



Workers in Portugal fight austerity, general strike sweeps the country

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From midnight Portugal ground to a halt in a 24-hour general strike. The stoppage, the first since 1988, involved all of Portugal's main union federations, the UGT CGTP and the Frente Sindical.

Public transport was virtually paralyzed: 60 per cent of busses, and near 100 percent of trains, the underground and ferries. The strike grounded flights, closed ports, halted refuse collection and shut down hospitals, schools universities and major factories. Volkswagen's Autoeuropa plant, the country's largest exporter halted production altogether. Strikers at post offices clashed with the police protecting the strikebreakers.

The cause of the shut down is the austerity plan of the Socialist Party -minority government of José Socrates intended to reduce the deficit from 7.3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) to 4.6 per cent in one year. Spending cuts and tax rises, worth some \$6.85bn are currently being pushed through parliament. This includes an average reduction of public sector salaries by 5 per cent, cuts in pensions and child benefits. The prime minister insisted that "Portugal doesn't need anyone's help" and would not request a financial rescue from the European Union and International Monetary Fund - which would demand even tougher cuts. Yet that was the claim of the Irish prime minister until a few days ago.

The crisis has hit Portugal especially hard with unemployment rising to 10.9 per cent. Already a low-wage country, it has seen company after company go bankrupt or shift its operations to the Far East. As a result the public finances have come under pressure from bond market speculators just as happened with Greece and Ireland.

The general strike shows that Portugal's workers are ready and able to fight back. But a 24-hour general strike will not be enough to repel the attacks.

As in Greece and Ireland Portugal it will take an all out indefinite general strike to block the passing of the crisis burden on wage earners, young people, small farmers and the lower middle class. The protests in Ireland, Greece, France and Spain show a Europe-wide coordinated resistance is possible and indeed vital! We must organize international solidarity with workers in Portugal. We need to oppose a Europe of resistance to the Europe of capital ? and go on to fight for a Socialist United States of Europe.

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