

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8433>



Portugal

Portuguese Elections –Left Bloc leader in debate

- IV Online magazine - 2024 - IV590 - March 2024 -

Publication date: Friday 1 March 2024

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

Bloco Esquerda (Left Bloc) is standing with a full slate of candidates. As a consequence of a democratic proportional representation system, the Bloc has had MPs elected from its formation in 1999 to today, winning between 2% and 10% of the vote and from 2 to 19 MPs at various times. Currently, it has 5 MPs, which operate as opposition to the social democratic government of Antonio Costa both in parliament and in struggles outside parliament.

The Costa Socialist Party government fell at the end of last year accused of corruption. From 2015 to 2019, the Left Bloc had a confidence and supply agreement (the *geringonça* or contraption), alongside the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), with the Costa government. Unlike Podemos in the Spanish state, it did not join the government or take ministerial posts. Their principled opposition to the 2019 budget, which neglected working class needs, effectively brought down Costa's government.

The subsequent Costa government, which collapsed in 2023, had an absolute majority and had no need for external support from the Bloc or the PCP. One of the campaign objectives in this election is for the Bloc vote to be strong enough to prevent an absolute majority for the Socialist Party and thereby construct a new written deal with the Socialist Party, forcing real concessions to the needs of working people.

As we have seen elsewhere in Europe and even globally, there has been a surge recently in support for the far right Chega (Enough), which is a recent phenomenon in Portugal. In the opinion polls, they are at 17%, while the Bloco has been polling between 7 and 4% and the PCP between 4 and 2%. Polling gives the centre (right) parties a two-point lead over the Socialist Party with 31%, but in order to form a government, they would need to do a similar deal as the Italian conservative parties have done with the far right. Such a government would mean a bigger attack on working people's lives and on public spending. Attacks on women's and LBGT+ rights would also follow. The Left Bloc is campaigning vigorously against the danger represented by Chega and its potential alliance with the centre right parties. No party or alliance is predicted to have a stable majority, according to the Portuguese media at the moment.

Below is a report from the [Left Bloc website](#) about a recent [radio debate](#) in which their lead candidate, Mariana Mortágua, participated.

“It's the Bloc's strength that can impose solutions that they say are impossible”

In the radio debate held yesterday between parliamentary candidates, Mariana Mortágua Bloco Esquerda (Left Bloc) leader insisted on measures to curb house prices and recalled that before the 2015 elections they also said that “it was impossible to raise the minimum wage.”

This Monday's radio debate brought together representatives of the parties with parliamentary seats, with the exception of Chega (the far right party rising in Cpolls-Tr), which refused to attend. In the first round of speeches, the topic was the future of the Social Security system. Mariana Mortágua defended the increase in pensions and the diversification of sources of revenue for public Social Security, either through the gross added value of companies or through the tax on large fortunes proposed by the Bloc. This is similar to what already happens today with the

additional tax on luxury assets, a proposal that the Bloc had approved during the “geringonça” (contraption), when the Left Bloc externally supported certain policies of the Socialist Party government and voted to allow it to take office. The revenue from this tax is earmarked for the Social Security Financial Stabilisation Fund, contributing more than a hundred million euros.

For the Bloc coordinator, “the way to fight poverty and have more economic growth is by fighting economic inequalities,” as Portugal is the second-most unequal country in the OECD. But “this can’t be done by reducing personal income tax on the highest salaries, as proposed by the IL (Liberal Initiative, a neo-liberal party) and the right,” Mariana Mortágua continued, nor by privatising contributions to the social security system, which she considered a “disastrous” proposal.

“Portugal is a poor country because it pays poor wages”

All it takes is for all workers to contribute a thousand euros to a private fund, and you’ve just created a hole of 1.7 billion in one year in the fund for pension payments,” warned the Bloc coordinator, recalling that “there was a liberal prime minister who governed England for a month or so, and the financial chaos created was such that pension funds lost 40 percent of their value.” In other words, “anyone who retired at that time and had a pension dependent on market pensions lost 40 percent of the value of their pensions simply because there was an irresponsible neoliberal prime minister who blew up the financial markets with her governance of the United Kingdom for a month.”

Mariana Mortágua also criticised the PS’s absolute majority for having created “scaremongering” about the sustainability of the system, “saying that it couldn’t comply with the law because that would jeopardise 13 years of Social Security sustainability, lying, and sending altered data to Parliament.”

The debate continued with the subject of justice in relation to recent cases with a political impact and the actions of the Attorney General’s Office. Mariana Mortágua defended the chief prosecutor’s need to have “the capacity for dialogue with the people” and also to “explain the processes that are underway.” However, she stressed that this is not the problem with justice in Portugal, which is the country that “applies the highest sentences in Europe,” has “20% of the prison population in pre-trial detention,” and is “too expensive and time-consuming.”

The third topic was the question of governability, with AD (Democratic Alliance, a centre right electoral alliance) leader Luís Montenegro again failing to answer what he would do if he needed the support of the far right to govern. Mariana Mortágua once again argued that a left-wing majority is the only stable scenario for the country and that the advantage of a written agreement is that “people can get to know it” and hold it to account. An agreement for the legislature “allows us to look at the country and make major reforms, which is what we need,” she continued, guaranteeing that on March 10, “there won’t be an absolute majority.” She said that “it’s the Bloc’s strength that can impose measures on that majority that otherwise wouldn’t be there”: for example, “lowering the mortgage installment through Caixa” and “banning the sale of houses to non-residents,” measures that the PS says are “impossible” today. “I remember the time when it was impossible to raise the minimum wage and the European Union wanted to impose sanctions on Portugal,” recalled Mariana Mortágua, confident “in the strength of the Bloc to impose these solutions” as it did in the past with defending wages.

With regard to defence policy, Mariana Mortágua began by pointing out that “the principle of self-determination applies to Ukraine as it does to Palestine” and that “Portugal must always place itself in the position of collaborating with peace initiatives and not with war initiatives,” as happened with the invasion of Iraq. And she argued that “the area of cooperation that must be protected is the area of European cooperation within the framework of the

Organisation for European Security and Cooperation, in which our Armed Forces must cooperate, not subordinate themselves to any other force.”

As for defence spending, she believes that “it must be necessary to defend the country and comply with our Constitution” and cannot be used to “give in to foreign interests by importing technology produced abroad.” She also gave the example of the PSD/CDS (centre-right parties) government’s choice in 2004, when it “decided to buy submarines from a German company that has been accused and convicted of corruption” instead of buying a multipurpose ship, considering it has broader functions”, such as rescuing the population and monitoring the sea coast. “That this can be combined with the recovery of the Portuguese naval industry is the most sensible thing,” he pointed out.

Regarding a possible change to the electoral law, Mariana Mortágua said she would accept the introduction of a national compensation constituency “without distorting proportional representation nor opening the door to single-member constituencies, which are a distortion of democracy.”.

The final issue raised in the debate was the use of mobile phones in schools. Mariana Mortágua recalled the Bloc’s proposal to limit the use of smartphones in playgrounds, believing that “the playground should be for socialising and playing.” “We have to understand the impact that exposure to screens and social networks had during the pandemic and afterwards,” which led to “children socialising and playing less.”

*Introduction and translation by Dave Kellaway for [Anti*Capitalist Resistance](#).*

PS:

If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of International Viewpoint. Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of [this article](#) for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.