

# LE CARTE E LA STORIA

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Political representation and representation of interests.  
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*di Paula Borges Santos*

### *1. The weakness of the corporate idea*

The Portuguese authoritarian regime defined itself constitutionally as a unitary and corporate republic. However, as the political system established at the time did not require the exclusively organic representation of interests organised as the State, several elements typical of liberal political representation remained in the system. In the 1933 Constitution, the organic framework was revealed in the choices made regarding the electivity of some bodies of the political system. This was specifically evident in the election of parish councils by households, the election of municipal councils by both parish councils and moral and economic corporations and the election of provincial councils by both municipal councils and moral and economic corporations. The most significant expression of the regime was the creation of the Corporate Chamber, which was composed of representatives of local authorities and social (administrative, moral, cultural and economic) interests. However, as the Corporate Chamber had only consultative powers and was placed under the dependence of the chamber of political representation – i.e. the National Assembly – it was effectively given a back seat in the political structure. This was even clearer after the 1935 constitutional review, when the Corporate Chamber was placed also under the dependence of government. Contrary to the position of the National Assembly, the Corporate Chamber was not considered a sovereign body. It should be noted that the composition of the Corporate Chamber was not based exclusively on an organic representation model, given that its members were appointed by government through the Corporate Council.

The liberal elements of the political system, inscribed the Constitution, were in substance seen in the option for a formal separation between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of power, and by the preservation of a direct vote in the elections for the President of the Republic and for the National Assembly which was granted legislative powers. Weighing up this combination of organicist and liberal solutions for the political system it is therefore evident that the organicist solutions were given a back seat in the Constitution.

Some historiographic studies<sup>1</sup> have stressed that the attempt to conciliate liberal proposals with other proposals of corporate nature in the constitutional status stemmed from the need to achieve political consensus – something that was considered essential to comply with the new constitutionality. Effectively, one aim was the normalisation of public life,

the purpose of which was to break with the political cycle of the First Republic. This Republic was marked by strong political struggles – also within the parliament – and short-term ministries, as well as broad social protests resulting from the growing politicisation of a number of professional classes that questioned the satisfaction of the need for housing or social security rights and the equity of some public policies, particularly with regard to taxes. Moreover, in the major cities there had often been work stoppages and strikes, intensely suppressed by the police and cleaned-up through numerous arrests and the deportation of hundreds of trade unionists.

However, another important argument is that the key to understanding the model of State powers in Portuguese authoritarianism – especially the prevalence of aspects of liberal political representation in its constitutional system – lies instead in another aspect: the weak nature of the corporate idea as a project for the State at the time that the dictatorship was enshrined in the Constitution in Portugal. Indeed, as I will seek to demonstrate below, the corporate framework did not correspond at that time to a unified project that could value the role and place of intermediary bodies proportionately in both the political and the economic spheres. Without doubt, these bodies were perceived in a different way in order to create new social and economic bodies considered to be more effective. The purpose of this, however, was not to create a more autonomous civil society stimulated by any form of decentralisation of power or by a strong system of associations. That is why, at a strictly political level, intermediate bodies were not called upon to occupy any significant place within the political system. The consecration of the very principle of sovereignty, which referred to the unified and indivisible State by reproposing the provisions of the Constitution of 1911 (that preserved this concept following the period of liberal constitutionalism), did not allow for the national representation of intermediate political societies to be valued. Decentralisation, based solely on municipalities, was proclaimed. Nonetheless, this proclamation did not question the maintenance of an anti-federalist position and did not unbalance the strengthening of central power. Instead the representation granted to municipalities was not even reflected in the composition of the National Assembly, therefore weakening the role of those within the legislative power.

It is important to note that the 1933 Constitution registered a generic appropriation of the corporate framework. This appears to be articulated as a policy prescription which for a while was considered as modern and modernising without any specific connection to concrete political or ideological stands. Both in the provisional constitutional project – disclosed publicly in May 1932 – and in the project submitted to a vote, reference to the corporate idea emerges briefly in the definition of the principles of economic and social order. Corporations – both moral and economic – were recognised by the State that undertook to promote and assist in their training. Politically it was the responsibility of corporations to take part in the election of municipal councils, provincial councils and the establishment of the Corporate Chamber (Art. 18 of the May 1932 version of the Constitution and Art. 14 of the 1933 Constitution). It was however stipulated that while the organisation of these corporations was not complete, they could “adopt transitional forms to comply with the spirit of organic representation” (Art. 137). The provisional draft text of the Constitution allowed for the possibility of electing the President of the Republic by direct vote by the heads of household (Art. 72, §2), and electing the National Assembly