



# Conservatives win power in Portuguese elections - workers facing massive cuts

Joana Ramiro Thu, 09/06/2011 - 21:13

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 As the right-wing of Portuguese politics comes out victorious in these last elections, Joana Ramiro analyses how social democracy, reformism and a parliamentary left tainted the heritage of the Carnation Revolution. In [Portuguese](#) [1]

The Portuguese legislative elections on June 5 resulted in a clear turn to the right. The centre-right Democratic People's Party/Social-Democratic Party (PPD/PSD) won with 39 per cent of the vote. Not enough to form a government, but the minimum required to reach out to the Christian, conservative Democratic and Social Centre ? People's Party (CDS-PP) and form a right-wing coalition. The leaders of these parties are promoting savage cuts to reduce spending to improve the country's credit rating with the European Central Bank.

But the response from the left was pitiful. In a country struggling with debt, growing unemployment of over 12 per cent and with an impending bail-out by the IMF-EU-ECB (the troika) the biggest losers were, dramatically, the Portuguese left of centre parties. The incumbent Socialist Party (PS) lost by around 700,000 votes, losing 23 parliamentary seats and its hegemony in all but three of the country's districts. Driven from office they are now the main opposition party. As for the promising Left Bloc (BE), their vote of 288,776 saw them lose half of their MPs, throwing the coalition of former small far-left tendencies into crisis. Now there is a debate in the Left Bloc over the question of the European Loan ? most of the party agree it must be paid but they disagree on the repayment schedule, an appalling reformist position in the face of the economic crisis.

Two left parties stood on a ticket of refusing to pay the European Bank's loan back. The Portuguese Communist Party, which dominates the trade unions, stood in a coalition with the Greens (called the Democratic Unity Coalition). The coalition received 440,850 votes, a modest increase, resulting in one more MP in the parliament. The Maoist Portuguese Workers' Communist Party/Reorganized Movement of the Party of the Proletariat (PCTP/MRPP) collected over 60,000 votes under the slogan that the ?elections were a fraud? and demanding a default on the loan.

The big winner in the election, however, was abstentions which hit a record of 41 per cent.

The weak showing for the left and the increase of abstentionism accurately mirror the state of Portuguese political consciousness and are a consequence of the failure of the revolutionary left to tackle some of the most important issues within Portuguese society. The success of the PPD/PSD reflects nothing but the utter disillusionment with the reformist, social democratic rhetoric used by the Socialist Party. Facing the exponentially deteriorating Portuguese economy former PM José Sócrates proved to have little if any of his ?socialism? left, fully embracing the neo-liberal diktats of Merkl, Sarkozy and further European political elites. His unconditional support of austerity measures in detriment of the Portuguese welfare state lost his working class vote, while his blatant cavorting with the international bourgeoisie lost his lower, nationalist and localist middle-class support. As for the Left Bloc, internal divisions aside, it was primarily incapable of approaching the unionised working class, still heavily controlled at leadership level by the highly bureaucratic Communist Party. This is due to the Left Bloc's increasing parliamentarist approach to politics, constricting its networks to urban, often well educated, intellectual middle classes and members of new amorphous strata of society, like those working in the service and media industries, usually recent graduates in precarious employment. Yet the Left Bloc seems to have missed a trick getting only 5.2 per cent of the total vote.

The discontentment of the younger, highly skilled, 'overqualified' workers has been met with soft left policies, vacuous rhetoric on economic and political agenda and a certain inertia of the Left Bloc leadership. The youth is not apathetic, but disappointed and alienated from the Portuguese left, preferring the eclectic ideologies of libertarianism and autonomism. It's anxiety about the country's grim future holds on to the neo-conservative, fallacious promises of economic recovery. Lack of hope leads to a despondent young working class, lacking strategy and most importantly lacking a representative, revolutionary party.

The lessons to be learnt from the Portuguese and dangerous trend of an increase in the vote of nationalists and conservatives in times of crisis is not just the allure of conservatism to the petty middle classes, but significantly the inadequacy with which the far left has so far failed to lead the struggle against capitalist neo-colonialist austerity measures. The Left Bloc needs to understand that parliamentary, reformist social democracy is no better than IMF-backing, free-market promoting reaction. Revolutionaries in Portugal need to take action and be in struggle with the unemployed, the precariously employed, the youth, the immigrant community and the working class. There has to be a struggle in the trade unions not just for a one day general strike, but for all out strike action against the austerity budget. There needs to be unity in the movement not just as a road into parliament, but out onto the streets - a road which the people are already ready to take.

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