe that I have already said once that when the Army created the conditions for the establishment of the new regime, it carried out two highly praiseworthy acts, of far-reaching consequences: it did not monopolize the machinery of government nor did it stipulate that it should function in its favour. On the other hand, it created a problem: the point is that, given the predominant political situation, whether of republicans or of monarchists, sufficient conditions for the task to be undertaken with the collaboration of only one of the groups would not be met with. And because all understood this, all have collaborated without restrictions or reserve and with the greatest generosity within the framework of the present regime.

On the other hand I believe that the Government has done everything possible for the House of Braganza, its Portuguese branch, I mean, since it was allowed to return to Portugal, to be placed on the high level of dignity which is meet for the direct descendents of the Kings of Portugal. It has acted in this way for two reasons: the justice owed to those who led the nation through eight centuries of history and the prudent view that there may come a moment when the monarchical solution may become a national solution. A consequence of this thought is however that whether the House of Braganza is considered merely as the repository of a historical heritage or whether the possibility of future services to its and our homeland is borne in mind, it should be distant from a political leadership which at a given moment might divide instead of uniting the Portuguese people. Now, when I notice certain external manifestations which may not be accidental and on the other hand when I see fears I know to be without foundation becoming active, the least I can say is that we are outside the framework and situation within which the question was put and that fundamentally the national unity that has been established is threatened.

Courage is needed if we are not to lose sight of the fact that this form of political organization and of governmental work without political parties, together with the Constitution which does not provide for them, make us stand almost alone in the world. I will, however, add that if appearances are such, the reality is very different.

There can be very few written constitutions today that do not call themselves democratic. It is the fashion. The communist States entitle themselves democracies par excellence — the popular democracies — but if we give words their current meaning we shall have to consider them as totalitarian States. It can be said that here and there in some satellite countries there is, for the benefit of memory, more than one party: the truth is, however, that one single party holds the reins of power,

defines action, calls itself the true representative of the people's suffrage and for all practical purposes it is assumed that it watches over the interests of that people. The existence of any party apart from the communist party can be taken as opportunism, but it is neither a principle nor a practice. We may thus state at this stage that a sizeable zone of the world lives outside the sphere of the party regime.

Anyone who examines the practical working of their institutions in the case of those States denominated parliamentary or party democracies can divide them into three groups. The first is constituted of those very rare States in which the limited number of parties allows of the formation of homogenous majorities which take turns in power and which, when they are in opposition, do not prevent the ruling government from acting. The second group is of those where party life is so intense and intolerant that changes of government are often brought about by means of revolutions or coups d'état and which are basically the negation of the very principle on which they claim to be based. There is a third group in which the fragmentation of parties and the constitutional obligation of a parliamentary majority join to endanger ministries permanently, to hasten resignations, prolong crises and paralyse governments, which find themselves condemned to inaction and to formulas of compromise which will not always be those that are most suitable in the national interest. Thus, some await elections, others the revolution, and the latter, crises, as possibilities of government.

Based on these data it is easy to make a geographical map. I shall not do so, but since we are at home I will merely say that before the 28th of May we gracefully took our place in the second group. Neither the division or fusion of parties, nor previously the non-existence and later the possibility of the dissolution of parliament, not even the repetition of general elections, nor the good will of men and their patriotism, nor the sometimes dramatic appeal of the leaders avoided the numerous revolutions that we witnessed and of which we were the victims.

What resistance to this sort of fatality can be opposed by the good intentions of people who are used to thirty years of peace at home and to the change in the political climate that has taken place in the meantime and who think that now it would be different from what it was then ?

I have read a considerable amount of what has been written about the case of Portugal, and I think I may deduce from many remarks the anxiety that is felt, a friendly anxiety moreover, that a party system should be created for the future to succeed the present regime. The question for me is presented in different terms: the party system is not a social phenomenon that is always amenable to legal organization and discipline. Once the parties came to be considered as an essential feature of political life we should immediately have five or six political groupings at least, due to imitation of foreign countries and the dividing tendencies of the system acting on our way of being. Anyone who knows anything of men, the ideas that drive them on and the passions that separate them, could easily define these groups. I know that there are countries with more still, but those five or six would be quite enough for us to return to the former disorder and the impossibility of governing ourselves.

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I am convinced that the conclusions I have drawn do not represent any distortion resulting from long habit and attitudes, but are in harmony with the truth of things. There is no doubt that political democracy, in its parliamentary and party form, has long ago entered upon a crisis of discredit and is in disintegration. It is not only in the facts, and what I have said already would be enough to bear witness to this, but in the doctrine that the commentators are taking it upon themselves to lay bare contradictions and sophisms. The system will drag out its existence for decades yet, but philosophically we may say that its foundations are already crumbling.

I may go further. Peoples dominated by preoccupations that are today above all of an economic and social nature do not show interest in parties, nor do they find in them satisfaction or the support they seek. The idea that the satisfaction of many real needs can be entrusted to a principle abstractly defined in a party programme has led the parties outside facts, and their electoral expression no longer bears any correspondence either to national problems or needs nor to the classes of population. Many systems have lost their rigidity, that is, the truth they displayed; liberalism is no longer liberal; radicalism has ceased to be radical; communism itself, when it calls itself national, is no longer communist. And the increasingly common election of «independent» members of parliament, like their joining together in a group, represent no other than disbelief in the politics of parties, through a certain contradiction in terms, and the attempt in the only possible way to create a national union in purely party assemblies.

In this liquidation of political systems or patterns there is, however, something very serious and it is that people cling to ineffective principles and inefficient instruments. When I consider the organic weakness of States, the collapses and deficiencies on the western side, the victim of its own political idealism, and see on the other that leaders do not raise their hands from the control lever, I tremble for the future of these peoples and their civilization. It may be that we have great reasons for our party differences and our claims, but what is essential may be lost in Byzantine arguments.

### III

These points of view could be demonstrated by a whole series of reasons which would not convince us if they did not satisfy two conditions: to be practicable theories and their practice to have served the national interest. The first part is self-evident.

The regime has become constitutional, that is, has become juridically legitimate, and it has lived for thirty years without serious jolts, if we leave out of account the disturbances which accompanied its infancy.

It believes that order and social balance are a constant creation of power, inspired by justice. It is thus authoritative in the sense that authority, knowing that it is itself necessary and limited, cannot be argued over in itself but it has no need to be violent and should not be unjust in its activity.

With a view to the interest of the homeland, the regime has endeavoured to call to its aid the greatest sum total of national values, mobilizing them with an effective productivity, in the certainty that not one can be wasted and without demanding more than the acceptance of those half dozen principles which can be considered imperative for the Nation, essential conditions or aims of the nation considered as a whole. Those principles would be in the conscience of the members of that élite, even if they were dispersed among the political parties. But we cannot discuss these principles because they represent the expression of a collective heritage and the concept of what we wish to continue to be in the world.

Speaking from experience, I will say that in this system government is not comfortable, but rather onerous for those who are obliged to take the ultimate decisions. It would be much more easy to have recourse to collective deliberations where the sense of responsibility, when it exists, is so widely diluted that it is easily lost. This would, however, be equivalent to replacing the Government by the Chamber or the party committees, in undesirable conditions and to the collective detriment.

It is true that this system is very different, more in spirit, moreover, than in some institutions, from those which have achieved constitutional expression in various parts of the world. In the past a result of this was a certain mistrust or misunderstanding: but the clouds have opened and let in a flood of light.

Furthermore, we do not possess the vain pretention of having created a pattern of State nor do we put ourselves proudly forward as an example for anybody else. We merely say: in Portugal we have been able to work in this way.

And has the regime served the national interest?

I have read that thirty years is a long period in the life of a country and that the mere passage of so much time would be of note for outstanding work. The statement seems to be naïve and we admit that it may not have mischievous aims: but outside nature time creates nothing, it only wears and destroys. The problem is another and it consists in knowing, first, if by other methods we could have travelled further than in fact we have and, in the second place, if the bases we have laid down will allow us to resolve the much that still remains and will remain to be done.

Let us separate the field of administration, with its material achievements, from the dominion of home politics and international affairs.

All that we have been able to achieve, even in the spheres nearest to intellectual and moral domains, is the result of an effort and a work of administration. It is thanks to the latter that the progress of the country has been created, and in part the improvement in the standard of living of the population, and the bases of the dignity, confidence, stability on which our policy has been built. I seem to discern theorists according to whose doctrines we have been overtaken, that is, for whom the administration, its order, its balance and its rigours have no longer the value that they had for us thirty years ago, when we were faced with a country stripped of its defences, deprived of what was essential, without money and without credit. I would advise, from the prudence that hard experience has given me and our country, that we should continue to follow this same path, at least until we see that it is possible to make omelettes without eggs or anything else that might replace them. Every day in the

world, however, we see painful returns to the principles, that is, to the harsh demands of the balance of economic life.

The administrative order that is represented in the financial order has an enormous power of multiplication, but it is always order. From it were born the first possibilities and the new courage that the life of the Nation plucked up here and in the Overseas Provinces. It is more than doubtful whether we should have reached that point by any other method, because through the former disorder it was not reached, in spite of the value and patriotic ambitions that inspired many men.

Some of the elements with which home policy functions are still from that same origin: the self-confidence of the Nation, a certain national pride, the increase in initiative, faith in the possibilities of national expansion and development, the tightening and warmth of relations with overseas territories. The truth is that consciousness of the uselessness of efforts, of the dispersion, of the social disintegration that the old order of things provoked or permitted, became so widespread that a new order of things was called for by all, even by those who in the immediate future would be sacrificed to it in the political field. And, after all, everything was born of this simple idea: that order and effective leadership would be the essential motive — but this was the same as to recognize and to accept the political disciplines that characterise the new order of things.

In international terms, countries are of value according to their population, natural wealth and economic power. They may also be valued on their strategical positions and in any case according to what they represent as the factors of a policy.

We are in Europe a small and very modest Nation, but with important portions in several parts of the world which are enough to allow us to change our plane in international life. If we are conscious of a mission and our will to fulfil it, we ought to consolidate our own internal situation, make our spirit





quite cohesive and our moral training very solid, as a way of calling on foreign elements of coinciding interests, without undesirable compromises or pledges. I do not think in this sphere we have taken any false steps, from the neutrality which made peace possible in the Iberian peninsula, to the Treaty with Spain for the formation of the peninsular bloc, the intensifying of the English alliance, the institution of the Luso-Brazilian community, so feelingly and enthusiastically exalted in the recent voyage of H. E. the President of the Republic. If the rigours of the present time do not jeopardise our close relations with the African nations that are our neighbours nor prevent us from carrying out our African programme, above all in Angola and Mozambique, that Luso-Brazilian community, at the side of the British Commonwealth and the Hispanic community which is rising and enveloping the Americas of Spanish descent, may eventually become three of the greatest factors of order and stability in international politics. Since the people does not lie in the manifestations of its collective feelings, we should believe that the way in which that people received the Queen of England in Lisbon and welcomed the President of the Republic on his return from Brazil expresses, as well as its perfect understanding, its support for a policy that only now our re-organization, stability and credit are beginning to make possible.

I consider that it is still a fruit of the same *national union* that the Nation understands as well as we ourselves do.





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