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Portugal

Big success for general strike in Portugal

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Portugal's minority right-wing conservative government (Democratic Alliance) planned to survive thanks to the parliamentary support, alternately, of the Socialists (PS) or the far right. It succeeded in getting the general state budget for 2026 adopted thanks to the abstention of the PS and then intended to pass a set of new employment laws with the complicity of Chega (far right). However, the general strike of 11 December has plunged this project into uncertainty.

A violent attack on the world of work

The government's confidence in the two "oppositional" pillars that supported its parliamentary minority was such that it dared to announce the most radical legislative package in recent decades. It went far further in its anti-working-class, anti-people brutality than any other government in the fifty years that the counterrevolution has just celebrated. Even the various governments with an absolute majority of the right, after 1975, never dared to consider the extreme measures contained in this "employment package".

Among the many provisions provided for are, in particular, an unlimited green light for individual dismissals, nullity of judgments ordering the reinstatement of a dismissed worker, the right for the employer to call on external companies to carry out the work of the dismissed persons, the obligation for workers with young children to accept weekend hours, and the implementation of an individual hour counter so that overtime is no longer paid as such, among other things.

And suddenly, the reckless government of Luís Montenegro realized that the conservatives' comfortable parliamentary majority, backed by the fascists and the PS, and the prospect that only two right-wing candidates would qualify for the second round of the presidential elections in January, no longer corresponded to the revolt of the real country.

At the beginning of December, the polls already showed broad popular support for the call for a general strike, and the indications of the polling institute *Vox Populi* already reflected the willingness to strike of many people who had never participated in a strike in their lives. The government has tried everything to dissuade the population from joining the strike, promising to raise the minimum wage from 870 euros to 1,600 euros and the average salary from 1,600 euros to 3,000 euros. But these extravagant promises, without any date or guarantee, were ignored.

Unprecedented participation in the strike

On the day itself, participation in the strike reached an unprecedented level. The CGTP, a trade union federation with a Communist majority, estimated the number of strikers at 3 million out of a working population of 5.3 million people. The UGT, a trade union federation with a Socialist majority, announced an even higher figure. Participation statistics are always controversial, but, regardless of the accuracy of the calculations, the strike has demonstrated its strength in an undeniable way by paralyzing essential services.

Public transport was paralyzed in almost the entire country. The Lisbon metro had to close its doors. Trains that were

not subject to minimum services were totally paralyzed, and many of those that were included in the minimum services also did not run. At Lisbon airport, the strike led to the cancellation of 400 flights. The boats that cross the Tagus have remained docked. Most schools closed and the strike in education lasted until the next day, 12 December. In hospitals, consultations and scheduled operations were cancelled, with only emergencies being taken care of. Household waste was not collected. Large private companies, such as Auto-Europa, a subsidiary of Volkswagen and the country's largest exporter, completely ceased activity.

The minister of the Presidency, Leitão Amaro, made a fool of himself by declaring on television that the strike was "insignificant." The country's most popular joke became the comparison between this character and Saddam Hussein's propaganda minister, who continued, unperturbed, to assert in front of the cameras the successes of the Iraqi forces, while the sound of imperialist artillery was already heard in the background of his own broadcast. The man who has gone down in history under the name of "Comical Ali" now has in Amaro a second-rate imitator.

The irrefutable facts speak a more serious and completely different language. Faced with the success of the general strike, the government deemed it prudent to put aside its proclaimed intransigence and announced that it would reopen negotiations on the "employment package." When the union reopens, it wants only the UGT as an interlocutor, in order to sow discord between the two trade union federations which, since 2013, had never called for a general strike. Another telling fact has been the dramatic change in the position of the far-right Chega party: while a month ago it praised the general meaning of the new laws announced and vilified the call for a strike, it has now shown sympathy for the strikers' motivations. This apparently means that the "employment package", as it stands, will no longer be able to count on a parliamentary majority.

The confrontation continues

This first success of the workers' struggle does not mean that the danger has vanished. The government and the employers' confederations will look for another way to impose their neoliberal agenda and ultimately create a regime of unbridled capitalism without any legal impediments. To do this, they will be able to count on the complicity of the far right and the PS, but also on the collaborationist or, at the very least, demobilizing attitude of the union leaderships.

The UGT declared, just after this day of general strike, that a second strike could be necessary if the government remained intransigent on the substantive issues. This seems a combative attitude, but, in reality, before making a threat that it cannot hold alone, the UGT should have refused the role of sole interlocutor offered to it by the government. As things stand, and knowing the UGT's track record, the threat of a second day of strike action can only be seen as rhetoric designed to negotiate a few minor concessions at the bargaining table.

The CGTP, for its part, did not get involved this time in the generalized organization of picket lines, limiting itself in many cases to supporting only those organized at the initiative of the rank-and-file. And during the large, young and combative demonstration that it called to go to the parliament, it was content to give the usual speeches to be heard by the head of the procession. It immediately left the area, while columns of protesters continued to pour in for several hours, fighting through the narrow streets to enter the square in front of the parliament. In leaving the premises, the CGTP also abandoned the demonstrators who had responded to its call and who had trusted its leadership, leaving them without instructions, facing the police and at the mercy of provocations that then gave rise to a ferocious repression.

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Translated by **International Viewpoint** from marx21.ch.

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