

Portugal snap general election prepares rightward lurch by ruling elites amid mounting social crisis

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Portugal will go to the polls Sunday in a snap general election, for the third time in three years. This marks the country's longest period of political instability since the 1974 Carnation Revolution, which ended the four-decade *Estado Novo* fascist dictatorship.

The election takes place under explosive social conditions. Since 2014, house prices have soared by 135 percent, fuelled by a speculative bubble driven by tax breaks for wealthy foreign investors, mass tourism, and decades of austerity.

For Portugal's working class and youth, homeownership and affordable rents are increasingly unattainable. Wages remain among the lowest in Europe, with national minimum wage standing at just €870 (\$974) a month, while the average net monthly wage is €1,100 (\$1,231), making necessities unaffordable as inflation erodes living standards. Fully 16.6 percent of the population is officially at risk of poverty.

The National Health Service (SNS) is collapsing under the weight of 15 years of relentless austerity. Between 2009 and 2023, the number of patients with access to primary healthcare plummeted, leaving 400,000 people without an assigned general practitioner.

The election campaign, however, has been dominated by reactionary posturing, especially anti-migrant xenophobia. Not a single party raises the real issues confronting Portugal's workers: the descent of capitalism into world war, the escalating crisis of the European Union, or the devastating impact of trade war, austerity and militarism.

Polls predict another hung parliament. The conservative Democratic Alliance (AD) of Prime Minister Luís Montenegro is polling first, at 28 percent, which would give it around 80 seats in the 230-seat parliament. The Socialist Party (PS) follows at 24 percent, projected to secure around 70 seats. The neo-fascist Chega party, led by former sports television commentator André Ventura, stands at 17 percent, consolidating its position as Portugal's third-largest parliamentary force, with an expected 50 seats. Chega has risen rapidly from just 1 seat in 2019, to 12 in 2022, before its breakthrough in the March 2024 election when it quadrupled its representation.

The pro-business Liberal Initiative (IL), polling at 6.1 percent, is set to win around 9 to 12 seats. The pseudo-left Left Bloc (BE) and the Stalinist Communist-Green coalition (CDU) are languishing at historic lows, each below 3.5 percent, projected to win between 3 and 5 seats each.

These figures point would leave no clear path to a stable governing coalition. Even if AD forms a minority government with the Liberal Initiative (IL), it will fall far short of a parliamentary majority.

An alliance with the far-right Chega would, however, provide a majority. Montenegro has publicly ruled this out but calls within AD to form such an alliance are mounting. Former Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho has denounced the refusal to work with them as "theatre" and "tactical."

Last year, the prospect of bringing the far right into power on the 50th anniversary of the 1974 Carnation Revolution was particularly explosive, particularly after two-years of mass strikes against low-wages and inflation across the country. Today, however, we are witnessing an international collapse of bourgeois democracy as epitomised by Trump's return to the White House, where he is openly attempting to install a dictatorship and with far-right parties advancing or entering government across Europe.

Chega, like its counterparts across Europe, is a party of the state apparatus, police, and reactionary petty-bourgeois layers. Its growth has been facilitated above all by the political bankruptcy of the official left and trade union bureaucracies. Its growing parliamentary presence is, in addition, the product of its deliberate promotion by the ruling class, which sees Chega as a necessary battering ram against the working class.

Confronted with an escalating war in Ukraine against Russia, the ongoing genocide in Gaza, and US imperialism's drive to global war against China, the ruling classes throughout Europe are responding by dismantling the remnants of democratic forms of rule and preparing unprecedented attacks on the working class at home.

Montenegro's AD government, continuing the policies of its predecessor PS government under António Costa, has sent millions of euros worth of arms to Ukraine, expanded its

participation in NATO military exercises, and deployed troops to Eastern Europe. He has pledged to meet NATO's 2 percent GDP—equivalent to €4 billion—defence spending target by 2028, one year ahead of schedule, claiming this will guarantee Portugal's "security" and "European autonomy." He promises to continue modernising the military with investments in cyber defence, anti-aircraft systems, and the development of a domestic defence-industrial base.

PS leader Pedro Nuno Santos insists on backing Ukraine and rejects any "peace" deal with Russia imposed without "Kyiv's consent"—which really means the European imperialist powers, led by Germany. The PS also supports strengthening the European Union's military capacity, building a national defence industry cluster aligned with the EU's Strategic Compass.

To pay for this, the incoming government, regardless of its composition, must impose deep austerity, and will privatise the national airline TAP, raise consumption taxes, implement pension reform, and oversee the distribution of over €10 billion in EU COVID-19 bailout funds to the banks and corporations.

For Chega, Ventura demands that Portugal reach the 2 percent target by 2026, aggressively expanding the armed forces and creating a mass volunteer reserve for rapid mobilisation.

The Left Bloc, while claiming to oppose military spending, has been one of the most aggressive cheerleaders of NATO's war in Ukraine. In a recent debate, the pseudo-left groups leader Mariana Mortágua denounced the AD government for placing "our military under the orders of a Trump general, who is an ally of Putin," demonstrating the party's hysterical pro-war line.

Last November, BE's former leader and current MEP Catarina Martins visited Ukraine, where she declared her full support for continued weapons shipments. In a revealing interview, Martins cynically admitted the imperialist powers' real motives, stating, "They [the West] are not doing this because they are generous, it's because they want to control Ukraine as a state with huge economic possibilities." But she then stressed the need to continue arming Ukraine, insisting, "You cannot resist without weapons."

The entire political establishment has sought to deflect mounting social anger through a vile campaign of anti-immigrant scapegoating. On the eve of the elections, the AD government launched a mass expulsion drive, announcing plans to issue around 18,000 notifications ordering undocumented migrants to leave the country. This week, officials began issuing notices to 4,500 migrants, demanding they leave voluntarily within 20 days.

Chega has predictably responded by accusing the government of electoral posturing, calling for mass deportations, the militarisation of the borders, and the stripping of citizenship from immigrants and their children. Ventura boasts that his party models itself on Trump's policies.

The PS candidate Pedro Nuno Santos warned of the "Trumpification" of Montenegro, and accused AD of trying "to fight it out with Chega, move closer to Chega, because in reality there is no difference in political point of view or ideas." But such hypocritical posturing as a defender of immigrant rights is exposed by the PS's record. It implemented EU austerity, supported NATO's wars, and pushed migrants into precarious, hyper-exploited labour in agriculture, construction, and domestic work.

The Left Bloc and Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) have fully integrated themselves into this rotten political framework. From 2015 to 2019, both parties provided parliamentary support to the PS-led government of António Costa through the "Geringonça" alliance. This government upheld EU-imposed austerity measures, slashed public services, kept wages among the lowest in Europe, sent housing prices soaring, and brutally suppressed protests and strikes—including deploying the army to crush a nationwide truckers' strike.

Although their formal agreement ended in 2019, both parties continued to support the PS government, even as it imposed mass COVID-19 infection policies and aligned with NATO in the war in Ukraine. It was only in 2022, amid a growing strike wave against collapsing living standards, that they opposed the PS budget in a last-ditch attempt to maintain a degree of political credibility.

This forced snap elections, which Costa won again. However, his tenure ended in November 2023 when he resigned following a fraudulent corruption probe, paving the way for the right-wing government of Montenegro.

Now, as Portugal plunges into political deadlock and the far-right surges, these parties offer nothing but calls to renew the same alliance with the PS that led to the rise of Chega in the first place. Left Bloc leader Mortágua said that a vote for his party is a "guarantee that this dialogue [with the PS] is centered on the most important issue of all—having a house to live in".

The PCP has called for the "convergence with other democrats and patriots" to stop Chega and the right.

What is urgently needed is the building of an independent political movement of the working class, fighting for socialism, against war, austerity, and xenophobia. This requires the construction of a Portuguese section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), to provide the necessary revolutionary leadership for the struggles ahead.



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