

# One-day nationwide strike in Portugal opposes right-wing labour reform

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On June 3, tens of thousands of Portuguese workers took part in a nationwide strike that paralysed large sectors of the country. Despite minimum service requirements, participation was massive in healthcare, education, and public administration. Transport was severely affected: rail services and the Lisbon metro were shut down, while numerous bus lines stopped operating.

The strike's impact extended to air transport, with more than 500 flight cancellations. TAP, the country's main airline, suspended around 300 flights and operated only 79 under minimum service obligations. In industry and the private sector, participation was equally significant, with sites such as Autoeuropa, Bimbo, Bosch, Cerealto, and Exide reporting participation rates exceeding 90 percent.

The strike was called against the Trabalho XXI law, a labour reform promoted by the right-wing Aliança Democrática (AD) coalition government of Prime Minister Luís Montenegro. The reform modifies more than 100 articles of the Labour Code. It facilitates dismissals, expands employer control over working hours, weakens collective bargaining, and increases subcontracting. It also strengthens minimum service obligations during strikes, with the aim of limiting their effective impact.

The strong opposition among workers to the Portuguese ruling elite's assault on their rights is part of an upsurge of the class struggle across the continent. Trabalho XXI is part of a broader social offensive against the working class across Europe and internationally, involving workers in countries from Belgium to Italy.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* documented in March of this year, when *The Economist* crowned Portugal as the "best-performing economy of 2025," it was praising a model that has turned the country into a low-cost platform for global capital. GDP growth, the fall of the deficit, and the 20 percent rise in the PSI-20 stock index rest on intensified exploitation: stagnant real wages lagging far behind the cost of housing, energy, and food; precarious employment in tourism and services; and mass underemployment.

The minimum wage has risen to just €920 from January, up from €870 the previous year, but rents have doubled or tripled over the past decade in Lisbon and Porto. Youth face an unemployment rate of 18 percent, and those who do find work

are trapped in temporary contracts, training contracts, and platform-based jobs with no prospects.

Underlying this assault on the working class are plans for imperialist war by the European powers and the surge of military spending across the continent. Portugal is increasing its military spending by 23 percent in 2026—one of the largest jumps in decades. It aims to reach the NATO-required 2 percent of GDP spent on the military for the first time since 1982, and spend 5 percent of GDP on the military by 2035.

Workers are being made to pay for war. Cuts to public services and the dismantling of labour rights are destined to finance the rearmament demanded by Washington and Brussels as part of war plans including against Russia, the Middle East, Africa, and, eventually, China.

The June 3 strike was the second nationwide strike against Trabalho XXI in six months, after the December 11, 2025 strike—the first in 12 years—which paralysed the country. Worried by the strike's impact, the trade union bureaucracy postponed further action and sought to demobilise the workers. The CGTP, a union linked to the Stalinist Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), only proposed a signature campaign against Trabalho XXI, while the UGT, linked to the Socialist Party, called for talks.

Nonetheless, strikes and workers' struggles have continued over recent months, with disputes at Comboios de Portugal, the Lisbon and Porto metro systems, airlines, healthcare, education, public administration, and waste collection. The growing anger in the working class, combined with the fact that the labour reform is about to begin its parliamentary process, forced the CGTP and other sectoral unions to call a new general strike.

After several months of negotiations with the unions, the Ministry of Labour declared that "the Government will, of course, vote on and approve something similar to the original draft, but obviously enriched with the contributions it considers useful."

After hearing this, UGT general secretary Mário Mourão stated that he did not know what those contributions would be, but that "a general strike is not yet on the table ... the parliamentary debate phase is coming, and the UGT will work with the parliamentary groups. First, we will request a meeting to explain where the process stands and what the UGT's

proposals were.”

This underscores the UGT’s capitulation to Portuguese capitalism. Appealing to a parliament in which the right-wing Aliança Democrática, with the support of the fascist Chega, holds a sufficient majority to pass this reform is a dead end for workers. The UGT will not persuade the Chega fascists to oppose the reform. The reality is that even the UGT itself does not oppose the reform. Indeed, Mourão said, “the UGT did not demand that the Government withdraw the labour package. I never demanded it.”

The situation is no different with the CGTP. In its “salutation” to workers following the strike, after congratulating itself on its success, the union merely called for a demonstration in front of the Assembly of the Republic. However, as a perspective for this protest, it proposed to impotently appeal “to the parties represented in the Assembly of the Republic that, when the Labour Package is submitted to a vote in its general principles, respect the will expressed by the workers in the general strikes and vote against this legislation.”

There was not a word about new mobilisations or the political perspective needed to oppose austerity and attacks on workers’ rights. Nor was anything said about the need to coordinate with workers in Belgium, Italy, or Greece who are fighting similar battles, or any criticism made of successive Portuguese governments’ participation in NATO imperialist wars.

The CGTP thus repeats the usual pattern of union bureaucracies not only in Portugal but internationally: a one-day strike, grandstanding declarations, calls to “negotiate” with a government that negotiates nothing, and a return to normality while austerity continues. The CGTP and the UGT bureaucracies act, by different means, as a form of labour police. They act not to organise the struggle but to manage it, contain it, and, when necessary, strangle it.

The Stalinists of the PCP and the pseudo-left of the Pabloite Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc, BE) are direct accomplices. The PCP maintains the failed Stalinist theory of the two-stage revolution. For them, the solution does not lie in expanding mobilisation or in a struggle for workers’ power and socialism but, as they declare in their statement on the strike: “There is sufficient strength to impose a path towards a just, developed and sovereign Portugal, with the fulfilment of the Constitution of the Republic and the application of the rights it enshrines.”

In other words, they defend the same state structures that the ruling class uses to exploit workers in Portugal. The PCP does not fight capitalism or imperialism: it advocates class conciliation within the constitutional framework of bourgeois democracy.

The Left Bloc does not have a fundamentally different policy. For its leader José Manuel Pureza, the struggle against the PSD/CDS executive’s proposal “now has a very important moment in the general strike,” but it then continues, “because the Government’s proposal has now entered the Assembly of the Republic and, therefore, will still take months to go through

its parliamentary process.”

Pureza pledged to work for a situation where the labour reform will be made “very plural, very united, without any sectarianism, listening to all voices that converge towards a new Labour Code.”

The PCP and the Bloco are appealing to a parliament controlled by the right and the fascists. They bear major responsibility for the rise of this government. Between 2015 and 2024, directly through their “geringonça” alliance or indirectly—in the case of the Bloco from 2019 onwards—both parties allied with a Socialist Party government that implemented EU austerity, cut public services, maintained poverty wages, and deployed the army to break a truck drivers’ strike in 2019.

They worked to demobilise workers, foster the illusion that a progressive alternative was possible within capitalism, and channelled discontent into bourgeois parliamentary politics, thereby creating the conditions for the rise of the fascist Chega.

The June 3 strike confirms both the combativeness of the Portuguese working class and the counter-revolutionary role of the organisations that keep it bound to a conservative, national framework. Workers seek to engage in militant action, but they come face to face with the crisis of revolutionary leadership. The CGTP, the UGT, the PCP, and the BE are not instruments of struggle but obstacles to it.

The decisive task is to build independent organisations of the working class: rank-and-file committees in workplaces and neighbourhoods that can link their struggles to those of workers across Europe and internationally. This fight must be centred on building a revolutionary party that unifies these struggles into a conscious political movement aimed not at pressuring the capitalist state but at replacing it with workers’ power and the United Socialist States of Europe.



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