Portugal’s housing protests escalate, defying police repression

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The housing protests sweeping Portugal have become a political confrontation between a growing social movement and a ruling establishment determined to defend the interests of landlords, property developers and financial investors. What began as opposition to soaring rents, evictions and housing speculation has developed into a broader expression of social anger over inequality, low wages and deteriorating living conditions.

The protests were fuelled by the right-wing Social Democratic Party (PSD) government’s introduction of legislation seeking to liberalise the rental market by reducing restrictions on landlords and rent-setting while making evictions easier.

Protests in July escalated into mass demonstrations and protest camps in Lisbon and Porto during October and November, to which Prime Minister Luís Montenegro’s right-wing coalition government responded with escalating repression, deploying the specialist public-order and riot-control unit, the Corpo de Intervenção, to dismantle camps and remove protesters.

According to *Público*, seven police operations against the encampments resulted in 99 arrests and dozens of injuries. Protesters were struck by rubber bullets, including in the face, while widely circulated footage showed officers charging demonstrators and beating people attempting to retreat.

The scale of the housing crisis is immense. Between 2015 and the end of 2025, house prices rose by approximately 182 percent while wages increased by only around 48 percent, creating one of the widest gaps between housing costs and income growth in Europe. Housing, a basic social necessity, has been transformed into a financial asset whose value rises far beyond the reach of those who depend on wages for survival.

The housing bill advanced through parliament after the far-right Chega abstained at a crucial stage, allowing the legislation to proceed. While seeking to capitalise on widespread anger over housing costs, Chega has been openly hostile to the encampments. Party leader André Ventura condemned a court ruling permitting the camps to continue, claiming it “undermines the authority of law enforcement” and legitimises “violence and anarchy.” Chega has called for new legislation granting police broader powers over public demonstrations.

More than 200 lawyers signed a public letter alleging disproportionate force and unlawful police actions and demanding an investigation. Amnesty International accused the authorities of using “beatings and excessive force” resulting in injuries and hospitalisations.

Such is the concern within ruling circles that class antagonisms will erupt that President António José Seguro demanded explanations from the government regarding police operations and convened the Council of State, a step associated with matters of exceptional significance. A former general secretary of the Socialist Party (PS), Seguro served as opposition leader during the 2011-14 Troika austerity years, opposing aspects of austerity while accepting the framework imposed by Portugal’s international creditors.

The housing crisis is the responsibility of successive governments rather than any single administration. House prices began their steep ascent during the *geringonça*, the “cobbled-together” arrangement that kept the PS in office between 2015 and 2019 with the support of the pseudo-left Left Bloc (BE) and the Stalinist Portuguese Communist Party (PCP).

Today, the BE and PCP seek to obscure this record through their opposition to the housing law and

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denunciations of police violence. While criticising Montenegro's reforms, both parties spent years sustaining PS governments on the claim they could secure more progressive policies. They withdrew support only in 2021, when growing industrial unrest and opposition to austerity made the arrangement politically untenable.

By subordinating social opposition to parliamentary manoeuvres, these organisations helped contain working-class resistance while living standards deteriorated. The resulting disillusionment has fuelled the growth of Chega. Since the May 2025 election, support for the Social Democratic Party (PSD)-led government has declined sharply, while Chega and PS have gained ground and now compete for first place in opinion polls.

The role of the trade unions is equally treacherous. The PCP-aligned CGTP has increasingly linked housing costs to inflation, poor wages and declining public services. Yet both the CGTP and the PS-aligned UGT rejected appeals from housing activists to join the November 11 general strike in neighbouring Spain. That strike emerged from Spain's own housing movement and from growing anger over evictions, inequality and falling living standards. Millions of workers participated in what became Spain's first nationwide strike in 14 years, demonstrating the potential for a broader mobilisation of the European working class around common social demands.

The conditions driving Portugal's protests are not unique. Similar housing crises have developed across Europe as governments prioritise corporate profits and preparations for war over social needs. Housing costs, declining living standards and worsening inequality are provoking growing opposition in country after country.

At the same time, workers across Europe face the same obstacle: trade-union bureaucracies that work to keep struggles divided along national lines. The recent one-day strike in Spain and upcoming ones in France, Italy and Greece have all been organised separately, preventing the emergence of a unified movement capable of challenging governments and employers on a continental scale.

The decisive question facing workers and youth is the international unification of these struggles on a revolutionary perspective. The defence of democratic rights, the fight against unaffordable housing and opposition to falling living standards and the drive to war require the building of rank-and-file committees in workplaces, schools, universities and working-class neighbourhoods, democratically controlled by workers themselves.

This requires a political break with the forces that present themselves as the left but subordinate mobilisations to parliamentary negotiations and the continuation of capitalist governments. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) advance the program of a coordinated European struggle against war and the capitalist oligarchy: the building of independent rank-and-file committees, the preparation of a European general strike, and the replacement of the European Union by the United Socialist States of Europe.



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