

Far-right Chega party rises in run-up to Sunday's Portuguese elections

Santiago Guillen, Alex Lantier
8 March 2024

As 10.8 million voters prepare to go to the polls Sunday in Portugal's general elections, the far-right Chega party is rising quickly in the polls.

A March 6 poll showed the right-wing Social-Democratic Party (PSD) at 35 percent, the ruling Socialist Party (PS) at 28 percent, and Chega at 15 percent of the vote. The PS' main pseudo-left allies, the Pabliste Left Bloc and the Stalinist Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), have collapsed to five and four percent, respectively. Overall, the PSD, Chega and their smaller right-wing allies, such as the Liberal Initiative, would control over 56 percent of the vote.

This could lead to the installation of the first Portuguese government backed by the far right in a half-century. The far-right has not backed a national government in Portugal since the 1974 Carnation Revolution toppled António de Oliveira Salazar's fascistic *Estado Novo* regime.

The ruling class organized the election based on a trumped-up corruption scandal against PS Prime Minister Antonio Costa, while Chega somewhat downplayed its appeals to anti-immigrant hatreds and instead making socially-demagogic promises to raise living standards. This was facilitated above all by the right-wing role of the PS and its discredited pseudo-left satellites, BE and the PCP. Costa ran as a backer of the NATO war with Russia in Ukraine and of Israel's genocidal war on Gaza, which he defended as Israel's "right to defend itself."

The potential entry of the far right into government is a warning: amid capitalism's plunge into a new world war and genocide, the Portuguese bourgeoisie is shifting sharply to the right. They are driven both by the international crisis and by the rapid growth at home of the class struggle, as workers have mounted repeated militant strikes that were brutally repressed by the PS government, with the complicity of its pseudo-left allies.

From 2015 to 2021, the BE and PCP maintained the so-called "*geringonça*" ("contraption") alliance with the PS, supporting but not joining minority PS governments. They obtained access to influence and power, while the PS brutally suppressed waves of strikes against the collapse in living standards due to European Union (EU) austerity measures after the 2008 Wall Street crash. In this time, the PS not only imposed several EU austerity packages but sent the police or army to assault

"yellow vest" protests and strikes by truckers, teachers and other key industries.

The rise of Chega is, in the final analysis, the product of the brutally anti-working class record of the pseudo-left tendencies and the PS. However, the reactionary role of the parties falsely marketed by capitalist media as the "left" does not in any way lessen the anti-working-class role of the political heirs of Salazar. Arguments in the political establishment that Chega's rise should not cause concern—because many Chega voters do not support all of its far-right policies—are false and staggeringly complacent, given the enormous dangers facing the working class.

An example of this complacency are Catholic University of Portugal Professor André Azevedo Alves' remarks to the *Guardian*. Alves said that Chega's sudden rise—from 1.3 percent in the 2019 elections to 7.2 percent in 2022 and now 15 percent in 2024—reflected "widespread discontent with the political class, left and right." Immigration may be a key issue "for a significant chunk of the voters who would align with Chega," Alves said. However, he added, "housing, public services and wages remain the key issues in the election."

But the capitalist class is not promoting the political heirs of Salazar in order to improve housing, public services and wages for workers. Amid world war, genocide and a rapidly-growing economic slump across Europe, it is putting forward Chega as part of its plans for a drastic escalation of repression and war in the 21st century—just as it used Salazar for that purpose in the 20th.

The key question posed by these elections is building a revolutionary internationalist, socialist alternative to pseudo-left groups like BE and the PCP in the working class. Absent this, the far right is left to capitalize on working class anger at the pseudo-left and push the political situation ever further to the right. The trumped-up pretext on which the Portuguese elections were organized last November underscores that these elections are part of a carefully-prepared conspiracy against the people—that is, above all, against working class struggles.

On November 6, reports emerged that Portuguese prosecutors were investigating potentially improper awarding of contracts for mining lithium, a key mineral of which Portugal has Europe's largest reserves, and for making "green" hydrogen

energy. Several top PS government officials, including Prime Minister Antonio Costa's chief of staff, were detained.

In fact, this matter had been known for years, and the decision to suddenly use it to oust the PS was a political operation, involving the participation of the PS itself. Indeed, the magazine *Sabado* reported that, already in 2019, there were accusations of favoritism against the PS in its dealings with various corporations involved in these contracts. In 2021, according to the daily *Expresso*, investigators taped a conversation of Costa with his Environment Minister on the location of lithium mining and processing facilities.

The only proof against Costa, the Portuguese prosecutor's office stated, was that: "During the investigations, it became clear, moreover, that suspects were invoking the name and authority of the prime minister to remove procedural blockages." The Supreme Court thereupon opened a separate investigation on Costa's role. It was the first time in Portuguese history that the Supreme Court had investigated a sitting prime minister.

These reports were seized upon by the ruling class, including both the PSD and the PS, as an opportunity to orchestrate a change of government. Only 15 minutes after the prosecutors' reports became public, Costa—who was not formally accused of anything—called Portugal's right-wing president, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, and announced that the PS government was resigning.

Even PS officials were taken aback by Costa's sudden resignation. A member of Costa's staff told *Sabado*: "We all stayed there, stunned." Indeed, Costa himself had previously declared that he did not think being under investigation meant he had to resign.

As Costa tendered his resignation to Sousa, he knew this meant the fall of his government: Sousa had said the year before that if Costa did not serve out his mandate, Sousa would call new elections. The PS subsequently petitioned Sousa to form a new government under a new prime minister. But Sousa rejected this, even though the Portuguese State Council, a consultative organ whose decisions are non-binding, did not support the calling of new elections.

Costa's ouster was in effect a presidential coup carried out with the complicity of the entire political establishment. On November 12, only six days after Costa resigned, Portuguese authorities admitted that the "Antonio Costa" mentioned in the police recordings was not the prime minister. It was PS Economy Minister António Costa Silva, and there was no evidence implicating the prime minister in the scandal.

Sousa and Costa already called new elections, however. These elections were allowed to proceed, and the PS and its pseudo-left allies were silent on the fact that the basis on which they had been called was utterly fraudulent.

The pseudo-left parties—BE, the PCP and numerous smaller parties that orbit around them—speak not for the working class, but for layers of the affluent middle class in academia, the

professions and the union bureaucracy that are deeply hostile to the workers. Working to keep workers struggles divided along national lines by various union bureaucracies, they were deeply shaken by the global upsurge of the class struggle in the last five years. They have moved to the right in lockstep with the rest of the Portuguese political establishment.

During the election campaign, the pseudo-left parties continued to signal their continued search for an alliance with the PS. Mariana Mortágua, a leading member of the Pabloite BE, hailed her party's six-year *geringonça* alliance with the PS in a recent interview with the *Guardian*, presenting it as the best defense against threats from right-wing parties, as "one of the rightwing candidates wants to have a referendum to ban free abortion." On this basis, she declared her support for this violently anti-worker, pro-war party.

"We did something important in 2015 and we need to keep that capacity to change the country, to have agreements on the left, and to have progressive measures," she told the *Guardian*. She stressed that the BE is looking for a deal with the pro-austerity PS, though she demagogically claimed that such a deal would protect workers: "We'd be happy to have an agreement if that agreement means we have enough power to impose new measures for wages and the healthcare system and housing and so on."

Such political lies no longer convince workers, who for years have been assaulted by PS police forces backed by BE, the PCP and similar, miserable middle class groups. They are happy to have an agreement because it will let them keep profiting from the plundering of the workers.

To the extent that these forces are allowed to falsely pose as the "left," this enrages ever-broader layers of the population, goading them to vote for the far right. This is underway across Europe—from the coming to power of Giorgia Meloni in Italy to the rise of France's National Rally and the Alternative for Germany.

Mobilizing the working class against war, genocide, and far-right authoritarianism requires building a new, Marxist-internationalist revolutionary leadership in the working class against groups like BE. The political and historical basis to undertake such a struggle is the unbroken international continuity of the International Committee of the Fourth International's (ICFI) defense of Trotskyism against Pabloite groups oriented to social-democracy and Stalinism.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)