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Portugal

The biggest general strike ever

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November 24th was a great day for the Portuguese workers' movement in mobilizing against austerity and social cuts. The first general strike organized by both trade unions (CGTP and UGT) since 1988 mobilized more than 3 million workers. The transportation sector gave the example with closed seaports, no air traffic and massive participation in the public and private transport companies, in all major cities and across the whole country. In Autoeuropa (Ford/Volkswagen, the biggest factory in the country), not one car was built in that day, despite of these workers had previously achieved a company agreement for 2011 of 3,9% salary raise, no firing and integration of workers without contract.

In short, this was a strike that involved both public and private sectors, and almost all professional categories, in a country with one million precarious workers, threatened of loosing the job if joining the strike.

The political moment of the strike is also very important. We are in the eve of the 2011 budget vote in parliament (Nov 26th), that goes deeper in cutting social expenses like the support for the unemployed and the families with small children, that cuts salaries in public sector and adds recession to an economy already in crisis. The budget will pass with the votes of both central parties (PS and PSD) with the support of Cavaco Silva, already in campaign for his presidential reelection in January 23rd.

For the left, this was an opportunity to make the workers show their voice to the omnipresent speech in the media that promotes "budget austerity" and "making sacrifices" as the inevitable answers for "chilling down the markets". In this struggle against the politics of fear, the workers are still on the defensive, but the general strike helped to get more confidence and combativity.