

The 1957/58 Capelinhos eruption on Faial Island in the Azores is well known for being an excellent example of *Surtseyan* hydromagmatic volcanic activity. Less well known are the responses of the Portuguese authorities to the eruption and subsequent earthquake in May 1958, and the ways in which well-thought-out and generally effective recovery programmes were put in place. At the time Portugal was ruled by a dictatorship, the *Estado Novo* (New State). Only superficially similar to other fascist governments in Southern Europe, the *Estado Nova* collected huge amounts of data on the responses of the authorities to the disaster and their programmes of recovery, but never encouraged academic evaluation of policy, although it ensured that the scientific aspects of the eruption and earthquake were meticulously recorded and published.

In this paper we remedy this situation by discussing the details of the immediate response to the emergency and the ways in which the island recovered in its aftermath. The study is based not only on archival sources and demographic and economic data, but also on detailed interviews with survivors some of whom were also decision makers. We argue that response, recovery and rehabilitation were generally highly successful and assess the lessons of the 1957/8 emergency which are relevant to future geophysical disasters in Faial and the wider Azores. Since the 1974 revolution Portugal has been a democratic state. We conclude that both the legislation and the civil defence infrastructure, necessary to achieve a similarly strong and successful, are in place today.