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Portugal

Portugal, Europe and the Left Bloc after the European elections

- IV Online magazine - 2014 - IV473 - June 2014 -

Publication date: Friday 27 June 2014

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This resolution was adopted by the political leadership of the Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc), Portugal on 1 June 2014. It was translated by Federico Fuentes for [Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal](#). The original text is [Portugal, a Europa e o Bloco depois das eleições Europeias](#) [Resolução pol tica da Mesa Nacional - 1/6/2014](#).

Following the [September 29, 2013] local elections, the Left Bloc developed its European program via a thorough programmatic debate involving many independent activists. That culminated at our February 2014 national conference.

The Left Bloc entered the campaign with a strong orientation, a clear, alternative program to the one proposed by the government, a candidate elected by consensus and an openness reflected in the quality of the list of candidates presented and the public support they received. The Left Bloc carried out a dynamic election campaign, throughout which it remained united and completely focused.

The Left Bloc received a bad election result [149,628 votes, 4.56%, down by 6.15% from 2009]. We were able to elect Marisa Matias, but were a long way away from electing a second deputy. We not only failed to turn around the losses suffered at the last legislative and municipal elections, but received an even lower vote this time around. The party must carry out a profound reflection on the political situation, the path we have taken to date and future options for the Left Bloc.

Crisis of the political system and the centre

The May 25, 2014, European parliamentary elections were a sign of the deep crisis facing the European political system. This was reflected in the generalised loss of votes suffered by traditional and governing parties (whether social democratic or conservative) and the growth of extreme right and xenophobic and reactionary populist forces, such as occurred in England, France, Denmark, Sweden, Austria and the Czech Republic.

Nevertheless, anti-austerity forces received significant results in Greece (victory for Syriza), Ireland (20% for Sinn Fein) and the Spanish state (United Left, IU, and the new party, Podemos, together won 18% of the votes).

A second factor in the crisis of the political system is the persistently high rate of abstention that has worsened with the social desperation arising as a result of the economic crisis. The very low participation rate in these elections deepens the crisis of representative democracy in the European Union.

In Portugal, the abstention rate at the European elections reached a record 66% (3% higher than in 2009, with 280,000 less voters). In Braganza, Faro, Vila Real and Las Azores, the abstention rate was higher than 70%. The previous highest abstention rate for European elections was registered two decades ago (64.6%).

The fact that migration has increased at a rate not seen since the 1960s and 1970s no doubt played an important role in the increased abstention rate. Nevertheless, the main explication for this phenomenon is the accumulated discontent with politics in general that is felt among broad sections of the popular classes. This disconnect among citizens tends to find its main expression in European elections, but it has also increased in legislative and municipal elections and could become a structural tendency. The current level of abstention is an expression of protest against austerity and anti-social policies.

In Portugal, the governing parties suffered a humiliating defeat that represented a condemnation of austerity policies. [Socialist Party (PS) president and prime minister Pedro] Passos [Coelho] and [Peoples' Party president and deputy minister Paulo] Portas have not been deposed simply because the inaction of the president keeps them in power.

The votes lost by the centre right did not go to the left in a significant manner. While it is true that the governing parties lost 400,000 vote compared to 2009, the PS stood still, winning only one more European deputy than the right-wing alliance.

The Portuguese Communist Party won 416,000 votes (35,000 more than in 2009), but it was not the only force that was able to channel some of the discontent. Polarisation also occurred around personalities such as Antonio Marinho e Pinto (Earth Party, 200,000 votes more than 2009). Despite not winning a seat for Rui Tavares, the Partido Libre (Free Party) received an important vote (70,000 votes) on the basis of an undifferentiated criticism of "party apparatuses" and the promise of a new way of doing politics that involves citizens, together with a predisposition towards an agreement with PS.

Left Bloc's results

The National Coordination salutes those activists who converted the Left Bloc into a force that had a presence across the country in a political battle that allowed us to preserve the representation that our political current has in the European parliament.

The National Coordination also salutes all the candidates that stood for the Left Bloc, whether they are members or independents, particularly Marisa Matias and Joao Laviã for their outstanding performance as lead list candidates.

The Left Bloc suffered as a consequence of two consecutive electoral defeats (2011 and 2013), which lent credence to the ongoing story regarding the Left Bloc's inevitable decline. Public disagreements and internal criticism also contributed to this, as did the exaggerated blame laid on the Left Bloc for the lack of a genuine convergence of the left around which expectations were created by failed to be met. This issue had particular repercussion within the Left Bloc.

On the other hand, the Left Bloc can no longer play the novel card to its advantage and its image has been tarred by the institutions within which we carry out part of our struggle, such as parliaments and municipal councils, and which today are viewed with a lack of confidence by many of the victims of the policies they decide upon. Without a sufficiently rooted electoral and activist social base, the Left Bloc faces greater difficulties due to the division of the left and the types of populism that characterise this context.

The debates at our organisational conference last February focused on this reality and attempted to start a response. The Left Bloc will continue to debate both the causes and consequences of the recent election results and debate its project and the political space it fills. Branches, and municipal and district groups will be bringing together members to carry out this discussion before the end of June.

The Left Bloc believes it is essential for the debate that our sympathisers and voters be included in these discussions. The objective is to recapture the original spirit of the Left Bloc, of unity and intransigence, which goes beyond party limits and involves activists and social movements in an indispensable dialogue for the construction of a broad alternative.

The European Union after May

The European election results demonstrated the how broadly held the perception is that the response to the EU crisis of the last few years has exacerbated the exclusion of citizens, promoted inequality, reinforced the control of a single power over the directorate, consolidated the decisive weight of the financial system and economies subordinated to the pursuit of profits, all of which has provided incentives for seeking national solutions to the aggression carried out by the European commission and the European Central Bank.

The categorical rejection of any process of pooling sovereign debt, as set out in the agreement between the right wing parties and the Social Democratic Party in the German government, as well as the failure to modify the Budget Treaty – an election promise raised by [French president François] Hollande, and then quickly forgotten – shows that EU policy will continue to worsen the destruction of the economies of the periphery countries and has imposed, in the name of the euro, a social crisis whose depth is without precedent.

Moreover, Europe does not have the means to resist a new financial crisis with its current institutions. Austerity leads to deflation and the risk of a prolonged depression, impedes an economic response that involves the creation of employment and growth, and condemns essential public services to disappear.

As such, the 20 years of austerity that the EU, the president and the government announced for Portugal are only compatible with authoritarian political forms and the concentration of power within the central bloc of governments pursuing this path of destruction. Collaborationism is the manner in which they hope to run Portugal.

Mobilise in order to wear down the government

The next few weeks will be marked by the return of protests, with trade union actions called in Oporto and Lisbon (June 14 and 21, respectively). Political discontent of the majority needs to be accentuated through the deepening of mobilisations, but above all taking into consideration the recent attacks against collective bargaining and the new austerity measures that the government is preparing as a response to the rulings of the Constitutional Tribunal regarding certain measures in the 2014 state budget. The government has indicated that it willing to ignore the real content of the court's sentences by not immediately complying with the reposition of salaries for the public administration or restoring subsidies they cut.

Reduction in the number of deputies weakens democracy

At a time when dissatisfaction is growing with the political system, the Socialist Party has proposed reducing proportionality and plural representation that are a part of democracy, and re-raising a proposal to reduce the number of parliamentarians and introduce uninominal [single-candidate] electorates. Responding to the political system's crisis of representation with regressive and pro-two-party proposals is an indication of PS politics, shared by both [party general secretary Antonio José] Seguro and [PS mayor of Lisbon Antonio] Costas.

National convention in November

The National Coordination has decided to hold the next national convention in Lisbon, on November 22-23, 2014. The IX Convention will evaluate the Left Bloc's work over the past two years, set out a political orientation and elect representatives to the party's national leadership bodies for the following period.