

Portugal: Mass demonstration against austerity

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The demonstration “Screw the Troika! Power to the People!” gathered 1.5 million people in dozens of Portuguese cities on 2 March. The main demand was the resignation of the Government and the immediate halt of the austerity measures that drove Portugal into a deep recession.

Few people would think that the huge demonstrations on 15 September, called by the citizens’ group “Screw the Troika” [[1](#)], could be surpassed in number. One million people then filled the streets and led to the government’s withdrawal of the Sole Social Tax amendment, that would increase the workers’ contributions to Social Security while decreasing the bosses’ contributions. This time, the government acted differently and decided to postpone the announcement of the welfare cuts — the initial intention is to cut more 4 thousand million euros — to next week, thinking it would keep many people out of the protest.

But their plans failed completely: on 2 March more people came onto the streets and made the biggest mass demonstrations ever in the country. For most of them, it was the first time they actually came into the streets to demonstrate and protest, mostly asking for the government to resign.

The demonstrations ended with the people singing “Grandola Vila Morena”, the Portuguese Revolution anthem that has resurged in the last weeks with groups of people singing it to interrupt public speeches of members of government all over the country. Even the prime-minister got “grandolated” (a new expression for future Portuguese language dictionaries) during his speech in the Parliament last month. [[2](#)]

Unlike the September demonstration, now there was an organized sectorial presence, inspired by the Spanish “waves”: the “health wave” gathered nurses and doctors, the “education wave” with teachers and students and the “retired wave” with retired workers and pensioners, one of the social groups most affected by the tax increase on their pensions.

This huge protest took place at the middle of the 7th evaluation of the troika memorandum, with the IMF, ECB and EU staff in Lisbon preparing the most savage cuts in Education, Health and on the welfare state as a whole. The unemployment rate remains out of control (almost half of all young people have no jobs) and the emigration numbers can only be compared with the late 1960s, when people fled the war, misery and dictatorship.

The indignation of the Portuguese people is an example to all European countries that are suffering from the consequences of the troika’s brutal neoliberal programme and the new dictatorship of the debt. Of course the protests will go on after the announcement of the new cuts, but the power of this mobilization also brings the urge for an international agenda of protests against the common enemies that are destroying the peripheral economies of the eurozone.

To see photos of the 2 March demonstration in Lisbon:

http://www.flickr.com/photos/bloco_de_esquerda/sets/72157632895706357.

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* International Viewpoint. <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/>

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Footnotes

[1] See on ESSF (article 28014), [Portugal: Appeal to March 2 mobilizations - Screw the Troika! Power to the People!](#).

[2] See here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M53-cxC8B1E>