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Portugal

Towards the General Strike in Portugal - Only the strength of those who work can halt the labour package

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The “Draft labour-law reform bill” (the so-called labour package) [1] is a set of more than one hundred regressive amendments to the Portuguese Labour Code presented by the Government of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the CDS – People’s Party (CDS-PP) [2], with the support of the Liberal Initiative (IL) and CHEGA, the far-right party. This package constitutes a deliberate and planned programme of rolling back labour rights in Portugal, reviving the offensive launched by Pedro Passos Coelho’s Government during the Troika years (2012–2015). [3]

While some proclaim the death of capitalism, in Portugal it remains very much alive. With the State on its side, capital uses technological pretexts and innovation to reorganise the capital–labour relationship in its favour.

No rhetoric of “modernity” or the “digital economy” can conceal the true plan. The attacks on labour rights are clear and undeniable. Proposals to extend working hours, normalise precariousness, facilitate dismissals, and attack time for social reproduction (rest, holidays, health, parenting, leisure) unequivocally aim to shift the balance of power in favour of employers. But to achieve this aim, it is also necessary to restrain workers’ forms and capacities for organisation, as well as the tools of struggle they mobilise. Thus, the package introduces various measures designed to weaken workers’ collective strength, undermining collective rights, the framework and security of collective agreements, and the very right to strike.

This attack is not new: it follows on from the neoliberal policy of devaluing labour implemented during the Troika period. That policy was partly contained by the Socialist Party governments (2015–2019 – the “geringonça” [4]; 2019–2023 – PS minority government) which, despite restoring some rights, were unable to reverse the trajectory of labour devaluation set in motion during that period.

Maximum minimum services: emptying the strike, emptying the struggle

The measure that seeks to broaden the interpretation of minimum service obligations during a strike is a clear attack on the most important instrument of workers’ struggle. The proposal to expand minimum services to more sectors is practically a way of abolishing the right to strike. [5] With this labour package, the strike – the tool that gives force to the fight for dignified and full employment – becomes mere performativity: the appearance of a right, but without material strength.

Workers are also left without material strength in the face of measures that reinforce the expiry of collective agreements, that is, mechanisms that favour employers by allowing them to terminate collective labour contracts more easily. This change gives employers greater tools to split and divide workers and to use non-unionisation as a weapon of management.

Normalising precariousness: the return of lives on hold

On the front of attacks against contracts offering stronger safeguards, and in addition to those targeting collective

bargaining agreements, several proposals deepen and broaden precariousness, particularly affecting people working on digital platforms. [6] The package also seeks to extend the duration of fixed-term and uncertain-term contracts and to multiply “atypical” arrangements (intermittent work, temporary work, etc.), thus making it harder to obtain a stable employment relationship. These measures aim to ensure a more “efficient” management of labour from the employer's perspective and to restore the employment contract as a permanent disciplining mechanism. It marks the return of the precariousness policy pursued by Pedro Passos Coelho, where lives are kept on hold.

The way in which this labour package brings back coercive instruments over work is closely linked to measures aimed at hindering workers' self-organisation. By facilitating dismissals, the measures foreseen in the labour package encourage forced competition among workers, distorting existing forms of solidarity. With the PSD–CDS labour package, it becomes easier for employers to get rid of workers and replace them with outsourcing and impoverished subcontracting. By removing restrictions on hiring external companies after collective dismissals and limiting the possibilities of effective reinstatement after unlawful dismissal, capital is handed tools and legitimacy to exploit labour without restraint.

Eight hours' labour, eight hours' recreation, eight hours' rest

Another attack targets the working time, which is central to workers' lives and has long been an arena of historic struggle. With the new labour package, we are faced with proposals that aim to extend working hours, directly attacking reproductive time and political participation. Stretching the working week to nearly fifty hours, concentrated in peaks of work when it suits the company, pushes workers into a regime where rest, family life, and health are subordinated to the volatility of business and markets. Furthermore, proposals to reduce overtime pay or to generalise flexible working-time banks empty the very concept of supplementary work. “Flexibilisation” conceals a single goal: to provide capital with tools to better manage its accumulation process, stripping workers of power and control over their own time. Taking advantage of the plasticity of human labour, the company decides, and the worker adapts.

It is therefore no surprise that the package also targets rest time. Holidays and pay are undermined, encouraging the commodification of time for social reproduction. Holiday time becomes treated as a privilege rather than a right – a right won by the workers' movement after 1974.

The possibility of exchanging holidays for money is, in reality, a response to structurally low wages: those who cannot make ends meet are pushed into giving up rest to fill the gaps. If wages were sufficient, there would be no need to trade rest for income. Through contractual means, the Government is cutting wages outright. If wages are insufficient, it is not because workers have “too much holiday”: it is because employers accumulate more.

Those who defend the family do not destroy the time needed to build it

There is also a glaring contradiction in this labour package. A Government that presented itself as “family-friendly”, heir to Pedro Passos Coelho's discourse on birth-related rights, now promotes attacks on parenting and on work-life balance. They claim to want higher birth rates, yet in practice they make parenting more expensive by increasing, through various reforms, the emotional, physical, and organisational costs of having children. They claim to support work-life balance, yet they reinforce flexible scheduling mechanisms used primarily to serve employers' interests. They claim to value motherhood and fatherhood, yet they have used these rights as bargaining chips in negotiations.

It is therefore important to expose this contradiction, which also serves as a strategy for the Government in managing negotiations. By putting extremely aggressive proposals on the table, the Government and capitalists know that these will become the focus of negotiations and are prepared to withdraw them to present the final result as a “balanced compromise”, tying workers’ struggle to the negotiating table. But even if many of these measures fall, the essential remains: more working time under capitalist control, widespread precariousness, hollowed-out strike rights, greater expiry of collective bargaining agreement – all meaning less time and availability for personal, family and political life.

Negotiation without strength is not enough: long live organisation in the workplace!

Faced with a labour package of this nature, it is not enough to pressure the Government at the negotiating table. Workers’ autonomous action in their workplaces must be strengthened. A negotiating table will only be strong for workers if it reflects the real strength of organised workers. Only a movement of workers with capacity and autonomy, rooted in the everyday life of each company and service, can transform a general strike into a process of confrontation and reversal of this offensive.

The PSD/CDS labour package, besides being a profound attack on wages, time, stability, and workers’ rights, is also a moment of defining the future of work: either we accept that the future is decided in offices and social-concertation forums, or we enforce a bottom-up “no”, with collective capacity and organised strength to stop these attacks. It is this persistent and rooted workers’ struggle that gives weight to the negotiating table and can prevent this offensive from passing into history as “inevitable”.

A Toupeira Vermelha therefore joins the mobilisation efforts for the general strike on 11 December 2025.

26 November 2025

In Portuguese [Toupeira Vermelha](#).

PS:

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[1] A draft bill is a preliminary version of a law prepared before it is formally submitted to Parliament. Its purpose is to test public reaction, and open negotiations before the final legislation is finalised. The document can be consulted in Portuguese at this [link](#).

[2] The current Portuguese government, sworn in on 5 June 2025, is the result of a coalition between the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the CDS – People’s Party (CDS), which ran together in the elections under the name AD – PSD/CDS Coalition.

[3] Pedro Passos Coelho led the XIX Governo Constitucional de Portugal, between 2011 and 2015. His administration is widely associated with austerity, fiscal consolidation, and structural reforms, largely shaped by the context of the Eurozone financial crisis and the EU–ECB–IMF bailout (“troika”), which Portugal entered shortly before he took office.

[4] “Geringonça” was the informal designation given to the left-wing governing arrangement in Portugal that supported António Costa’s first

government from 2015 to 2019. It was a parliamentary agreement between the Socialist Party (PS), the Left Bloc, the Communist Party, and the Greens, which enabled the PS to govern as a minority with their support.

[5] The government's proposal expands the obligation to provide minimum services during strikes to several new areas, adding schools and nurseries, care homes and social-care institutions, food-supply services, and private security activities to the sectors that must remain partially operational, alongside the already established essential services such as health, transport, and utilities.

[6] The proposed labour package is likely to affect many more people working through digital platforms by making it harder for them to be recognised as employees. Instead of strengthening the presumption that platform workers should have employee rights, the reform raises the threshold for that recognition, meaning many couriers, drivers and other gig-economy workers may continue to be treated as self-employed. As a result, they risk remaining without guaranteed minimum wage, paid leave, social-security protection or regulated working conditions, leaving a large and growing group of workers in a more precarious position.