Portugal

The Left Bloc in the face of the crisis

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We reproduce below some articles from the electronic daily *Esquerda.net*, published by the Left Bloc, from which we can see how the anticapitalist Left is intervening in the crisis in Portugal.

"We are experiencing an economic coup d'état"

The Prime Minister has presented to the country "a set of measures that will change the Portuguese economy and the social reality of the country" and he has done so "without presenting the accounts", without any guarantee that, by 2013, we will be at the beginning of the end of the crisis, said Francisco Louçã.

In reality, "with these measures, in 2013 Portugal will be a much smaller and more ravaged country, with far fewer options and less ability to make choices, as a result of the savage taxing of this economy by the Troika and of the memorandum which has been implemented", he said.

The Bloc leader stressed that we are faced with the plans of "Talibans of the economy who, with flattery and cruel proposals" present measures that correspond solely to the interests of big business but “never to the suffering of the population”.

Francisco Louçã has accused Prime Minister Passos Coelho of lying to the country by stating that the measures presented flow from the decisions of the Constitutional Court and from its pressure, that they strengthen social security, that all Portuguese will be treated equally and that Portugal was not Greece.

“The Prime Minister has brazenly lied by saying that he took measures to respond to the Constitutional Court, because the Constitutional Court said exactly the opposite, demanding equality for work and a stop to the protection of capital and speculation. The government has transformed interim measures into permanent ones, continuing the attack against workers and against reforms; in other words, violating the principles of the Constitutional Court in a grotesque manner” said the Coordinator of the Left Bloc's Political Commission.

“The poor are treated with great cruelty” said Louca, unlike those who “avoid being taxed”, and are favoured.

As regards the alleged differences between Portugal and Greece, Francisco Louçã pointed out that in both countries it has always been clear that "wage reductions have never been a solution to the crisis”.

Louca said, referring to patent inequities in the proposals submitted by the government, that the taxation from the 3,466 million euros which, as has been recently discovered, have been deposited in accounts offshore, corresponds to wage reductions for civil servants and reductions in retirement pensions, and even exceeds them. The Coordinator of the Left Bloc's Political Commission added that the lowering of the Single Social Tax (TSU) "favours only big companies" and that on the other hand small companies are disadvantaged by the decline in household consumption.

“We are experiencing an economic coup d'état" which is leading to an "economic depression" stressed the Bloc MP, warning that the Socialist Party will have to choose, and to decide whether it continues to support the policies of "insensitivity, dementia and cruelty" of this government which has been transformed into "an embassy of financial
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interests or whether it is willing to break with this memorandum and to oppose this "economic coup d'état".

The Bloc will be, said Francisco Louçã, "ready for every struggle, for every form of unity and convergence in the framework of all the democratic measures that enable us to oppose this savage economic coup d'état".

"We are at a time when Portugal must stand up again and when Labour needs to know how to defend itself, when democracy must include everyone. This is a struggle that will lead to a government of the Left, capable of breaking with the troika, of restructuring the debt, of defending the economy and Europe against the Talibans of the policies of financial speculation" he concluded.

September 8, 2012, http://www.esquerda.net/artigo/esta...

Convergence of the oppositions for a motion of censure

At a press conference this Saturday, Francisco Louçã announced that the Left Bloc is "ready for a convergence or a confluence of all the oppositions around a motion of censure" of the government, which would represent "the voice of the country against the attacks on wages and pensions". This was the main proposal approved - unanimously - by the National Bureau of the party, which discussed "the dramatic worsening of the economic and social crisis" in the country and "the political failure of the government".

The Bloc MP pointed out that the demonstration on September 15 was the most convincing and determined response to the Prime Minister's announcement of that all workers had to offer the bosses a month of their salary. The demonstration mobilized so many sectors that "the Prime Minister has found himself all alone", he said.

It appears, nevertheless, that the government is considering new ideas on how to take from workers one or two months' more salary, or pension in the case of pensioners, either by means of a new tax increase or through new taxes and surcharges or by other similar attacks. "All of these measures, over the past year, show that this government is totally incompetent and non-viable from the social point of view, and unreasonable economically", Louçã said.

Support for a general strike

The Bloc has presented an agenda around three proposals, as indicated in the statement presented to journalists: firstly, urgent support for popular mobilization; secondly, support for a general strike which would unify the entire trade union movement and broaden out socially; thirdly, appealing to the Constitutional Court, with a motion of censure and a fight in Parliament to present clear alternatives.

After its crushing defeat, which forced it to abandon the changes to the TSU, the government again wants to impose measures as severe as a huge tax increase, said the Coordinator of the Bloc. "So, let us have the courage to say that the only response that Portugal expects is the resignation of the government". To this end, the Bloc affirms to all the forces of the opposition that it is completely ready for a motion of censure which will reflect this popular clamour and this demand. "Everything for a fightback against austerity. Everything for a fightback against the troika. Everything for a country which lives decently," concluded Francisco Louçã.
Louçã insists on a motion of censure

"In the course of this week we will see what the government wants to do. We will discuss and we will not give up, we will not let our guard down. I will speak with the leaders of the opposition parties, to insist on the obligation that the country has given us, so that Parliament may hear the million people who have been censored by the government and the troika," said the Coordinator of the Political Commission of the Bloc to journalists, this Monday morning, after a journey on the Green Line of the Metro to demonstrate the constraints imposed on travellers by the reduction of trains to only three carriages.

This descent into the Metro fits into the Bloc's campaign against budget cuts and privatization of transport. "With this government, it's the end of the line".

Although the Socialist Party has argued that it was premature to present a motion of censure of after the government of Passos Coelho has apparently abandoned the changes in contributions changes to the Single Social Tax (TSU), Louçã insisted on the fact that "we must not withdraw or give up".

"After the first responses of the Socialist Party (PS) and the Communist Party (PCP), I think that we should discuss further. In our opinion the motion of censure is still necessary. If the government's policy is to increase unemployment, reduce wages, raise taxes even more, whereas they have promised that they will not increase them, what people said in the street must reach Parliament and force the opposition to be consistent. That is why the Bloc has invited everyone to be consistent and to respond to the country's difficulties," said the leader of the Bloc.

To the question about what he expected from the Social Concertation meeting, which began this morning, Louçã replied that the government is preparing "a colossal attack on wages" and that it is preparing to ask workers to pay for "the incompetence and the inefficiency of the budget and the destruction of the economy that it has caused".

"The government is completely addicted to wage-cutting, it is drugged by attacks on pensions and it thinks that the only thing possible in the Portuguese economy is wage-cutting and reforms. This only causes crisis", Louçã criticized.

The Member of Parliament and leader of the Bloc stressed that the alternative is "to be serious in the field of the economy" and that it is for this reason that the opposition should unite around a motion of censure. For Louçã, it is time to move from words to acts and to take on one's responsibilities.

"We want to unite without wasting time. We are not prepared to turn our back on the country. It's already as bad as it could be," he said.

João Semedo: "Struggle is the only way to defeat the policy of austerity"

Esquerda.net interviewed the MP João Semedo on the retreat of the state with regard to the TSU and the measures announced on Monday by Passos Coelho.
Esquerda.net: What do you think of the measures announced by Passos Coelho?

João Semedo: Under the pressure of the gigantic demonstration on 15 September and the concert of protests across the country, the government has been forced to withdraw the amendments to the TSU and is trying to fool us by claiming that it is relieving us of austerity, whereas it will in reality intensify it by a general increase in taxes on income from work, for all workers, including retired people and those on benefits. The people look to the streets against the austerity imposed by the troika and the government, against even more unnecessary and unequal sacrifices, whether they are called TSU or IRS (personal income tax). The Portuguese people is tired of always being victims of the troika and the government, while at the same time the government accords advantages to banks, financial groups and employers. What will the CDS do this time? (this party centred its election campaign around the slogan, against any increase in taxes). Will it keep silent about a tax increase, as it has always done is since it has been in government with the PSD? I cannot remember a government that has so much increased the taxes of those who work for a living as the government of Pedro Passos Coelho and Paulo Portas has.

Esquerda.net: The Bloc has called for a motion of censure, is it maintaining this call?

João Semedo: On Saturday, the Bloc considered that it was necessary for the parliamentary opposition to censure the policy of austerity and that this condemnation could and should take the form of a convergence around a motion of censure of the government. The measures that have been announced now confirm the worsening of austerity and therefore show that the Left Bloc's position was right. If the whole opposition converged around a motion of censure, it would have great importance for the fight against the government's proposals. I think we can say that what we already know of the government's intentions reinforces the validity of the position of the National Bureau of the Left Bloc.

Esquerda.net: Beyond this call, what should be done now?

João Semedo: I think that the key now is to intensify the social protest, the social movement, social struggles in all the forms that they can take, from big demonstrations, big street protests, up to a general strike. Neither the Council of State, the employers, nor the financial groups can stop the government offensive against the wages of those who work, or the reforms to the pensions of those who have spent their lives working. The only brake to this policy, the only way to defeat and overthrow this government is by the social struggle; now, by demonstrating on September 29 at the call of the CGTP. The Bloc will mobilize all its forces to contribute to a big demonstration that will once again show the government the door.

September 25, 2012, http://www.esquerda.net/artigo/joão...