Portuguese Stalinists, pseudo-left ally with big-business PS to protect right-wing government

Santiago Guillen
2 June 2024

On April 2, a new Portuguese government took office, under Prime Minister Luis Montenegro of the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the main party in the right-wing Democratic Alliance (AN) coalition. The AN won a plurality in the March 10 general elections, with 80 of the 230 deputies.

This government promises to follow the policies of Antonio Costa's previous Socialist Party (PS) government. It will continue austerity at home and back the imperialist bloc waging war in Ukraine against Russia and supporting Israel in the genocide in Gaza.

The first foreign leader invited to Portugal under the new government was Ukrainian President Zelensky. The new foreign minister, Paulo Rangel, was quick to deny that a genocide is unfolding in Gaza, claiming: "Genocide presupposes the will to eliminate a people. It would be very unfair to say that Israel intends to eliminate the Palestinian people."

The far-right Chega party, which came third with 50 seats, did not receive any ministerial posts. For now, the PSD has rejected including Chega in the government. Fifty years after the 1974 Carnation Revolution overthrew the far-right regime of Antonio Salazar, amid explosive social anger in the working class, the PSD manifestly concluded that it was not immediately advisable or necessary to put the extreme right in power.

Montenegro's minority government can count on the collaboration of the PS, which came second with 78 seats, with which it agreed to preside over the National Assembly on a rotating basis. The PS has said it is open, according to PS leader Pedro Nuno, to working with the executive to "build an agreement that allows solutions to be found," and that both parties can forge pacts on matters in which "there is a broad political and partisan consensus."

The PS formalized their support for the PSD government by abstaining from voting on censure motions presented by the Pabloite Left Bloc (BE) and the Communist Party of Portugal (PCP), during debate in parliament on the new government's programme.

Both BE and PCP are in deep crisis. In the March 10 elections, the BE obtained only five deputies, far from its all-time high of 19 in 2015 and 2019. The PCP had its worst result in history with only four deputies, even losing its representation in the Alentejo, a region that historically was a Stalinist electoral stronghold.

This is the product of the BE's and PCP's reactionary support for PS minority governments between 2015 and 2022. In 2015, the PS, Bloco and PCP signed an agreement called "*gerigonça*" (in Portuguese, something improvised or of inferior quality) by which Bloco and PCP pledged to vote for the PS on all fundamental issues.

Although this agreement ended in 2019, both forces kept supporting the PS government until 2021, when, amid a growing wave of strikes against the collapse in living standards, they decided not to vote in favour of the 2022 budgets to maintain the farce that they oppose austerity.

The *gerigonça* was a disaster for workers. It enshrined the European Union (EU) austerity measures imposed from 2008 onwards, slashed public services, imposed among the lowest wages in Europe, sent house prices soaring and managed the pandemic based on profits over lives. The subsequent PS government only continued the policies the PS had carried out in 2015-2019 with overt PCP and BE support.

Despite their posturing with a motion of censure against the PSD government, BE and PCP are again bowing to the PS by forming an agreement similar to the 2015 *geringonça*.

© World Socialist Web Site

The BE held a series of meetings with the PS, the PCP and other pseudo-left forces, aiming, according to BE leader Marina Mortágua, to "debate the elements of convergence, not only in the opposition to the right-wing government, but also in the construction of an alternative."

Aware of deep opposition to the PS in the working class, BE leaders are working hard to justify this decision with political lies. Manuel Afonso, a member of the BE national leadership, wrote an article asking whether getting closer to the PS "would not mean turning our backs on those disillusioned with the socialist government and diluting the combative left in what was so vehemently rejected?"

Without examining any other arguments, Afonso immediately answered his own question in the negative, stating: "The temptation to make criticism of the PS the centre of the current tactics would result in total disorientation and de facto unity of action with the extreme right." He claimed that any left-wing party that did this would "divorce itself from the most conscious and organised sections of the working class and youth."

This is nothing but a new attempt by the Bloco to deceive the workers. The accusation that opposition to the PS means support for neo-fascism is a lie that stands reality on its head. The PS has said it will make a pact with the right-wing PSD which, on the other hand, is open to seeking support in Chega. To align with the PS is to enter an anti-worker bloc with the right and the extreme right in a capitalist parliamentary dictatorship. That is where the BE aims to drag militant workers and youth.

In this strategy, the BE can count on the Stalinist PCP's collaboration. PCP General Secretary Paulo Raimundo already declared, "We will be available for any concrete convergence."

After meeting with the PS, PCP and Bloco officials sent a similar message, claiming that Costa's government preferred running a budget surplus to making public investments. Raimundo summed up this view, saying: "there was a clear choice on the part of the PS not to respond to the country's problems."

BE's Mortagua said, "The PS, although it has growing surpluses, denies the response to important sectors."

PCP and Bloc are pro-capitalist parties, but forces deeply and historically allied to the PS. They promote illusions in a false, utopian perspective of pressuring the PS to get pro-worker policies in government or to oppose the PSD. They claim the problem with the last PS government was that, with its absolute majority, it did not need either the PCP or BE. The conclusion is that it is necessary to rebuild the *gerigonça* with the PS.

The *gerigonça* in 2015 sought to paralyze the working class by stabilizing the unpopular, imperialist PS government so it could attack the workers without any opposition. Now, the BE and PCP aim to subordinate the working class to the PS again, to block a movement against the new right-wing government, fascism, the Gaza genocide and the NATO imperialist war in Ukraine.

Nearly a million people demonstrated in Lisbon and other Portuguese cities on April 25, the 50th anniversary of the Carnation Revolution, recalling the 1974 demonstrations as the revolution began. They were driven by opposition to the new right-wing government and fascism, but also against the legacy of poverty of the previous PS government and the crimes of NATO imperialism. There are also continuing strikes by air traffic controllers, justice officials or telecommunications workers.

Bloco and PCP are aware of this ferment and will work to derail any struggle that may arise. Their reactionary policies are impoverishing the workers and opening the way for the fascists of Chega. The precondition to fight fascism, capitalism and imperialist war is for a critical mass of workers and youth to build a Marxist-Trotskyist party, based on the heritage of the International Committee of the Fourth International's (ICFI) struggle against Pabloism and Stalinism.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site