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Portugal

The bromance between André Ventura and Luis Montenegro in Portugal

- IV Online magazine - 2025 - IVP610 - November 2025 -

Publication date: Thursday 20 November 2025

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The media hype in Portugal about the “survival” of the Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc) has the same function as the anti-gypsy posters of André Ventura (president of the far-right Chega party), namely, to distract through a gesture with one hand, while the other takes care of more lucrative tasks.

I am therefore led to fight two misconceptions: the one according to which the problem of the left is delineated and the one that ensures that the country is condemned to the new normality of the close relationship (bromance) between André Ventura and Luis Montenegro. [Montenegro was prime minister of Portugal from April 2024, at the head of a centre-right government led by the PSD-Social Democratic Party.]

The malaise

With 2% for the Bloco de Esquerda, 2.9% for the Communist Party (PCP) and 4.1% for the Livre (Green Party), and the Socialist Party (PS) overtaken in number of deputies by Chega (because the latter has monopolized the votes of the Portuguese abroad), the recent parliamentary elections have shown the state of distress of the left and the centre. Together, they now account for less than a third of the vote, which means less than 20% of the electorate. None of these parties has the capacity to reconstitute a majority. They lost the parliamentary and municipal elections. And some do not want to understand this, because sectarianism, the most toxic characteristic of the Portuguese left, leads those who look in the mirror to ignore the world or, worse still, to pretend that the difficulties lie in their neighbour.

On the other hand, the right-wing and far-right majority has been consolidated, and has gained the power to revise the constitution. It can change the composition of the Constitutional Court and other bodies and will strengthen its positions because it has the wind in its sails. Their alliance was a historic gamble, which aimed to convince public opinion that there was a holy war between the ethnic Portuguese and the horde of dangerous invaders who were already in the citadel, according to the Passos Coelho-Ventura-Montenegro version. [\[1\]](#) The advance of this crusade constitutes the greatest transformation of Portuguese politics since 25 April 1974: the terrain has changed and so have the protagonists.

This shift of the political regime through the new balance of forces is the result of the convergence of two crises. The first was the collapse of the absolute majority of the PS (which governed until a year and a half ago – until 2 April 2024, and since November 2015 – remember?), which caused a fracture in Portuguese society, and which tends to be overshadowed by the daily feverishness. Its effect has been to pave the way for the installation of the right as a political space, excluding from the field of possibility any reference to protection measures at work or for housing (the rise in housing prices, under the effect of Airbnb tourism and the purchase of housing by Europe's “retirees”, is unbearable for wage earners). The second crisis, from which we must not turn away, is caused by the naturalization of inequalities and the glorification of an insatiable and despotic neoliberalism: life thus becomes an ordeal for the majority of the population, precisely those who are led to believe that the fault lies with the colour of the immigrants' skin. This double crisis explains the surprising fact that the cultural affirmation of the new balance of forces no longer hesitates to erect a monument to Trump, Netanyahu and Milei. The “jesters” and the “criminals” are the heroes of revenge.

The power of caste

To deal with this, the theory of the three bodies (interrelations between three actors) has been brandished, which leads to the recommendation of a compromise: the centre (and the left) should offer their support to the right to save it from the unstable proximity of the far right. It is obvious that this leads to a failure that arouses shame and disarray, reducing the PS to an ambiguous policy that renounces presenting alternatives, as in the case of its support for a “bad” and “uncredible” budget, and thus follows the drift. In view of the presidential election in January 2026, this strategy is being interpreted in a theatrical way by António José Seguro (who was secretary general of the PS from 2011 to 2014), which is not new. Indeed, a dozen years ago, the current candidate for the presidency of the PS – alongside various declared candidates, among them André Ventura, Luis Marques Mendes linked to the PSD and Catarina Martins of the Bloco – tried to conclude a “national salvation” agreement that would have led the PS to align itself with the government of Passos Coelho. It was Mário Soares (president of Portugal from 1986 to 1996, who died in 2017) who prevented him from doing so, threatening to leave the PS if the affair succeeded.

Can we therefore be surprised by a presidential campaign whose main concern seems to be to deny the relevance of left-wing values? This headlong rush has become the candidate's refrain, which reveals an unprecedented electoral manoeuvre, because it is the first time that I have heard an emphatic call for a vote that declares itself useless. Moreover, the imbroglio is deepening, because, if we are to believe the latest poll, this theory of the three bodies would advise a vote for Admiral Henrique Gouveia e Melo in order to guarantee him a presence in the second round and thus avoid Ventura. The world is certainly round.

The “pacification” of the PS therefore has a history, which began with Seguro and continues today. However, this is a profound process because it corresponds to the “pacification” of politics. Former prime minister Antonio Costa himself set the tone by lamenting that “people feel like strangers in their own country,” which led Leitão Amaro to raise the level to a conspiracy of “demographic reengineering” aimed at filling the country with immigrants. As Público pointed out, the fact that the deputy who kisses everyone (Filipe Melo de Chega, in September, mimed a “hug” from the socialist Isabel Moreira during a parliamentary debate) calls for the expulsion of a black deputy “to her country” is already a mainstream policy. The Montenegro-Ventura bromance is the consecration of this hard and xenophobic right-wing current.

What I mean here is that we can defeat this current by knowing its weak points. Its first fragility is the arrogance of the caste. Notice how tycoons mount presidential candidacies, how arms or public procurement contractors pour funds into the Chega party, or how they finance the Observador-Iniciativa Liberal (a right-wing party that calls the regime set up after the Carnation Revolution a “left-wing dictatorship”). In fact, as in all the authoritarian reversals of the ruling class in the past, there is a boundless greed here. Formed by the state and fuelled by the state, the caste accumulated its wealth through the plundering of taxes, the threat of the sword, and colonial ideology. That's what it's back to today, with laws that protect the accumulation of real estate and tax cuts for the coffers of the biggest corporations, and it's also why racism against the colonized from within (including the Roma, long-time residents) is so natural to it. They repeat the language of their origin.

Hence its second and main weakness: this policy of “pacification” does not respond to anything. For the people, this only means that life in our cities is becoming an ordeal, that pensions and salaries are literally plundered by rents and that the supermarket charges exorbitant prices. We are driven from our land by the caste. It is in the revolt against this unbearable life that there lies the strength to constitute a new majority, a new response from the left and a new project for Portugal. The slogan is “to live.” The caste forbids the hope of a normal life to people who work and want to breathe. It must be overcome in order to live.

3 November 2025

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Article first published in **Público**. Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [A l'Encontre](#).

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[1] Pedro Passos Coelho, Prime Minister from June 2011 to November 2015, at the head of a centre-right government (PPD/PSD, CDS/PP) which applied severe austerity measures.