

# Pabloite Left Bloc seeks to demobilize Portuguese workers after mass 1-day strike

Santiago Guillen  
22 December 2025

A mass one-day strike brought Portugal to a standstill on December 11. Participation reached over 90 percent in some sectors, such as healthcare and education, and the strike completely shut down Portugal's largest industrial firm, Autoeuropa. More than 70 percent of youth supported the mobilization. This first nationwide strike to take place in 12 years brought tens of thousands of workers onto the streets in large demonstrations, notably in Lisbon and Porto.

The strike was carried out against a package of social and labor reforms put forward by the right-wing government of the Democratic Alliance, a right-wing coalition currently led by Luís Montenegro and made up of the Social Democratic Party (PPD/PSD), the Democratic and Social Center–People's Party (CDS-PP) and the Monarchist People's Party (PPM). It was called by the CGTP-IN, a trade union linked to the Communist Party, and the UGT, the union close to the big business Socialist Party (PS).

The reforms make more than 100 changes to the Labor Code, brutally rolling back Portuguese workers' labor conditions. They make it easier to dismiss workers, use temporary contracts, deregulate working hours and limit leaves (for example, breastfeeding leave). The reforms also expand minimum service requirements during strikes, making it easier for either the government or employers to impose them. The government has also launched a process of so-called "State Reform," which aims to slash spending on public services.

With these attacks on fundamental social rights, including the right to strike, the Portuguese bourgeoisie aims to massively increase its profits, cut its public sector debt (now at 98 percent of GDP) and free up spending for war. It aims to guarantee an increase in military spending as a percentage of GDP as demanded

by the NATO alliance to the 5 percent level committed to by 2035, up from the current 1.5 percent.

This strike exposed both the readiness of workers to fight the government and its reactionary policies and the hostility of the union bureaucracies to taking any further action. CGTP-IN and the UGT treated this strike merely as a way to blow off steam and deceive workers by opening negotiations with the government. But there is nothing to negotiate with a government that seeks to impoverish the workers and scrap their rights in order to wage war.

The UGT declared that "the trade unions are willing to negotiate as long as the fundamental rights of workers are respected." After the strike, the only measure announced by CGTP-IN through its General Secretary Tiago Oliveira was to "launch a nationwide signature-gathering campaign rejecting this labor package, to be submitted to the prime minister."

The union bureaucracies accept that profits squeezed out of workers are to be used to prepare for imperialist war. They are not proposing any further struggles nor seeking any fighting unity with workers elsewhere in Europe, as in Belgium and Italy, who carried out similar strikes in recent weeks. They make no criticism of successive Portuguese governments' collaboration with NATO nor of their plans for increased military spending.

In their role of holding back struggles and demobilizing workers, the trade unions also receive key support both from the Stalinist PCP and from the pseudo-left grouped around the Left Bloc (Bloco de Esquerda).

The Stalinists praise the union bureaucrats and laud their "unity," while not only failing to raise any kind of criticism of them. For PCP General Secretary Paulo Raimundo, the path forward is not combating

imperialism or capitalism but rather “the path toward a just, developed, and sovereign Portugal involves ... complying with the Constitution of the Republic and giving material form to the rights it enshrines.” That is, supporting the very structures that the bourgeoisie uses to exploit Portuguese workers.

The Left Bloc (BE) advocates that it and the PCP ally with the PS. Its new leader, José Manuel Pureza, recently stated: “I believe that the Socialist Party, like all left-wing political forces, has a responsibility: It must respond to the living conditions of people who suffer hardships and deprivation daily. ... The challenge has been posed; each one will do what they believe is best. I hope it will be possible. Frankly, I will do everything necessary to make it possible, working to strengthen the left and change politics.”

Pureza argues the best Portuguese workers can hope for is that the BE and PCP will renew the “gerigonça” alliance they formed with the PS, supporting a minority PS government on every critical question. This is despite the fact that the PS, when in government in 2019, sent the army to break a nationwide truckers strike. For the BE, this alliance was wonderful.

The motion on which Pureza was elected BE leader at its November congress shamelessly stated: “Between 2015 and 2019, the Left Bloc fulfilled its mandate: It overthrew Passos Coelho and contributed to improving the living conditions of the population.” It added, without explaining what mistakes it had made, that “In 2025, the defeat of the Left Bloc was the worst among the left-wing parties. The Bloc lost the trust of part of its electoral base, which can be explained by the effect of the shift to the right, but also by its own mistakes.”

The BE did not make “mistakes,” it pursued a deliberate policy of subordinating the workers to the bourgeoisie. After the “gerigonça” formally ended in 2019, both the BE and PCP kept supporting the PS government until 2021, when, amid a wave of strikes against falling living standards, they suddenly voted against the 2022 budget, bringing down the PS government.

What the BE called the PS’ “improvement in living conditions” was in fact enshrining austerity measures imposed by the European Union (EU) after 2008—cutting public services, enforcing some of Europe’s lowest wage levels, driving up housing prices and addressing the pandemic based on the principle of

profits over lives. This created the conditions for the rise of the far-right Chega party and for the BE to lose 18 parliamentary seats from 2019 to 2025, leaving it with only one seat.

As the WSWS noted regarding Mamdani and the DSA in its analysis of the Mamdani-Trump pact, Pureza and the Left Bloc represent “privileged sectors of the upper middle class who are firmly opposed to a fundamental redistribution of wealth. They are not, and never have been, independent of the oligarchy or the state apparatus.”

This role becomes even clearer with the BE’s election of Pureza as party leader. He presents himself as a proud Catholic and maintains a close personal friendship with Cardinal D. Tolentino de Mendonça. He is also one of the promoters of DIALOP, a platform for dialogue between Christians and so-called Marxists. This initiative received direct support from Pope Francis, who granted the delegation an audience at the Vatican and called DIALOP a “beautiful program” promoting the common good.

Pureza also maintained an important relationship with Pope Francis, who turned a blind eye during the Argentine dictatorship and whose last decision before dying was to give his blessing to the government of Donald Trump.

The election of Pureza and the practicing Catholic character he prides himself on seek only to reaffirm his position before the upper middle class, which in this crisis is turning to the right to maintain its privileges and against the working class.

Fighting for socialism and combating capitalism, imperialism and war means breaking with the national union bureaucracies and with parties like the BE and PCP that serve the ruling class. It is necessary to build rank-and-file organizations of struggle within the working class in Portugal and across Europe to mobilize it in struggle, together with a revolutionary political leadership affiliated to the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).



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