

# A CENTELHA

JORNAL DO SOCIALISMO REVOLUCIONÁRIO

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## WHAT WE STAND FOR

### The interests of the working class!

- The state monopoly of foreign trade and the nationalization under democratic control of workers' organizations of the banking system and the key sectors of the economy, including the top 100 companies.
- The immediate suspension of the payment of public debt, with compensation of small investors in case of proven need.
- Immediately raising the national minimum wage to 900€ a month as a step towards a living minimum wage.
- Minimum unemployment benefits, pensions and reforms equal to the national minimum wage.
- The end of all forms of precarious labour. The end of false self-employment contracts. The return of collective bargaining agreements in all workplaces with 10 or more workers.
- A national plan of full employment aiming to equally distribute all necessary work amongst the whole active population, reducing the working day without loss of pay.
- A national plan of housing taking all abandoned property into pu-

blic ownership, aiming to distribute houses equally to the whole population, with rents serving merely for the maintenance of the infrastructures under the democratic control of tenant commissions.

- No cuts to social services! Budgets adequate to the needs of the population supported by the increase of taxes on big business.
- Totally free access to education, culture, healthcare and sports as basic rights.
- The nationalization of all healthcare enterprises, all education institutions and all public transport under the democratic control of workers and users.
- An education system that privileges continuous evaluation and guarantees accompaniment adapted to the students needs and the rights of education workers.
- The creation of a public network of child and baby care, canteens and laundries.
- The democratization of trade-unions, with the regular election of all representatives, revocable mandates and the wage of trade-union full-timers equal to the average wage of the workers re-

presented.

### A sustainable economy!

- The nationalization, under the democratic management of workers, of all production and distribution of energy.
- The replacement of jobs in polluting companies for green jobs.
- Public investment for the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy in the shortest possible time.

### The fight against all forms of oppression!

- Portuguese nationality for all immigrants! The same social and political rights to all workers!
- The end of the wage inequality based on gender. Equal pay for equal work!
- Non-discriminatory sex education in schools from elementary education onwards.
- Inclusion of the study of the fight against racism, xenophobia, sexism, LGBTphobia, the discrimination of people based on disabilities and all other forms of oppression in the national school programme.
- The complete legalization of

abortion as a public healthcare service equal to any other and the free access to all forms of contraception.

- A twelve month parental leave for the mother, the father or the couple.
- The end of overcrowding in prisons with the immediate release of all prisoners condemned for non-violent crimes.
- Access to education, culture, healthcare and sports as a basic right for prisoners too. Full social and political rights to ex-prisoners.

### Socialism and Internationalism!

- The democratic planning of the economy, through the organization of workers councils, to answer the needs of the whole population and protect the environment.
- Solidarity with workers and oppressed peoples' struggles around the world. An injury to one is an injury to us all!
- The building of a socialist confederation of the countries of Europe and the world in the place of the bosses' European Union, guaranteeing the right to self-determination to all nations.

## SUPPORT SOCIALISMO REVOLUCIONÁRIO!

Decades of struggle against capitalism have taught us the need for strong finances in an organization that fights for the interests of the exploited and ultimately to end all exploitation. Our tasks, campaigns and interventions amongst the youth and workers require money. But to keep our freedom of thought and action, we cannot depend on financing from the State or private companies. A revolutionary organization must depend exclusively on the working class!

For this reason, we make an appeal: if you agree with what we stand for, make a donation.

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# THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL EDITION OF A CENTELHA

**A** *Centelha* (The Spark) is a bi-monthly paper and was preceded by *Ofensiva Socialista* (Socialist Offensive) as the publication of our organization. The first issue was published in No-

## **“A PAPER IS THE BACKBONE OF ANY REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION.”**

vember 2015, when *Socialismo Revolucionário* — three months from being officially recognized as CWI's section in Portugal — was still a very small group of around 10 people.

A paper is the backbone of any revolutionary organization, fulfilling a great number of key functions. Firstly, it is only around the paper that it becomes possible to consolidate the first small group of members. Likewise, it is through the work of writing and editing the paper that a significant part of the basic theoretical education of comrades is accomplished, and therefore, it is to a significant extent

every member of the organization has access to it, can read and discuss it with comrades, assimilate the ideas of the collective and prepare himself to intervene in the workers' and social movements with confidence and a clear understanding of our programme.

Furthermore, the very participation of our section in the workers' and social movements depends on the existence of this paper, not only because of the reasons stated above, but also because we are not yet more than a propaganda group and it is through the paper that we present our programme to the working class, and especially the working class youth. On the streets, with our stalls, in every movement in which we get involved, at assemblies, meetings and various activities of the left, it is through our paper that our ideas reach the workers.

And our ideas aren't simply contained in the words of every new issue. Some of them are expressed on the very act of selling the paper. In insisting on a physical format such as this, we open a discussion about organizational methods, about revolutionary finances and working class in-

allowing us to pay for the costs of our remaining activities, for meetings, congresses, trips, leaflets, banners, flags and all the numerous requirements of political struggle.

This edition, specifically, was planned having in mind the need to share our experience with comrades from other sections of the Committee for a Workers' International in written and properly organized form.

We proudly present for the first time an International Edition, fully written in English and in a larger format than a regular issue of *A Centelha*. We intend to print one Interna-

either silent or loudly praising the PS government internationally.

Following this article, there are reports on the feminist struggle and on the recently founded Students' Union, allowing the reader to take a glance at the enormous potential that the working class youth is showing in Portugal.

Two shorter articles seal this edition, one about the housing crisis — a major problem in Lisbon and Porto, the main cities in the country — and another one about the first steps towards organization among call-center workers, a promising new chapter in the

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tional Edition every year from now on, and to make it available at all the international meetings of the CWI.

In this issue, we report on various aspects of the class struggle in Portugal.

The first article is an updated version of an article firstly published by our German section's publishing house, *Manifest Verlag*. In it, we explain the class character and policies of the present Portuguese government, not only dissolving the internationally widespread illusions about supposedly “anti-austerity policies”, but also explaining how the left, the bureaucratic leaderships of the unions and the working class are responding to the continuation of austerity. It is an important article inasmuch as it gives an extremely rare critical assessment of the political conjunction when almost all the voices on the left are

Portuguese class struggle.

All of this unfortunately remains a brief and superficial view of the developments in Portugal, and a great number of matters were left out. Our small section still lacks the resources to produce an extensive and more in depth analysis of politics in Portugal, but we are aiming for that, and we are proud to have taken this first small step. ✱

## **“IN INSISTING ON A PHYSICAL FORMAT SUCH AS THIS, WE OPEN A DISCUSSION ABOUT ORGANIZATIONAL METHODS, ABOUT REVOLUTIONARY FINANCES AND WORKING CLASS INDEPENDENCE FROM ALL CAPITALIST ORGANIZATIONS, INCLUDING THE STATE.”**

through the paper that we manage to educate our first cadres.

Equally important is the publication's function as an element of cohesion. In it, our programme is centralized and

dependence from all capitalist organizations, including the state.

So, lastly, the paper functions, together with the dues, as a primary source of sustenance for the organization,

# FROM THE CARNATION TO THE CONTRAPTION

## THE CRISIS OF THE PORTUGUESE LEFT<sup>1</sup>

Gonçalo Romeiro

This article is an updated version of an article written in the summer of 2017 for the book *Die Linke International (The Left Internationally)*, edited by Manifest Verlag, on March 2018.

The history of the Portuguese Left is a peculiar one. That history is marked by three key elements: the unusually long-lived fascist regime, the “Estado Novo”<sup>2</sup>; the Portuguese Revolution of 1974 as well as its defeat; finally, the fall of the USSR and the planned economies. Here we can only explain that history

in passing, our objective is to analyze the left’s current stage of development, its structure and programme, so that we can outline our perspectives and tasks in this new period, marked by the economic and political crisis of capitalism, but also of renewed class struggle and reorganization of the socialist movement.

### A short look on a particular history

As mentioned, the unusually long-lived fascist regime of António de Oliveira Salazar<sup>3</sup>, was decisive in the shaping of the Portuguese left. Its oldest party, the *Partido Comunista Português* (Portuguese Communist Party, PCP), was found

ded in 1921 by a small group of mainly anarcho-sindicalists inspired by the October Revolution. Unlike the vast majority of other European Communist Parties, the PCP didn’t come from a left-wing split of a mass social-democratic or socialist party, who had Marxist traditions and, therefore, elements of its many tendencies. The absence of such a party in Portugal also represented the absence of a consolidated Marxist movement. This is the first peculiar element we want to emphasize, from this results both the development of the PCP under the ideological and organizational influence of Stalinism and Moscow, and the absence of the Trotskyist Left

Opposition. This is what explains the weakness

that the Trotskyist movement would later have in the country.

Under these circumstances, the Communist Party became the pivotal reference for all the left organizations that came into existence much later, in the final years of the dictatorship. The PCP is seen, and rightly so, as the most important anti-fascist organization, enjoying great prestige among the working class and poor rural workers at the beginning of the Portuguese Revolution of 1974. During the Revolution, it quickly became a mass organization with more than 100.000 members, controlling the most important trade-union confederation, the *Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses - Intersindical Nacional* (CGTP-IN), which, despite its deep crisis, still represents 700.000 workers today.

Founded in 1973, in Germany, under the wing of the German SPD by a small group of petty-bourgeois intellectuals, the *Partido Socialista* (Socialist Party, PS) also has a peculiar past. Unlike most of its European counterparts, it never was the historical party of the Portuguese working class. Nonetheless, during the Revolution, by presenting a socialist profile — and even going as far as to call itself Marxist — in opposition to Stalinism



The Contraption. Illustration by Helder Oliveira. Source: Expresso.



Signing the deal between the PS and the left parties. From the left: Heloísa Apolónia (The Greens Party), Catarina Martins (Left Bloc), Jerónimo de Sousa (PCP), António Costa (PS). Source: Expresso.

it quickly gained mass influence and became, alongside the PCP, the most important working class party. Nonetheless, its leaders, around Mário Soares<sup>4</sup> played the role of representatives of western imperialism and, with its support, accomplished the liquidation of the revolutionary process in November 1975.

The most important organization of the so-called far-left was the Maoist *União Democrática Popular* (Popular Democratic Union, UDP), with an important presence in the industrial working class during the 1970s. As pointed out above, Trotskyism was weak in Portugal. Its first organization was the *Liga Comunista Internacionalista* (Internationalist Communist League, LCI), founded in 1973 as the Portuguese section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI). It mainly had influence among the students' movement. The LCI would later form the *Partido Socialista Revolucionário* (Revolutionary Socialist Party, PSR) which, together with UDP, came to found the *Bloco de Esquerda* (Left Bloc, BE) in 1999.

The Carnation Revolution shaped the Portuguese left, turning it into a mass force, but with the defeat of the Revolution came the crisis of the left. The 1980s were a period

of counter-revolution, retreat of the left, huge demoralization and demobilization. That crisis intensified in the 1990s, with the fall of the USSR. The PS, mirroring its international counterparts, concluded a process which in its case started much earlier. Breaking most of its ties with the organized working class and most decisively embracing neoliberalism, it consolidated the capitalist two-party system in Portugal. On the other hand, the PCP, unlike the majority of the CPs internationally, held its ground and didn't move to the right in the direction of Eurocommunism and support for the European Union. Despite suffering huge losses, it managed to hold its organization and influence in the workers' movement, although entering a slow but lasting crisis. For the far-left this period represented the loss of most of its presence in the trade-unions — the mass workers' organizations.

The Left Bloc is a party born in 1999 out of a coalition between 3 of these smaller socialist organizations: the ex-Maoist turned Eurocommunist UDP, the Mandelist PSR and the Eurocommunist *Política XXI* (21st Politics). They formed the Left Bloc as an answer to their crisis and isolation, but by the time they did, they had already

lost reference and roots in the working class. The leadership of the Left Bloc was dominated by petty-bourgeois liberals, who, despite remaining socialists on a moral basis, in reality had lost all faith in the working class and in socialism itself, unable to build any perspective beyond the limits of capitalism. The party grew around issues that were neglected by the traditional organizations (PCP and PS), such as feminism, anti-racism and LGBT rights. There was a positive element here, but the party failed to link these issues with the class struggle, repeatedly slipping into liberal positions. Owing to this, it developed a parliamentary nature, unable to see real changes coming from outside capitalist institutions. These elements remain as the dominant ones today and, if anything, even intensified.

### **The beginning of the crisis: a new period for the Left**

As elsewhere, the start of the capitalist world crisis in 2008 marked a new period for the left. The history of its organizations is important to now understand how they reacted to it, and what the consequences were, not only for itself, but for the working class as a whole.

The first two years had a

stunning effect. The crisis found the left, and the working class in general, without an immediate response. But austerity made its way and anger started to accumulate, first in the rank-and-file of the organized working class, the trade-unions, and afterwards reaching new layers: the new generation of precarious workers and youth losing the hope of having a better life than their parents.

In June 2010, after the announcement of two austerity packages by a PS government, the CGTP-IN, organized a mass demonstration that brought 100.000 workers to the streets of Lisbon. In September the mood became more combative as yet another austerity package was proposed, forcing the first 24-hour general strike out of the Unions' bureaucracy in November, following another mass demonstration against the NATO Summit in Lisbon. The beginning of 2011 was marked by the North African revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. The waves resulting from these revolutions reached far beyond the Middle East, and in 12<sup>th</sup> of March a demonstration against precariousness, called through social media, mobilized 200.000 workers and young people to protest in the streets of Lisbon and Porto, with actions in all



Nurses and auxiliary medical staff strike. Santa Maria Hospital, Lisbon, October 2017. Source: Expresso.

the main cities. It was the first time in many years that a mass mobilization happened outside the scope of the Communist Party, marking the entry of a fresh layer of the working class into the movement.

We entered a period of mass mobilizations and political crisis in the south of Europe, led by the Greek working class. The ruling class, already doubtful of the government's capacity to implement new austerity measures, decided to bring it down after the March demonstration. The *Troika* (International Monetary Fund, European Commission and European Central Bank) was brought into the country and all the capitalist parties in parliament signed the *memorandum* that would dictate the policy of the next government. But 2011 wouldn't end without more mass action. Answering a call from Spain, youth around the world mobilized against the corrupt system of the 1%. October 15 saw the beginning of the Occupy movement. In Lisbon, a demonstration of 100.000 people culminated in a popular assembly in the front steps of the Parliament, calling for the nonpayment of the public debt, the nationalization of the banking system and an appeal to the trade-unions to call for a new general strike.

A few days afterwards the general strike was called and, for the first time in Portugal, accompanied by street protests.

Just a few months after the election of a new conservative government the mass movement was already calling for its overthrow, accompanied by demands that clashed directly with the capitalist system. Such movements would continue until the summer of 2013. After

(and still has) the capacity to organize mass actions on its own, if it so wishes. However, its leadership, both in the Party itself (parliamentary and extra-parliamentary) and in the CGTP-IN, abstained from doing so. The communist leaders saved the government more than once! Every time the working class pushed for mass action, bringing the government to its knees, instead of a clear plan

rious workers, the PCP didn't grow in this new period, neither electorally nor in membership. By repeatedly demobilizing the working class, its crisis intensified. When the general elections of 2015 saw them win just one extra parliamentary seat, they couldn't hide their disappointment.

The Left Bloc had little more than its members of parliament (MPs) when the movement began. Years of parliamentarianism emptied the party of any active rank-and-file membership. Without any strength in the unions, it had to turn to the new inorganic movements, but here, it played the role the PCP was playing in the unions. So it happened, that at the same time a new generation was coming out to fight, searching for alternatives and organization, the BE entered its worst crisis so far. The leadership was always more willing to search for deals with the PS (itself in crisis) than to boldly base itself on the new mass movements. However, the pressure of the movement prevented it from going too far. This wavering policy cost the BE splits both from the right, with those who wanted an alliance with the "socialists" at any cost, and from the left, with those who wished to clearly orient the party towards the

**"HAVING BECOME A BREAK INSTEAD OF AN ENGINE FOR ACTION, COMPLETELY IGNORING THE NEW MOVEMENTS OF YOUNG PRECARIOUS WORKERS, THE PCP DIDN'T GROW IN THIS NEW PERIOD, NEITHER ELECTORALLY NOR IN MEMBERSHIP."**

5 one-day general strikes, the first ever Iberian general strike and two mass demonstrations a million strong (in a country of 10 million), the right-wing government was in shambles, on the verge of collapse. But the opportunity was wasted. In the decisive moment, the leaders of the Left Bloc, Communist Party and CGTP-IN chose not to act.

What was the role of the Left in all these processes? The Communist Party had at its disposal the majority of the trade-union movement, it had

of action to win the workers' demands, it was met with empty speeches calling on the President — a member of the conservative party in power — to remove the government. Such speeches were never accompanied by calls for an escalation of mobilization, but rather the customary "let's wait and see" attitude. The President was only too happy to ignore them.

Having become a break instead of an engine for action, completely ignoring the new movements of young pre-  
ca-

movement. In the general election of 2011 it lost half its MPs, in 2014 two of its three seats in the European Parliament. It was only after the movement ebbed, and the epicenter of class struggle shifted back to parliamentary politics, that the party started to recover and to partially benefit from the still growing class anger under the surface. On the background of a general rise of the Left, first Syriza in Greece, afterwards Podemos in the Spanish State, Bernie Sanders in the US and Jeremy Corbyn in the Labour Party, in 2015 the Left Bloc saw its share of the votes grow from 5,2% to 10,2%, electing 11 extra MPs. This result brought with it a new surge for the party which, in the absence of mass movements, became once again the main gate for those workers and youth who want to become politically active. This phenomenon is now being impaired by the party's support of the new PS government and its 'light' austerity policy.

### **"Marx is back", but where is socialism? — The programmatic question**

As soon as the world crisis began, and all the illusions in neoliberalism bursted alongside its speculative bubbles, the most advanced thinkers of capitalism came crying "*Marx was right!*", "*Marx is back!*". Paradoxically, the reformist leaderships of the Left, to this day, keep crying "*orthodox!*" to anyone putting forward a consequent Marxist position.

As we've seen by the Left's approach to the previous period of mass mobilization, its leaders' subordination to capitalist institutions results in a program that refuses to go beyond capitalism itself. Both the Left Bloc and the Communist Party leaders dream of a better, more progressive, non-monopolistic, non-imperialist capitalism, one that, under enlightened leadership, steadily progresses towards socialism and, in an ever distant future, peacefully reaches its destination.

It's important to point out that there are many correct

demands — in the programs of both parties — that we support, such as the abolition of student fees, a public banking system, better wages and working conditions, the reconstruction of public services or a left opposition to the bosses' European Union (EU). Today, this last point is of special relevance. The PCP's historical position is that of opposition to the EU as a capitalist alliance, while the BE, after the capitulation of Syriza, developed a similar position, coming a long way from the most enthusiastic Eurocommunism. Still, neither party puts forward a socialist and internationalist alternative, but rather one based on national capitalism. The ques-

**"WITHOUT ANY STRENGTH IN THE UNIONS, [THE LEFT BLOC] HAD TO TURN TO THE NEW INORGANIC MOVEMENTS, BUT HERE, IT PLAYED THE ROLE THE PCP WAS PLAYING IN THE UNIONS. (...) AT THE SAME TIME A NEW GENERATION WAS COMING OUT TO FIGHT, SEARCHING FOR ALTERNATIVES AND ORGANIZATION, THE BE ENTERED ITS WORST CRISIS SO FAR."**

tion is that, given the current stage of development of capitalism, these demands are not possible within capitalist limits, so when push comes to shove, the Left leaderships capitulate.

### **The institutional approach of reformism produced a failed tactic**

After 4 years of brutal austerity implemented by the most hated government of Portugal's Third Republic, the Socialist Party was still unable to present itself as a credible alternative, losing the general election of October 2015. This was the weakest moment of the portuguese two-party system so far, both the conservative coalition and the PS could not form a government by themselves.

In these circumstances, we supported the tactic of allowing a PS government, in the context of a strengthened Left in parliament. First of all, it would be unacceptable, from

the point of view of the working class, to allow the conservatives to get back in power. Secondly, it would provide a huge opportunity for the Left, through serious mobilization, to force a weak PS government to make important concessions, i.e., gain important victories as a way to agitate and gain momentum for a left government with a socialist programme based on a united front of left forces.

Instead of this, the leadership of the Left Bloc and the Communist Party started negotiations with the PS without a common strategy and behind closed doors while blocking any serious mobilizations, producing weak agreements

The wasting of yet another huge opportunity is already having negative effects on the Left and the workers movement. At a time when a bold strategy from CGTP-IN to reach and organize the new precarious sectors, combined with a combative plan to defend public services and jobs is most needed and has great chances of success, its leadership, blocking the way of any serious action, is widening the gap between itself and the new generation of workers, while demoralizing the old guard of unionized workers. The subordination to the government is, therefore, intensifying CGTP's crisis when union affiliation is already at a historical low. The depletion of the PCP-led confederation is the depletion of the party itself.

The Left Bloc became a left adviser for the government, and this tactic is taking its toll. Mobilization, and the rank-and-file structures needed to materialize it, is what the BE needed to consolidate its growth after the electoral upswing at the end of 2015. By remaining a hollow organization its reformist leaders can only hope to maintain a passive membership to call upon in electoral periods — and this is exactly what they do.

Electorally, the polls show a stagnated Left — if not slightly retreating — while the PS is getting closer to an absolute majority every day, when instead it should be fighting for its very existence! But as a new crisis approaches, and with it, more austerity, things will become sour again for the PS, and all the more to its left supporters. The first electoral defeat of the Left already took place at the local elections in the end of 2017, with the PCP losing 10 city councils to the PS and the BE remaining an insignificant force locally.

### **A dead end around the corner or a shift to the left?**

As we approach the last year of the PS government, the real nature of the so-called Contraption is becoming increasingly clear to everyone. Despite the apparent economic reco-



Dockworkers against precariousness. Lisbon, June 2016. Source: n/a.

very, living conditions continue to deteriorate. The meager concessions obtained with the agreements between the PS and the Left were incapable, as they promised, of “stopping impoverishment”. The working class continues to face increased precariousness, a drop in real wages, collapsing public services and a housing crisis of dramatic proportions, while

dership. On the other hand the Left is forced to become more critical of the government, as it becomes more obvious that it will backtrack in the most important concessions previously agreed, while it tries to claim for itself all the gains made so far. Nonetheless, the reformist leaders refuse to break their support to the government, which, at this stage, means the

the next government of the Socialist Party. We also said that the fate of the PS is linked to the fate of capitalism itself and that its collapse can be delayed but not prevented, it faces a dead end around the corner of the next crisis. The Portuguese Left will only avoid sharing such fate by breaking with its class conciliation policies, refusing to support the next budget if it means the continuation of austerity and building a bold plan of action armed with socialist policies to fight for an 100% anti-austerity government in 2019.

#### Rebuilding a mass socialist left and the central role of the youth

With the economic and political crisis of capitalism, a search for alternatives has begun, especially amongst the youth. Class consciousness is on the rise again, and passing through its first embryonic stages. The mass movements around the anti-austerity programs of Bernie Sanders, Jeremy Corbyn, Mélenchon and AMLO represent this general tendency towards socialist ideas. As these processes develop, so does the crisis of the bourgeois two-party system. In Portugal, the mass movements between 2010 and 2013 show us a similar picture, and although the fall of the “extreme-center”

can be postponed, it cannot be averted.

We look again at a peculiar picture: the working class moves away from the center and is increasingly attracted to socialist ideas; meanwhile, the leaders of the Left are moving in the opposite direction. This second move does not go unnoticed and a response, in the form of new left-wing tendencies and groupings, can already be seen, both in and around the Left Bloc and the Communist Party. The reformists, therefore, are forced to adjust their speech. What we now witness in Portugal is the prelude of a more intense reorganization of the Left, a phenomenon that is taking place worldwide.

In the CGTP-IN trade-unions it is becoming increasingly difficult to block workers actions, especially amongst Education and Healthcare workers, where the continuation of austerity is felt more sharply. Militant action is growing and pressing the leadership. In the last two years we have seen strong mobilizations and a wave of strikes of nurses, doctors and teachers, who demand not only that the government fulfills its promises but that it goes further in order to save public services. The trade union confederation’s leadership attempts to deflect the danger of these struggles by maintaining

### “THE CURRENT LEADERS OF THE WORKING CLASS CHOSE TO CAPITULATE BEFORE A GOVERNMENT BOUND BY EU NEOLIBERAL POLICIES AND AUSTERITY. INSTEAD OF MOBILIZING TO BUILD A LEFT ALTERNATIVE TO THE “EXTREME-CENTER”, INSTEAD OF EXPOSING THE PS, THEY’RE BAILING IT OUT, GIVING IT A LEFT-WING AURA.”

the real gains from growth stay at the top.

As a consequence the ebb in the class struggle is slowly but steadily giving way to a new period of mass mobilizations. We can already observe an increased pressure on the government and its supporters and how it affects their attitude towards each other. On the one hand the PS is more vocal in its demands for the Left to be “responsible”, while showing increased openness to deals with the new conservative lea-

approval of the next austerity budget, giving the green light for the PS to ignore the key demands of the growing struggle from key sectors, such as nurses and teachers.

As we’ve said many times before, the development of a new wave of mass struggle, triggered by the continuation of austerity in the midst of an apparent recovery and the escalation of such a movement in the context of a new financial crisis will bring the working class face to face with

them as isolated as possible from one another, and refusing to organize coordinated strike action and demonstrations. They hope to tire these workers before their struggle develops into a generalized political fight against the government. In 2016, after months of strike action culminated in a demonstration against precarious labour, the Lisbon Dockers not only stopped the bosses' plans of deregulation in Lisbon, but started an ongoing process of building a national union to end precariousness in all the ports of the country and organize around its militant traditions the entire logistics sector. Similarly, a new national call center workers' union is being built, representing the first steps to organize one of the most rapidly growing sectors of the Portuguese economy. A new teachers union was also created in 2018, and while it is still a small and isolated organization, it is having a modest but important impact in the latest mobilizations and can grow if it is able to provide a combative alternative to the bureaucratized unions. These developments, especially with the action of revolutionaries, can have a galvanizing effect in other unorganized sectors.

Like we previously said, a similar process is taking place at the political level. We see new left groupings and tendencies coming out of the sphere of influence of the PCP. Although still dominated by a Stalinist tradition, and sometimes jumping to ultra-left and sectarian positions, they mainly represent a positive search for a socialist way out of the crisis. In the Left Bloc a similar search is taking place and our section, *Socialismo Revolucionário*, is playing a key role in it. Despite the purging of most of our members from the BE, we can still influence the discussions inside it, as was demonstrated by the only left opposition inside the party being the first tendency to adopt our proposal for a living minimum wage of 900€. We're fighting for a clear socialist programme, a bold plan of action and a democratic and combative BE capable



Teachers' demonstration. Lisbon, May 2018. Source: Filipe Caetano/PortugalDiario.pt.

of achieving it. In 2016 our work among the youth caused the leadership to react with a ham-fisted attempt at expelling our small organization, which resulted in a big wave of solidarity from other critical sectors within the party.

As the Left Bloc continues to be one of the main gateways for the new generation of workers to enter political activity, searching for socialist ideas and very open to Marxism, the contradiction between these proletarian elements and the petty-bourgeois liberal leaders will continue to develop and strengthen the revolutionary tendencies within the party. Our task is to build a broad party as we build the revolutionary tendency. Accordingly, we must emphasize the need for a United Front of the Left and workers' organizations from

below, as the basis for a socialist alternative to the current capitalist government.

In all these processes of reorganization and radicalization we can see the embryo of the future mass socialist organizations of the working class in Portugal. As a new crisis looms on the horizon, and with it new challenges and hardships, a new mass socialist movement will emerge to face titanic battles as the new generation tries to save itself, and the planet, from capitalism. Arming such a movement with the program of socialism and a mass revolutionary party will be the decisive factor to achieve victory.

The words of Marx are not forgotten: "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win!" ✿

1. "Geringonça", the Portuguese word for contraption, is how Paulo Portas, then leader of the Christian Democrats pejoratively nicknamed the current Socialist Party government with the support of the left parties in parliament. The term became widely used in the press. A similar phenomenon happened after the last British elections when a possible government coalition led by Corbyn was nicknamed "Coalition of Chaos".

2. Estado Novo or New State in English is the name given to the Portuguese fascist regime lasting from 1933 to 1974. If we add to that the military dictatorship (1926-1933), Portugal was under dictatorial rule for 48 years.

3. President of the Council of Ministers and head of the fascist regime from 1932 until 1968.

4. Mário Soares is the historic leader of the Portuguese Socialist Party, and the leader of the democratic counter-revolution in 1975, which put an end to the Portuguese social revolution. He became a key figure of the capitalist recovery in the 1980s, adopting neoliberal policies that destroyed many revolutionary conquests such as the Agrarian Reform and a Public Banking System. Finally, he led Portugal into the European Union in 1986.

# RESISTANCE AGAINST OPPRESSION, SEXISM AND AUSTERITY IN PORTUGAL

Minerva Martins

**T**he period of severe austerity policies that followed the 2008 economic crisis has had a particular impact on working-class women all over the world. The situation in Portugal is no exception. As the capitalist crisis worsens, so does the violence against women.

The growth of unemployment and unstable working contracts has affected women the most, increasing wage inequality. The 2017 Report on Equality between Women and Men in the EU, from the European Commission, shows that the gender pay gap in Portugal increased from 8.5% in 2007 to 17.8% in 2015. And this labour instability caused working-class women to be more vulnerable to all forms of violence, sexual harassment in the workplace or domestic vio-

lence within their families.

Working women are now more economically dependent on their male partners or family members, and therefore on violent partners or family members. A national study about dating violence (from April 2017 to January 2018) that enquired almost 2.000 university students showed that more than half of the women were subjected to violence from their partners or ex-partners. Also, according to the Annual Report on Internal Security of 2016, 96% of femicides are committed by partners, ex-partners, or family members. Working women, without access to psychological and physical medical services and without economic independence to leave their houses, are the most harmed.

Also, with the austerity policies affecting the public services, working women have been forced to take more res-

pensibility on domestic chores and the care of children, elderly or ill family members. With an inexistent public network of child care or nursing services, and a degraded national health care system in the country, the time that women spend on domestic chores is, on average, almost two hours more than men do. In Lisbon, the network of child care services for children with ages between 3 months to 3 years provides less than 50% of the needs of the children that live in the city — the majority being privately or semi-privately owned services, practising average prices nearing half the minimum wage.

In Portugal, anger against this reality is clear among the majority of young and working-class women, whose hopes for an independent and emancipated life were put on hold. We are witnessing the radicalization of a new generation of working women that is now open to organizing around important demands such as equal pay for equal work, an end to sexist violence in the workplace and at school, and democratic access to child care services.

## A reorganization of the feminist movement

The mass movements that took place between 2010 and 2013 against austerity policies and the intervention of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Commission (EC) and the European Central Bank (ECB) — the so-called *Troika* —, brought important lessons to this new generation of workers who took the first steps in building a class consciousness. Popular assemblies, strikes and occupations during this period created the possibility to discuss the idea of a new and equal society, not controlled by the bourgeoisie, interested in keeping the working class divided according to race, gender and sexual orientation to better exploit it.

But the lack of a programme frustrated the possibility of any significant victories. The conservative government remained in power until the end of the term, provoking a



ROSA at the 25<sup>th</sup> of April demonstration. Lisbon, 2018. Source: Socialismo Revolucionário.

temporary demoralization. Besides that, no women's mass movement nor any important feminist organization were built during this period. The more recent mass reactions of women in Argentina, Brazil, United States, Iceland, Poland, or the Spanish State, against sexist violence and inequality, were thus decisive to the new reorganization of working-class women in Portugal, inspiring thousands to fight for their rights.

Several of these international episodes of struggle have triggered solidarity actions in the main cities of Portugal, and helped to fuel the discontent against the worsening conditions of the majority of the women in the country. Specially since the beginning of 2017 — with the worldwide Women's Marches against Trump — the majority of spontaneous street demonstrations have thus been around women issues, against a sexist justice system, against violent episodes towards women, after the death of Marielle Franco in Brazil or the case of *La Manada* in the Spanish State.

We have seen one of the biggest demonstrations in the context of the International Working Women's Day (IWWWD) in the present year of 2018 — the second and consecutive year

a demonstration was called to support the International Women's Strike in Portugal, despite the efforts from the leaderships of the Communist Party (PCP) and the Left Bloc to boycott this initiative. A small organization called Feminist Assembly of Lisbon (AFL) was responsible for organizing this day of struggle, having enormous limitations to reach working-class women. However, near two thousand people joined the appeal across the country. A considerable part of the women present in this years' IWWWD were from the Spanish State — the state where more than 5 million workers participated in a feminist strike —, and Erasmus university students from several countries, which shows the international character of these demonstrations.

### **The struggle against patriarchy and for LGBT+ rights**

Three months after this IWWWD, we also witnessed the biggest LGBT+ Pride March in the capital since its inception in the year 2000. Ten thousand people marched on the streets of Lisbon, the majority of them youth that decided to join the pride demonstration for the first time — also inspired by the feminist movements all around the world, motivated by recent legal victories for trans people, and driven to fight the violence and discrimination against LGBT+ people at the workplace, in education, in health care and in housing.

It is important to note that the number of trans people outing and searching for official gender change is increasing every year in Portugal, following an international tendency. There are more and more people, especially young people, rejecting the binary gender roles

assigned to them, in a period when the bourgeois family model is being violently imposed on working families after decades of growing expectations of sexual and gender freedom. The very destruction of the Welfare State means the transfer of responsibility for the care-taking of the home and family members to working-class woman, unable to find a job that provides her an independent life from her partner or family; the working man, on the other hand, feels the obligation to assume the role of provider to his family.

The Left must have a clear position on gender self-determination and sexual freedom, fighting any discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or intersex people currently being reinforced by the imposition of the bourgeois family model. In Portugal, the LGBT+ working-class have achieved many significant legal victories, as the right to marriage, to adopt and co-adopt, the access to assisted reproductive technology, the prohibition of discrimination due to someone's gender identity, and the de-pathologization of trans people. But these achievements, not available to the majority of LGBT+ people, clearly show the need for a class approach

to the LGBT+ question — the need to fight for full employment rights or public, free and quality health care and education systems, and the need to build a society democratically managed by the working-class, for the interests of the majority and not for the profit of a minority.

The feminist movement and left organizations have the challenge to unite all these young and working-class LGBT+ people interested in getting organized in the struggle against the capitalist system, and to openly reject sectarian and destructive views from identity politics and “radical feminism” — for example, pitting cis women against trans women, gay men or any other oppressed group based on numerous theories of “privilege”. The system that forces the working-class women to labour in precariousness, to withstand hours of unpaid labour and sexist violence at



home, is the exact same system that blocks the chance for same-sex working-class couples to safely establish a family and compels trans women to unemployment, homelessness and prostitution. An effective programme must be built around a firm class line.

### **The Left Bloc and the Communist Party**

The Left Bloc and the PCP, as the main left forces in Portugal, have an important influence on the current feminist organizations and movements

se revolution. Its bureaucracy has consistently tried to isolate their members — and the thousands of working-class people that still see the party as an important authority in the struggle for their rights — from the new women's movements that are filling the streets. The need for the PCP bureaucracy to maintain their control over the party and not let this radicalised movement influence and inspire its rank and file members to go beyond their current programme explains why the PCP didn't support the Inter-

gal and their unwillingness to introduce a programme of struggle to the new feminist movements and radicalized layers of working-class women are opening the way for the intervention of small organizations that present themselves as alternatives to parliamentary parties and that are influenced by academic feminist authors and by anarchist and "radical feminist" perspectives. This trend is evident in the development of the Feminist Assembly of Lisbon (AFL) or the Feminist Assembly of Coimbra (AFC).

ting out that the leaderships and even the membership of those organizations are mostly comprised of men.

We have a responsibility, even as a small marxist and revolutionary organization, to intervene among the working-class women that get close to these collectives and to present them a clear and socialist programme. Accordingly, we need to defend a left and class unity with the rank and file members of the main left-wing parties and trade unions — the unity of men and women —, to advance a clear program for the socialization of domestic work, equal pay for equal work and the end of workplace harassment, connecting the interests of working-class women to the whole working class, and to put forward the idea that only in a planned economy and the socialization of the means of production and reproduction — that is, the democratic management of the key companies and economic sectors, but also of the hospitals, schools, child care and nursing services, canteens and laundry rooms — is able to end sexual and gender oppression.

### **ROSA and the role of the revolutionary party**

An important step that our organization, *Socialismo Revolucionário* (the CWI section in Portugal) took this year was founding ROSA — Resistance against Oppression, Sexism and Austerity. ROSA is a party space for political education aimed at our women comrades. It was an important step, given after understanding the impact of double oppression on working women even after they joined the revolutionary organization. This impact was felt on the participation and development of the women comrades, and ROSA is what is needed to harness the potential of this important part of our section.

At the same time, ROSA places at the center of the revolutionary activity the question of methods of discussion and organization that can fight sexist, racist, homophobic and other

## **“THE FIGHT AGAINST SEXISM, RACISM OR HOMOPHOBIA HAS TO BE A CONSTANT AIM OF THE WORKING-CLASS ORGANIZATIONS AND MOVEMENTS SO AS TO BUILD A WORLD WITHOUT OPPRESSION NOR VIOLENCE.”**

— competing with the liberal Socialist Party (PS). The Left Bloc maintains a liberal perspective on the women's question, not putting forward a clear class approach of the impact that the recent austerity measures have had, particularly on working-class women, and therefore not denouncing the important role the PS has had during this violent process for the majority of women.

The last feminist campaign about sexual harassment launched by the Left Bloc on the 2018 IWWD is a clear evidence of this approach. The campaign touches solely on the need for cultural change, not presenting a single demand to fight sexism in schools or the workplace. The Left Bloc doesn't differentiate itself from PS's liberal programme on women, and is therefore unable to build strong campaigns around gender equality issues from the new radicalized mood among working-class women. Furthermore, the Left Bloc bureaucracy maintains the internal structures of the party hollowed, not providing any democratic organs for party members to discuss politics and a programme for the working-class women and LGBT+ people.

The other main left-wing party, the PCP, is in its biggest crisis since the 1974 portugue-

se revolution. Its bureaucracy has consistently tried to isolate their members — and the thousands of working-class people that still see the party as an important authority in the struggle for their rights — from the new women's movements that are filling the streets. The need for the PCP bureaucracy to maintain their control over the party and not let this radicalised movement influence and inspire its rank and file members to go beyond their current programme explains why the PCP didn't support the Inter-

national Women's Strike and organized its own National Women's Demonstration. This decision alienated young women that followed the Spanish Feminist Strike with excitement. On the other hand, the PCP maintains an important influence on labour sectors dominated by women, such as the health care or education sectors, that are undergoing one of the most combative struggles of the last years. It is important to note that the biggest ever demonstration and sector strikes among nurses, school staff, and cleaning workers took place this very year. However, these struggles are not being coordinated by the trade union leaderships (the most important one, CGTP, under the control of the PCP) so as to jointly force the government to raise the minimum wage, guaranty collective contracts and the 35-hour working week for both private sector and public service workers — much less to raise demands related to the current housing crisis, sexist violence, child care rights, and other demands that open an important dialogue with the women workers.

### **The emergence of new feminist organizations**

The limitations of the two main left-wing forces in Portu-

gal and their unwillingness to introduce a programme of struggle to the new feminist movements and radicalized layers of working-class women are opening the way for the intervention of small organizations that present themselves as alternatives to parliamentary parties and that are influenced by academic feminist authors and by anarchist and "radical feminist" perspectives. This trend is evident in the development of the Feminist Assembly of Lisbon (AFL) or the Feminist Assembly of Coimbra (AFC). These organizations have a more radicalized discourse than the Left Bloc or the PCP, talking about a feminist revolution and openly criticizing the state and the capitalist system, and the way it structurally oppresses women, particularly, women of colour. Many young working-class women searching for spaces to organize around Lisbon and Coimbra are now looking at these new structures. However, because their leadership doesn't have a marxist approach to the women's question, no real solution for the emancipation of working-class women is put forward.

In the case of radical feminists, biological sex is considered the main factor of gender inequality, not private property. So even though they criticize the capitalist system, they don't see it as the main target against which the feminist movement should organize itself. This has consequences such as the openness to alliances with bourgeois feminist organizations, the transformation of feminist organizations into safe-spaces for all kinds of women to focus on talks about daily experiences, and a refusal to enter into a dialogue with the rank and file members of left parties and trade unions, justifying this stance by poin-



8M (International Women's Day) demonstration. Lisbon, 2018. Source: Arthur Pontes/Flickr.

violent and discriminatory tendencies of capitalism inside the revolutionary and working-class organizations — as a way to integrate to the fullest women and other oppressed groups in the struggle against capitalism, and to start to create the foundations for a socialist society. The fight against sexism, racism or homophobia has to be a constant aim of the working-class organizations and movements so as to build a world without oppression nor violence.

With ROSA, we are preparing the ground to form revolutionary women cadres, to intervene in the women movement and struggles with the correct program and perspectives, to create mass and broad campaigns for the rights of working women — ROSA's campaign for the legalization of abortion in Ireland is a brilliant example of what can and must be done —, and to build an important revolutionary pole of attraction in the portuguese left as a step towards a socialist and mass workers' party. The recent processes of radicalization of the working-class in Portugal create opportunities to build the revolutionary party, but also place bigger responsibilities upon our shoulders — to intervene and to push the movement forward. The building of a national feminist strike, coordinated with the trade-unions in the

Spanish State and other countries, is a significant task that we must have as a perspective for the upcoming years.

### **Prospects for a 2019 feminist strike**

On an international level, the feminist movement is making important steps by coming closer to the workers' organizations, the struggles of the working-class and its historical (and effective) methods

able to gain the support of the first trade unions for the campaign, this will encourage the participation of working women inside the trade unions, and establish connections between the women's struggle for the end of sexist oppression and the general working class struggle for the end of capitalist exploitation.

This campaign is an important step forward in the building of a national feminist

of the Left Bloc and Communist Party in these last years, both in the international actions of the 8th of March and more generally in the whole feminist movement; as well as the limits of other feminist organizations that put the interests of working women against the interests of working men and don't call for a feminist strike of the whole working class but, on the contrary, call only for a women's

## **“WE, AS REVOLUTIONARIES, MUST STRIVE FOR A CLASS BASED FEMINIST MOVEMENT AND WILL CEASE ANY OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD SUCH A MOVEMENT.”**

of struggle, such as the strike. Examples of feminist strikes in Latin America, Iceland, Poland or, even more significantly, the Spanish State, are having an impact on the women's movement in Portugal. We have now an important opportunity to defend the participation in the international feminist strike.

Socialismo Revolucionário is using the recently launched campaign for a network of public, free and quality child care services to make progress in that direction. We have recently started to make contacts with trade unions, feminist, anti-racist and left organizations, to gain the support of this campaign and to reach working-class women. If we are

strike because it opens a discussion about the socialization of domestic work, the violence against women in the family, as well as the discrimination of women in the workplace, that are forced to accept temporary work to take care of their children, immigrant rights and it's also an urgent matter for the majority of working families that don't have access to this fundamental service. The demands raised by this campaign put quite evidently the limits of the capitalist system for the emancipation of working women.

However, the feminist strike of 2019 is still very uncertain. On the one hand, we have to consider the veritable boycott

strike (against men). On the other hand, we are witnessing the support of working-class women and the rank and file of the trade unions for the idea of a portuguese feminist strike in 2019, inspired by international episodes of struggle, as well as the pressure exerted by them over the bureaucratic leaderships of the workers organizations and left-wing parties.

So at least one thing is absolutely certain: things will not remain as they are. We, as revolutionaries, must strive for a class based feminist movement and will cease any opportunity to build such a movement. ✱



Students' Union at the May Day demonstration. Lisbon, 2018. Source: Socialismo Revolucionário.

# BUILDING THE STUDENTS' UNION

## THE FIRST YEAR OF STRUGGLE

João Reberti

In Portugal, working class youth remains an untapped reservoir of revolutionary potential. Decades of sectarianism and opportunism by the main left leaderships created a political vacuum that only a democratic and socialist organisation could fill. Participating in the student movement, we were able to develop our programme whilst developing a critique of the type of movement in play: unable to establish links with the working class, and thus unable to achieve real victories. Our collective experience in the student movement, paired with the lessons from our comrades internationally, led us to where we are now. With a lot yet to learn, we're confident that we're on the right track to be better positioned when the next inevitable period of turmoil arises.

### Before the Students' Union

Our orientation towards Left Bloc (*Bloco de Esquerda*, BE) was mainly through the youth section of the party, an unofficial structure (with all the problems that entails) that after the 2015 general elections saw a surge both electorally and membership wise. With the help of relatively new members that came from BE we confirmed our analysis and prospects: the youth was orienting itself into BE as the main left-wing reference with an anti-austerity discourse that paid special attention to oppressions and environmental issues. But since the party is virtually without any organic links to the working class, be it either in the form of union shop stewards or rank and file union members, we also knew that the class character of the layers now joining wouldn't be without contradictions.

Nonetheless, with a handful of comrades we managed to

intervene in the Lisbon youth sector with modest but positive accomplishments. The barely-existent structure, with almost no meetings, no activity outside the planning of a summer camp and a few parties, and no political discussion, started to take form as we insisted on organizing meetings to attract and consolidate new members. We also pushed for a youth paper, something that had never existed prior to that point. We started from meetings of 5 people and were soon having 30 people meetings that presented the potential within BE to mobilise the working class, as well as sectors of the petty-bourgeoisie. It was a school of utmost importance to several young members that developed quickly through a baptism of fire in the discussions against the aspiring bureaucrats. Through this activity — never disconnected from the building of the revolutionary party — we managed to secure

2 spots in the youth section's coordinating committee, with the first opposition slate in 6 years, putting an end to the negotiation of places between tendencies.

It is also necessary to mention our involvement in arguably the most left leaning university in Portugal, with the only group who could be considered part of a student movement. It presented itself as a "unitary" collective (BUL - *Brigada Universitária em Luta*). But it was "unitary" only for as long as it was dominated by the Communist Party Youth (*Juventude Comunista Portuguesa*, JCP). It organised protests, discussions and Student Association alternative slates to the "apolitical" festivity-organising recurrent one. But the clashes with the unelected and unofficial movement's leadership came to be one crucial point: the informality of responsibilities and therefore of power proved impossible to

oppose in practice. JCP's decisions always prevailed. These clashes became intolerable when, responding to the announcements of privatization of the university, a wave of students came knocking at BUL's door to join the struggle.

The backtracking that came with JCP's diminishing power can be epitomised in a pathetic, if not ironic, thesis — against a generalised privatisation of the New University of Lisbon the struggle shouldn't be articulated between faculties, between different campuses, because, as a leading member of the JCP boldly put it "our particular faculty is a micro-cosmos, our way of struggling can't be replicated, there's nothing we can teach, provide, facilitate to other students." This was later to be jokingly known as "socialism in one faculty".

The refusal to organize a university wide movement was the breaking point for BUL. We lost the struggle, and even though we didn't have a good starting point, fighting privatization could have easily been become the stepping-stone for the development of a stronger movement that could spread through different universities. JCP's leadership, however, fearful of losing all the control over the situation, ordered the dissolution of BUL.

Along with the contact established with the Spanish State's Students Union, the disappearance of the only embryo of a student movement in Lisbon was the fundamental factor for the founding of the Portuguese Students Union.

Throughout this period we grew both inside and outside the Left Bloc, especially amongst the youth, further reinforcing our youngish and student, but also working class, character.

### **The youth under the "Contraption"**

The shutdown of internal youth meetings of the Left Bloc, our expulsion from the Party and all sorts of similar sabotage manoeuvres must be framed within the PS government arrangement (popularly called "the contraption"): Left

Bloc and Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Português*, PCP) parliamentary support for the "Socialist" Party (*Partido Socialista*, PS) programme and budgets. Blocking the right from power was necessary and the correct step forward, but from its inception we argued against the method of closed

## **"OUR PURPOSE IS TO SHOW THESE PEOPLE THE NEED TO CHALLENGE THE CURRENT LEADERSHIP IN ORDER TO ACTUALLY FIGHT FOR THE SOCIALIST POLICIES THAT THE LEFT BLOC STANDS FOR."**

and separate meetings to produce deals for the whole term, for this would bind BE and PCP to the austerity programme of the PS. We argued that a PS minority government would be much more permeable to the demands from the workers' and social movements. Firstly, the deals weren't discussed by the membership at any level. A special conference to discuss the basis (i.e. the programme) should have been organised by PCP and BE together with unions, social movements and other left organisations; but PCP and BE presented themselves and negotiated with PS separately, offering greater negotiating power to PS. From this moment forward, both left-wing parties were chained to a light austerity programme where demands over pay unfreeze, pension actualisation, and some modest, if not problematic, changes to labour law concerning precarity, could hardly make up for the maintenance of the neoliberal policies of the previous period.

Since early 2016 both left leaderships made sure the movement was contained within strict limits, regardless of the destructive consequences for both parties in the long-term. BE continually draws young petty-bourgeois and working class people, but it has no way to integrate them, lacking the party structures to do so; right now the party heavily depends on staff and employees to function. For us, despite the expulsion — that increased our profile amongst BE's non-bureaucratic sector — the orientation towards BE makes even

more sense now than before: combative and able minded youth everywhere look to BE as the main political reference. Our purpose is to show these people the need to challenge the current leadership in order to actually fight for the socialist policies that BE stands for.

The communist youth is

much more monolithic, keeping the Stalinist methods of organising. Right now we can only try to mobilize the most radical and ambitious layers through our work in the Students Union, hopefully to the point where the party's rank and file ask themselves why on earth is the JCP, an organisation with at least 5000 members, only able to accomplish next to nothing.

It is also extremely important to understand the effect of the upwards economic cycle lived politically through the Contraption: this worldwide positive cycle made it possible to slow down austerity but not reverse it — the commitment to EU regarding deficit goals made it so that all growth was channeled to debt relief and interest payments. 2 in 4 new job contracts are temporary, and the average wage, 800 euros, is falling rapidly to meet the minimum wage of 580 — to be 600 euros in 2019. Youth has nothing to look forward right now. Everywhere, young working class people ask themselves: if the economy really is better where is my share? The new generation can't find a job with a contract, can't find an affordable place to live, can't pay university tuition fees, can't use public transportation and has limited access to public health. The mix of anger and despair is becoming a powerful political catalyst.

Combative anti-capitalist youth organisations are formed by the dozens. Hundreds, if not thousands, of young working class people looked at the tools presented to them, and

many deemed the bureaucratic reformist leaderships useless, especially after entering the left-wing parties and experiencing huge frustration. We took it upon ourselves to start the process of building the necessary organisation, an organization capable of linking everyday education struggles

to the broader workers' movement.

We started a local chapter against this background, and named it UDE (Democratic Student Association). The first prototype was circumscribed to one university, as we understood it as BUL's replacement, and considered our yet reduced number of revolutionary cadres to mean that anything more ambitious was impossible. Predictably, both BE and JCP boycotted this effort. Nonetheless, it allowed us to better understand the challenges of building a democratic anti-capitalist youth organisation.

We discussed the methods of any democratic anti-capitalist organisation and we established elementary procedures: there would be an elected leadership, responsible for synthesizing the discussions on conferences and branch meetings, and held accountable to every member through congresses; a paper to contact students and workers on stalls and demonstrations as well to unify and solidify our programme, aiming to produce regular income for our activities. Every member would have well-defined responsibilities to counter the inertia associated with spontaneous movements.

As UDE, we started organising debates on student struggles in Brazil and also on institutional racism concerning education. We brought a different approach to these themes always defending the need to have an anti-capitalist program and reinforce worker/student solidarity, which was pretty much non-existent at the mo-

ment.

We organized our first stalls with papers and campaigns and the receptivity was very positive, building the ground for the expansion of UDE on a national level. The raw core was from one particular faculty but we started having people join in from other places.

### International struggles and the *Sindicato de Estudantes*

Meanwhile, over the end of 2016 and beginning of 2017, CWI and IR (Izquierda Revolucionaria) started conversations and we had the opportunity to participate in the October and November 2016 student strikes that joined hundreds of thousands of young people in the streets of all major cities. It is impossible to overstate the impact of the unification within our ranks and also on our student organisation. Afterwards, we also had the opportunity to attend the Students Union's congress in Madrid. Ambitiously, but not naively, we set the goal to build a student organisation capable of being a determinant factor on the class struggle, as the Spanish SE is today.

We had to take in consideration the circumstances around us: no major student upheaval, bureaucratic leaderships determined to act against any sign of significant struggle and, most importantly, limited resources — a tiny group of developing youth cadres and about twenty active members. We realised that we were in for the long game.

Morphing UDE into the Student Union (*Sindicato de Estudantes*, SE) was largely discussed but also easily understood on all levels, specially the national scope: it needed be a national organisation capable of linking and unifying all local struggles around a common programme which is anti-capitalist, feminist, LGBT and anti-racist. We maintained all former structures and started around a citywide branch in Lisbon, while developing activities in the most favourable universities and high-schools.

This latter point is of considerable importance: from its



Cancela a Propina at the Students' Day demonstration. Lisbon, March 2018. Source: Rebeca Csalog.

inception we had it clear that whichever movement could or would arise, high school students would be at its core. This is because working-class students seldom pursue higher education. Two major-contributing factors play a part in this: first and foremost, according to our analysis, the tuitions put up a wall against that pursuit — they average around 1.000 euros annually, around 2 months of minimum wage; secondly, national exams amount to 50% of the admission application — these exams evaluate 2 or 3 years worth of lessons, are done in 3 hours or less, with most students spending huge amounts of money preparing for them. Basically, working class students that can't gather around 100 euros a month are utterly underprepared when compared with wealthy students. Plus, attending classes demands a place to live, universities are concentrated in big cities, Lisbon being the priciest, with around 300 euros for a bedroom. Transportation is yet another obstacle, the cheapest bundle (for those living very close to the city center) being 36 euros for bus, subway, etc. To all this we must still add food, study materials, etc... So, on top of those 1.000

euros and hundreds more for private tutoring, 500 more is needed, monthly, to study. Another thing to have in mind is that 50% of secondary level students end up in vocational studies, influenced by teachers, social stigma and economic pressures, and the great majority of them are working class. Racism plays a huge role in funneling non-white students to this education sector. That should be enough to anticipate higher education's worsening class composition.

However, as with most things, organizing high-school students is easier said than done. The high-school students haven't been a protagonist since the Carnation Revolution. Years of depoliticisation with student associations that are festivities committees have numbed the potential of this layer. Here and there we can see struggles happening and we try our best to reach the students involved, but our effect radius is rather limited as of right now, mainly parts of Lisbon and even less in Coimbra, with some contacts in Porto. There is also the issue of diminished autonomy, these high-school students can't, most of the times, meet us in other places for lack of time or even means of transportation.

### The first year of *Sindicato de Estudantes*

The past school year was really important for *Sindicato de Estudantes* and *Socialismo Revolucionário* (SR) both. We took several ambitious steps, testing to the limit our ability to accomplish and follow through with everything. We can't discard being ambitious, as this is the moment to set the corner stones for the following years. Our activity was structured around meetings with political discussions, stalls and movement participation, and maintained that SE isn't SR's youth. Even though it was started by SR and its current leadership are SR members, we make a point of being open to everyone searching for a tool against capitalism and its ills: as of right now several members are from BE and others without any party. It is not boasting to say that without us these people would very likely demoralise and demobilise at BE or "inorganic" movements, lacking a structure, a perspective and a programme.

We also suffered from a minor ache of anarchism. An anarchist group joined the SE with a lot of praise, knowing fully well that what characterised us was a well-established

definition of member, ensuring internal democracy; independent finances, for an independent programme; and democratic centralism, which means that no branch can operate isolated from the rest of the organization. In Coimbra, home of the most fragile branch of the SE, an anarchist member tried a coup that resulted in all the anarchists leaving the organisation, but not without trying to tarnish SE's name. The parallels with the student movement that attacks the Spanish State's Students Union are evident. These young activists proposed a confederation of movements and not a unified organisation with a common programme. Through this conflict, we were able to consolidate all the members in the SE with a better understanding of our programme.

We held several conferences to discuss our programme and methods. We assured tendency rights to any group of members and we decided in conference to maintain our proposal related to independent and sound finances, related to the definition of member and also the need of a collective leadership. Documents were produced by both factions and it served a rather productive function: it allowed us to solidify our organisational structure against a specific idea petitioned by the other

group. Only the members of the anarchist organisation, after being defeated in congress, left. Everyone else agreed, and most importantly, understood the ideas put forward by us.

We've been involved in two major campaigns: one against tuition fees and one for nationality rights for immigrant children. More actively on the tuition fee campaign, we advanced the need to gather support from the workers' movement and also to develop some kind of coordination at local and national level. This

## **“ONLY THE METHODS OF THE WORKING CLASS OF MASS STRIKE ACTION AND MOBILIZATION CAN GUARANTEE ANY SUBSTANTIAL VICTORIES.”**

movement is still a newborn, but with great potential. As addressed earlier, we see the tuition fee as the main contradiction to explore, because it's nothing more than a fine for poor and working class people. This movement, *Cancela a Propina* (Cancel the Fees), puts together a heterogeneous group of people. Nonetheless, so far, it's main ideological influence is that of petty-bourgeois individualism, spontaneism and voluntarism. Despite these faults it has put forward the demand to abolish tuitions in important demonstrations,

reviving and opening a space for the movement outside JCP. We believe next year we'll see a further radicalisation of the youth against these and other injustices.

At the same time we tried to intervene whenever workers' struggle took place, with an approach towards solidarity and also propaganda. The teachers' demonstrations against a ten year long pay freeze showed the potential to build bridges between students and education workers, with dozens of papers sold and also

union contacts being made. Another sector we look to with particular attention is the call-centres workers, because it is a place where a lot of college working-class students pass through, and we have a good relationship with the Call Centre Workers Union. The May Day was also a huge moment for us where we participated by the first time with our banner building ties with the unionised working class proving that sectarianism is a sickness to be fought, establishing contact with union representatives and workers.

## **Prospects**

We know these steps are still modest but they show us that we're heading the right way. We have a broad periphery of contacts, students all over the country are getting to know us and most will look to us when they take the necessary next step towards organisation. For that contributes our paper that brought us hundreds of contacts, our facebook page and most importantly our actions and contributions to the movement, wherever we can intervene. The political space exists, and demands a anti-capitalist organisation to break with the reformist leaderships and actually win concessions. Only the methods of the working class of mass strike action and mobilization can guarantee any substantial victories. Only an international perspective assures that we can learn from the victories and defeats of our class worldwide. Only a revolutionary organisation can prepare the working class youth of today for the tasks currently presented to us.

This next period will be one of intenser struggles and also activity for us, and we are better positioned than before to be a decisive factor in local struggles building our way up to be a decisive factor at a national level. ✱



Students' Union at the International Women's Day demonstration. Lisbon, 2018. Source: Socialismo Revolucionário.

# HOUSING A WORKING CLASS NIGHTMARE

João Carreiras

**T**he housing prices have abruptly soared in the last couple of years, laying bare an old working class problem: finding a decent and affordable place to live.

## A chronic issue

In the 1950's, Portugal experienced a massive exodus of workers from rural areas into Lisbon, Porto and the surrounding towns in search of a less miserable living. Self-built neighbourhoods and slums

late 1980's, the central State stopped altogether the construction of public housing. Instead, the successive governments gave tax bonifications to anyone buying a house to live in, stimulating the private housing market. This policy was also aimed at strengthening the role of the portuguese banking system, which was being privatized, and the financialization of the economy. The social housing programmes are transferred to the municipalities which, with fewer resources, only intervene in extreme situations, for example

Between 1950 and 2012, the private sector was responsible for 89% of all housing built in the country. However this boom led to speculation and increase in housing prices and thus it was registered mostly in the suburbs of big cities, where houses were more affordable. Moreover, these acquisitions and constructions, being fuelled almost entirely by easy loans, created huge levels of indebtedness in those families and construction-related companies.

In a different reality were the poorest layers of the working

trusion sector was already in recession. Too many houses were built and working families could not afford them. According to the study "Finança e Habitação em Portugal" CES Coimbra, in 2010 Portugal had an average of 1.5 accommodations per family, 2nd highest value of the advanced capitalist countries. This recession coupled with high level of indebtedness caused many construction related companies to collapse, affecting tens of thousands of workers, mostly immigrants.

At the same time, during the crisis salaries and the income of wide layers of the petty-bourgeoisie (especially the public sector) in general crashed under massive austerity cuts. In the last 6 years, the number of poor families who pay more than 40% of their income in housing doubled! Moreover, as hundreds of thousands were thrown into unemployment, the market value of real estate plunged, leaving thousands of families in a situation where their debt was not paid off even after returning their houses to the banks. In 2010, 37.7% of families were in debt. Thus several thousands were faced with eviction. And since the renting market has always been particularly costly in Portugal, all this led to mass emigration, as well as to a mass return to the parents' houses for any working class people that were not protected by older renting contracts — a majority of which were young workers.

While banks were being saved by the billions under the intervention of the Troika (the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission) the portuguese bourgeoisie was further liberalizing the renting market, introducing a law in 2013 to unfreeze the prices of old contracts. This law came to be known as "Eviction Law". In the same period, thousands of accommodations belonging to banks and funds remained empty and devoluted instead of fulfilling their social purpose.

## **"WHILE BANKS WERE BEING SAVED BY THE BILLIONS UNDER THE INTERVENTION OF THE TROIKA, THE PORTUGUESE BOURGEOISIE WAS FURTHER LIBERALIZING THE RENTING MARKET"**

proliferated with poor sanitary and housing conditions. These were laid bare in the Lisbon floods of 1967 with at least 700 deaths and widespread destruction of precarious housing. As with many other areas of the welfare state in Portugal, public or social housing was virtually nonexistent until the Carnation Revolution, in 1974. However, unlike Education or Health services, there was never a nation-wide state programme for building affordable and decent housing to meet the necessities of the majority of workers.

By 1976, the public housing programmes initiated during the revolution almost stopped and after the IMF interventions in Portugal, during the

to eradicate slums.

In the 1990's this privatization of housing increased with huge tax exemptions to real estate funds (controlled by the main banks), thereby increasing even further the contradiction between housing as a commodity and housing as a necessity.

With these conditions there was a huge boom in construction and acquisition of houses until the mid-2000's, and not exclusively by sections of the middle classes, like public sector workers and liberal workers, but also by large sectors of the working class who had for the first time the opportunity to buy a house while monthly paying the banks a debt as if they were paying the rent to a landlord.

class. The majority were unable to acquire a new house and went on living in inner city neighbourhoods, council housing or rented houses in the suburbs. Due to a shortage of rent controlled housing, the newer renting contracts were expensive, which also "pushed" workers' families further and further away from the city centers where they worked.

This nightmarish character of portuguese housing market can be understood once one realises that Portugal is one of the EU countries with the lowest percentage of public housing: only 2%!

## Housing crisis deepens

When the capitalist crisis of 2008 hit Portugal, the cons-



Tenants' protest against evictions in the Mouraria neighborhood, Lisbon, 2017. Source: Socialismo Revolucionário.

### Economic recovery and gentrification

With the period of apparent recovery which world capitalism is experiencing since around 2015, and the insecurity concerning terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as major European cities, the tourism sector in Portugal has experienced a boom in the last years. And with it, the real estate has increased its value, giving rise to a furious process of gentrification whereby the old historic neighbourhoods are being bought by foreign capital and converted into hotels or tourist accommodation.

Since 2013, with the “defreezing” of older renting contracts, evictions in the old city centers, especially of Lisbon and Porto increased massively. Until 2016, 5.5 families were evicted per day on average. And now that real estate is again “desirable” for speculation, the tendency is for this problem to grow even further, with housing prices skyrocketing and pushing more and more people away from the cities. Even for students sharing

accommodation, this means being forced away from the center, with the rents doubling or tripling in the space of months. This has led to some isolated attempts at an anti-eviction struggle which unfortunately lacks the breadth of what was accomplished in the Spanish

probably need to be “saved” at the expenses of workers, with more austerity policies.

This poses an obvious contradiction under capitalism: the majority of the population cannot buy or rent accommodations on the market, whereas the capitalists can only

## “IN ORDER TO SOLVE THIS ISSUE, IT IS IMPERATIVE TO BREAK WITH THE LOGIC OF HOUSE AS A COMMODITY.”

State.

As is usually the case with capitalism, the economic recovery has been one-sided. The big corporations and capitalists have recovered their profits and resumed “business as usual”, whereas workers and youth continue with low wages and precarious contracts. This means that the speculative nature of the current housing prices will be put in check in the next years. The bubble that is being fueled by speculation and tourism will eventually burst and many banks and investment funds will (again)

realize their investment if someone actually buys or rents an accommodation.

### One solution: democratic ownership of housing

In face of this decade long problem one must wonder why the successive governments and the State have never tried to tackle an issue as important as housing. The intertwining of the financial system and real estate is part of the explanation. In fact, loans for building or buying houses accounted for a great deal of bank profits for several years.

In a peripheric economy such as the portuguese, especially after entering the EU, real estate and construction are economic sectors somewhat shielded from international competition — unlike industry, for example.

So in order to solve this issue, it is imperative to break with the logic of house as a commodity. All real estate funds should be taken into democratic ownership and their assets rented to working class families according to their needs. There should be democratically planned municipal programmes of rehabilitation of devoluted buildings so that such buildings can be turned into social housing with controlled rents. We also need a national plan for housing, taking from the experience of the struggle of the working class in Portugal during the revolution of 1974-75, guaranteed through taxation of profits and the super rich as well, and fundamentally, the nationalization and democratic control of the banking system. ✱



Workers' protest at the Konecta Call-Center. Lisbon, July 5, 2018. Source: Socialismo Revolucionário.

# CALL CENTERS: A GROWING ECONOMIC SECTOR IN PORTUGAL

Bruno Penha

**A**t a time of weak economic growth the Call Center sector has seen a tremendous growth in Portugal. According to the Portuguese Association of Contact Centers (APCC) there were 81.615 Call Center workers in 2017, almost three times as many as in 2015 (when there were close to 30.000), the year that the PS government took office with the support of the parliamentary left. The government's Agency for the Investment and External Commerce of Portugal (AICEP) "country profile" explains this increase: Portugal has one of the best telecommunications infrastructure in the world, including a high percentage of optical fibre in the broadband internet, and a workforce with a majority of foreign language speakers and "availability, flexibility". What the agency leaves out is that this availability is due to 17,5% of real unemployment — much higher than the official numbers of 8,5% — and that the flexibility is due to increasingly weak labour laws and rampant precariousness that enables bosses to easily sack workers.

**Plagued by precariousness and dreadful working conditions**

Much of this growth is related to outsourcing companies, which employ 42% of the workers in the sector. Client companies prefer to pay extra to a number of national and international companies that are specialized in outsourcing — such as Teleperformance or Manpower — so they can wash their hands from any responsibility towards the workers. Around 1/3 of the outsourced jobs salary is at the national minimum wage (NMW) level of 580€. This is a poverty wage in Lisbon and Porto — where 80% of the jobs of the sector are located — cities with suffering from a growing housing crisis — the rent of a single room can easily account for more than half of that (for a more extended explanation of the crisis see "Housing: a working class nightmare", pp.18-19).

Precarity and grueling working conditions are the common thread of this quite heterogeneous sector. Jobs can either be classified as inbound — answering calls from customers, often offering technical support — outbound — calling costumers, often selling or retaining a customer whose contract is about to expire — or backoffice — dealing with administrative work, and not directly with clients — spanning several different ser-

vices, from insurance to tourism or even banking. The pressure to achieve certain values in sales and customer satisfaction (assessed through inquiries) is huge, with constant threats of being sacked, harassment by the supervisors, inadequate working equipment and unhygienic working environments — respiratory infections, back pain and eyesores are commonplace. All this results in regular burnouts and a turnover of 20% a year in the sector.

## Fighting for a living wage and better working conditions

Such state of affairs can be attributed to a lack of workers organization. The largest trade union federation, CGTP, under the Portuguese Communist Party's (PCP) influence, didn't bother to organize this new sector, and ended up scattering the workers through several different miscellaneous trade unions, aggravating the confusion of an already quite inexperienced and depoliticized workforce.

But such awful working conditions can be tolerated no more — the workers are starting to organize! The membership of trade unions related to call center jobs nearly doubled in the last couple of years and the pressure from the rank and

file was such that even the bureaucratized and unwilling CGTP had to stage a nationwide sector strike one year ago. Another important development was that an independent trade union with as little as 4 years of activity, the Call Center Workers' Trade Union (STCC), has been able to stir the waters by demanding that call center jobs be recognized as a "fast wearing profession" — applied to stressful professions, which would allow for longer breaks, less time in line and a lower retirement age — organizing workers assemblies and successful strikes for pay raises, joining other sectors struggles (and even feminist, LGBT and anti-racist protests) and denouncing the flaring precariousness in the sector.

Even though PCP and the Left Bloc promised to fight precarity during their campaign 3 years ago, it has grown nationwide since, including in the public sector! They not only couldn't bring the Socialist Party government to regulate the call center sector, but allow it to fund the outsourcing companies with public money by cutting on taxes and paying for their rent and utility costs! We the workers were proven once again that this government doesn't have our interest at heart, but those of capital. Only we can put an end to precariousness, low wages, harassment and the lack of working condition by fighting on the streets and on our workplaces. ✱