

Portugal: Fifth Convention of the Left Bloc

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On June 2-3, the Fifth national convention of the Left Bloc took place in Lisbon. Since its creation in 1999 this unitary organization of the anti-capitalist left in Portugal has strongly consolidated and implanted itself in society and on the political landscape, becoming today a significant force which has more than 4,000 members, hundreds of local councillors, 8 members of parliament and an active presence in struggles and in the social movements.

The convention was dominated by the desire to build a strong left opposition to the social-liberal government of Socrates. The openly neo-liberal policies conducted by the government of the Portuguese Socialist Party are giving rise to widespread unease and discontent in the popular layers of society.

This was expressed in the general strike which took place on May 31st against the measures of deregulation in the civil service. Although it is true that this strike had a limited impact, it nevertheless made it possible to demonstrate the real nature of social liberalism when it comes to power and its determination to push forward with policies which always end up by provoking the return to power of the hardline right.

The Fifth Convention of the Bloc brought together more than 600 delegates from all over the country who represented the 4,200 members of the organization (Portugal has about 10.5 million inhabitants). The debates were concentrated around four tendency motions, representative of the internal plurality of the Bloc. Motion A, which brought together the three founding organizations of the Bloc (the APSR, Portuguese section of the Fourth International; the ex-Maoist UDP and Política XXI, which came from the Portuguese Communist Party) and many members who did not come from these organizations presented a document entitled "The Socialist Left as an Alternative to the Socrates government". This document laid out the main lines that should be a priority for a fighting left which puts at centre stage the struggle against climate change from an anti-capitalist perspective and the struggle against all the injustices caused by capitalism. This tendency had the support of nearly 75 per cent of the delegates.

Motion B, entitled "For a Platform of Socialist Democracy" was put forward by a group whose origins are in various organizations of the Portuguese far left of the 1970s. This motion insisted in its theses on the need to deepen the internal organization of the Bloc and on correctly handling internal pluralism. This motion had the support of 5 per cent of the delegates. Motion C, entitled "Everyone in the struggle, everyone in the streets!" was defended, along with some independents, by the Ruptura/FER current, an organization linked to the LIT tendency (International Workers League, "Morenoite" Trotskyism).

This motion was the most critical towards the outgoing leadership of the Bloc (essentially Motion A) and centred its attacks on the supposed absence of internal pluralism in the organization and on the adhesion of the Bloc to the European Left Party (Ruptura/FER asked in particular that the Bloc propose within the ELP the expulsion of Rifondazione Comunista for its support to the Prodi

government). This motion, which had the support of 12 per cent of the delegates, also proposed that there should be a rapprochement with the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), in particular in trade union work.

Lastly, Motion D (3 per cent of the delegates) was presented under the title “The Bloc for a social majority of the Left”, and was defended by a group of militants from the town of Matosinhos. This motion insisted on the necessity to link the Bloc more closely to the social movements, but its proposals were very similar to those of Motion A.

The Congress debates were very rich, first of all in the discussion of the different motions, then in the debates on the statutes and finally for the election of the 80 members of the new national leadership. The composition of this leadership is the following:

Motion A: 404 votes - 62 representatives 74.5 per cent

Motion B: 24 votes - 4 representatives 4.42 per cent

Motion C: 78 votes - 12 representatives 14.3 per cent

Motion D: 17 votes - 2 representatives 3.13% per cent There were 3 blank votes and 6 invalid votes.

It should be noted that our comrade Francisco Louça of the APSR was elected spokesperson of the Bloc. The Left Bloc came out of this congress strengthened, in particular in its ability to articulate different left traditions without however losing sight of a clearly anti-capitalist perspective.

P.S.

* From International Viewpoint website.