

António de Jesus Paulo and the fight for the 8 hours of work in the fields of Alentejo

Fight for the 8 hours

"In April 1962, in Berlanja, people – in that estate – demonstrated for the eight hours of work but it did not work. (...)

The real fight for the eight hours of work started here. (...) José Lopes and I began by inciting the women and the foremen, to make them aware so that they could also be part of the great fight we were preparing for the eight hours of work. It was very easy to convince the foremen, the one from the village was Aníbal Pedro, he was even my relative, the other one, from Santa Catarina, was a member of the Communist Party. When I told him about it, he fell silent, staring at me, and then he walked towards me and gave me a strong hug saying, with tears in his eyes: "Yes, comrade, it would be amazing if we could achieve this great victory." "It is a dream I've always dreamed of, but every day, when I wake up, I never see it accomplished, and I feel sad. And as for the women, we will prepare them for this great task."

It was also easy to convince Mr José Lopes, the women from the village and their foreman.

But, in addition to the women and their foreman, Joaquim Granja, I had my father-in-law who was the general foreman. I started by telling him when I went to his house at night (he lived nearby). The first time I was a little scared, but I ended up saying to him, "One of these days we'll have the eight hours of work." "But when?" "It won't take much longer." "That would be good. But can't you see that it can't be?" "It can, it can." – I replied. And that thing about you being in charge, and in case you hear someone saying something about it, you just say you haven't heard anything, freeing your responsibility and also that of the person who said it. Pretend the person didn't say anything either. Do you understand what I'm telling you?" "Yes, I do." "Think about it, if this happens during this summer, when we leave work, we'll still have four hours of sunshine. For people like you, my father-in-law, who have a vegetable garden to take care of, it will be wonderful. You will have time to do everything."

And it was already the end of April. The people, who were very excited, couldn't stop talking about it.

On May 2, the ranches in Palma went to the fight. The GNR went there but did nothing, because when people come together, no force can defeat them.

On May 3, José Lopes said to me: "António Paulo, yesterday, the people from Palma fought for the eight hours. Tell Granja and the women that tomorrow is our turn, I will tell Aníbal Pedro": "Okay man, but we really can't fail."

Since I transported the women from Santa Catarina, at night, when we dismounted the trailer, I signalled to Granja for the women not to leave right away. Granja said, "You just wait here because our tractor driver has something to tell you."

None of the women moved.

"Look, comrades, here it is: tomorrow we will try to conquer the eight hours of work. But for that to happen, we must be firm and have our feet set firmly on the ground. Even if my father-in-law tells you to work, no one moves from the stove. You only start working when you hear the siren from the Barrosinha factory at eight. At noon we'll have lunch. Then at five, we'll be on our way to Santa Catarina. Deal?" "Fine." "So, do not fail because tomorrow, by this time, you will already have your clothes washed and all the little things in the house done. See you tomorrow." "See you tomorrow."

From there, from Santa Catarina to Gacha, where I lived at the time, it was less than two leagues. I could get there in a little more than twenty minutes. But even though it was a short trip, it gave me enough time to think and question myself: What if this thing goes sideways? What if any of the women feel pressured by some authority to tell them that José Lopes and I planned all this? We will be in huge trouble. The PIDE will shoot us!

(...) I woke up very close to the time I needed to get up. (...) I started my journey to Santa Catarina.

When I arrived, only the foreman, Joaquim Granja, and his wife were there. We talked, exchanged greetings and I said: "What is about to happen will become part of the history of the people of the region of the Sado Valley, no matter the outcome. But I believe everything will work out." "I agree." "On your way, keep inciting the women for this great struggle that we're about to face. We must remain united and firm. Someone will talk, but when we hear about it, that person won't matter anymore. Do you understand?" "Of course, it's as if no one had spoken." "That's right. When we finish this dialogue many women, I would even say most of them, will know how to act."

We left to the workplace. When we arrived, my father-in-law was already near the stove with the men who lived in the estate. I opened the back of the trailer, put the ladder on for the women to come down and walked towards the men to see how they would act. Then, José Lopes arrived with the women from the village. I realised right away by their expressions, smiling and determined.

Until the hour came.

My father-in-law as the general foreman said:

"Let's get to work." And he started walking.

The women all stood there. And the men started following my father-in-law, so I said to them, "But what is this?". The men stopped. "Wait and see. Don't try to ruin what the women are about to do."

And the men no longer followed the general foreman. He came back and said, "So nobody wants to work today?"

Everyone was quiet. But then, in the midst of all the people, two voices emerged, two ladies saying to my father-in-law: "Mr António, today we will only work when we hear the siren of the Barrosinha factory. We want the eight hours of work." "Okay, but I have to inform the boss and tell him what's going on."

I approached the foreman and asked him, "Do you know any of the women who spoke?" "More or less. I know who they are." "Right, but you're not going to tell the boss you know these women, are you?" "Oh, no. He doesn't need to know that." "Of course. Because if he or

anyone else hears about this, there will be a lot of trouble. Don't say anything. Let one of them come and reach his own conclusions."

The siren rang, and they all went to work.

At noon it rang for lunch. "Good morning." Neither men nor women responded. "I know you want the eight hours of work. I agree with you, but you must understand that, at this time of the year, and with all the work we have to do, I would appreciate it if you could work one more hour." Nobody opened their mouths. And since no one answered, he went on, "So no one will answer me?" Everyone was quiet. "At least tell me to piss off. Let's go; these people don't deserve anything. Let's go!"

And I knew that the guy wanted to fool the workers: he wanted them to do one more hour of work so that he could say that the workers had opted for the nine hours instead of eight — the smartass.

Right from the start, they were trying to ruin what the workers had been aspiring for many years, that this great day would come — May 4, 1962.

For two days, on the 5 and 6, the workers had no foremen to order them around. People knew what they had to do, and everything went very well.

I was earning two more escudos than the others who made the standard daily wage. They received twenty-three escudos, and I received twenty-five. But, if I did the math, I was still making less than the others.

At sunset, they left the service while I continued, for one or two more hours and, on several occasions, for even more than that.

(...) But now, this was going to change, because I wouldn't allow them to rob me in the service I do. The eight hours were also for me, and they would have to pay me all the extra hours I worked.

And so it was. On Saturday, the payer paid me as if I had only worked eight hours but, by transporting the women, I was working one more per day.

On Sunday, I waited for my boss. When he went to the garage to go to mass at ten, I went to him. He stopped and asked: "So, António. Are there any news?" "Yes, there are, sir." "Then tell me what's going on." "Here's the deal, boss. I also want the eight hours of work." "Yes, but you must understand that there will be many times when it cannot be, you have to work more hours." "I know, boss. But from eight in the morning to five in the afternoon, it's when it counts. Before eight in the morning and after five in the afternoon, it's overtime. I don't know if you agree with me." "Well, if you want it that way..." "I think I have the right to receive remuneration for the hours that I work beyond those eight." "Yes. All right. From now on you'll earn more." "Yes, but I've worked a few extra hours this week already. Do you want me to talk to the payer?" "No, let me talk to him, and he'll pay you." "Thank you very much."

I understood that the man hadn't liked my demand at all.

It was to achieve all this that the others and I had been fighting for years, day and night, under rain and wind, wet and shaking with cold. Enough.

(...) But, although we had gotten the eight hours, the fight wasn't over yet. Now we wanted more money as in the harvest of the wheat where we reached thirty escudos.

During the eight hours, I did not reap; I stayed on the tractor transporting women to the rice weeding and, during the day, I carried firewood and other things like wheat to the threshing floor. Then, came the threshing of the wheat. Here, there was a conflict between the employer and the workers because, before the staff had this schedule, the wheat was threshed by machine, from sunrise to sunset with one hour for lunch and another for dinner. Back then, the rogues even stole us one hour of rest from the two hours we had for dinner. (...)

We would start at eight, then we had one hour for lunch at noon, and at five, we'd leave, right in the middle of the afternoon. But on that first day, at lunchtime, J. showed up, with that bastard look, and said to the workers: "Guys, you don't have to do everything at once, the job is hard. And, if you rest now until four, you can take a nap and then eat at four and leave at eight. You'll still have one hour of sunshine.

The men didn't like this because they had to be tied up all day at work and so they said no. "You don't like it? But it has to be how I want, it's my job and it has to be done as I believe is best for me and also for you. Do you understand?" Despite this vicious speech, the workers, once again, refused. Mr J. (...) was still very annoyed by the eight hours of work. So, now he wanted revenge. He told G.: "You stay here, and I'll come get you." And he took the jeep and went to Alcácer.

G. came to me and said, " Mr António Paulo, you should leave because you're a tractor driver and you have nothing to do with these people. You just come here to fill the barrels of water. You have nothing to do with the threshing of the wheat or the work of the machine, and he winked at me as if to warn me that something bigger was about to happen. And so I did. And since I had all the barrels full of water, I took the tractor and went straight to the mount of Gacha. After I crossed the bridge, I found F. who was the bookkeeper of the house and also the head of the Portuguese Legion here in Alcácer.

After two hours, the PIDE had already gone to the threshing floor with two jeeps and had taken all the workers to the guard post for questioning, to see who had been the ringleader. Some of the workers told me that the screams from the interrogations, led by chief Corvo from Setúbal, who was the big mean boss of the PIDE there, could be heard in Ribeira Velha. Some of the people who were taken there came back scared, but everything remained the same (...).

The eight hours of work had been in place for almost three months. After all this time, we wouldn't go back. (...) When the people from the Beiras saw the men and women here conquer these working hours, they too, immediately adhered to this great achievement. And they even improved one or two things: it was traditional for about twenty or even thirty men to eat together from the same bowl. They called it "open bowl eating." So, they asked the boss to buy a small pan so that each of them could eat from it. There were two capable men in this ranch to solve whatever came up. These were the men who got in front of the guys that day saying: "The fight is also ours. We are not from here, but we are here. If it's for the people from here, it should also be for us."

A certain day, already at the end of May (...) I saw C., who was the boss, come over. "Oh, António." "What is it, boss?" (...) He entered the office and told me to come in, too. (...) "Listen, have you been telling the workers from the Beiras not to work the whole day? That I want them to do the job, but when it comes to paying... that they're working almost for free? (...) And that's not all. They say you have been talking about Russia."

Imprisonment – 1965

(...) Luís Emídio arrived at the cafe of Mr Marcelino and (...) said to me, "I will tell you something." (...) "Back in our village, the PIDE arrested two men." (...) "Yes, yes, and you know who they are..."

When Luís told me about this, I realised that any day now, at any time, I too could be in trouble.

(...) On the last week of July, on a Saturday, I took my eldest daughter to the bus that would take her to Lisbon. She went there to serve in the house of a Counsellor, an elderly and retired couple. It had all been arranged by a neighbour's daughter who also served a couple in their neighbourhood. (...) When we arrived home (...) we had lunch. But I knew, deep inside, that something wasn't right.

(...) It was already three in the afternoon (...). I heard someone knock at the door; I opened it. I was surprised to see Mr Ribeiro, the head clerk of the company where I worked, at my door. (...) "Are you 1383?" "Yes sir, I am." "Some gentlemen are coming to see you." (...) "You don't know me." (...) and he took a card from the pocket of his short-sleeved shirt that had some red letters that joined together spelt PIDE. "And now you know who I am, don't deny it, and you're also aware of what we came here to do." "That's what I don't know." "But you will right away – I need to enter the house. Can I come in?" "Sure you can, but if you are looking for something, all that's in there is mine." In the meantime, my wife and two daughters walked in – they immediately started crying. The head clerk was trying to calm them down with the other guy who was also of the PIDE, while the other one was searching the house rummaging through everything: he even searched the mattresses of the beds. He opened a can that had been for coffee. The guy asked me, "What about this money? Is it yours? Or is it the Party's?" "What party, I told you, you knocked on the wrong door." Afterwards, already outside, (...) he said to my wife and daughters who couldn't stop crying: "Shut up, we don't want anything from your husband. We'll take him to Odemira to make a few statements and nothing else." "Let me give her and the girls a kiss," I asked. "For what? You'll be here in one hour."

In Odemira, they left me at the Republican National Guard station. I was there for one hour. Then they came and told me, "We thought this could be settled here, but apparently, it can't. We must go to your hometown, in Alcácer, and the matter will be solved."

Then, it was straight up to Grândola. We passed through Alcácer (...) we didn't even stop. In Setúbal, the same happened: we kept on moving. (...) On our way to Azeitão (...), the car stopped. (...) I got in the car, and one of the PIDE agents said to the other "boss have you noticed this monkey really looks like someone who enjoys gardening and flowers. That's why they call him 'Flowers'." Hearing all of this I said to myself – I'm as good as dead already. These creeps already know my pseudonym.

When we got to Cacilhas, they placed the car on the boat (...), and I saw an employee of the boat look at me with the saddest look, but when he looked at the PIDE agent, his face changed: his eyes were full of rage. In Cais do Sodré, we went up through Rua António Maria Cardoso until we reach the headquarters.

(...)

PAULO, António, MALHEIROS., Manuel, BALTASAR, Flávio, “Tempo de luta: a greve pelas horas de trabalho – 1962”, (Fighting time – the strike for the working hours – 1962) in *Memórias Partilhadas. Vida de um Trabalhador Agrícola da Ribeira do Sado* (Shared Memories. Life of an agricultural worker from Ribeira do Sado)

Biography of António de Jesus Paulo

António Jesus Paulo was born on September 1, 1925, in the Monte das Cotovias, in Alcácer do Sal. He is now 93 years old. Son of rural workers, António Paulo began working when he was still a child, as a cow herdsman, then, he started working in rice production in the lands of Ribeira do Sado.

In 1962, when he was 37 years old, he was one of the organisers of the fight for the 8 hours of work in the fields of Alentejo, in the Alcácer do Sal region. Following his plan, women and men decided to work eight hours against the will of their employers and the authorities. They won the fight, but in July 1965, after leaving his eldest daughter on a bus that would take her to Lisbon where she served, António Paulo was arrested by the PIDE. He was then brought to Lisbon, to the headquarters of the PIDE, to António Maria Cardoso, where he was questioned and subjected to sleep torture. He remained incarcerated until September 1966.

Here, he provides, as a testimony, an excerpt from his memoirs, those of a worker in Ribeira do Sado.