

Portugal: Build on the general strike action

The magnificent UK public sector workers’ strike against cuts in pensions, jobs and services on 30 November was preceded by a general strike in Portugal on 24 November against austerity measures – an event barely reported in the British media. Below, in a shortened article, members of Socialismo Revolucionario (CWI, Portugal) report on one of the biggest workers’ strikes in years.

It was one of the largest general strikes in the country’s history, demonstrating the clear will of the working class to fight the government’s draconian austerity measures.

The strike was important in several aspects. It was the first one organised against the implementation of cuts by the PDS/CDS government, which took power in May, with PS (‘Socialist’ Party) consent in ‘opposition’.

The austerity measures go even further than planned in the deal with the ‘troika’, [European Central Bank, EU and International Monetary Fund]. Some measures have already been applied this year, eg the increase in the VAT on electricity and gas, and public transport fares. But the worst is yet to come.

The cutting of Christmas ‘bonuses’ is the most hated of these attacks among the population. But others will come, such as the imposition of 30 minutes of unpaid work every day (equivalent to 17 working days a year), which means 17 days of slave labour.

The general strike was also innovative, in two ways. Firstly, in that it was accompanied by numerous demonstrations up and down the country on the same day, which has not been a feature of past strike days.

In Lisbon, tens of thousands of

CGTP (the main trade union federation) members and demonstrators from different organisations and sectors (‘indignados’, students, and others) took to the streets.

Secondly, the strike and demonstrations were called not only by the trade unions but also by the 15-October platform (which is composed of various organisations and individuals). This shows the support of the wider population for the workers’ and unions’ struggle.

In this struggle, the coming together of every sector of the working class is necessary if we want to really improve the situation and achieve a real transformation of society.

The strike was solidly supported. In the public-cleaning sector, only eleven out of 118 trucks circulated in Lisbon on strike day. 94% of fire-fighters were on strike. The government alleges that only 3.8% of workers participated in the strike!

On the other hand, it is also necessary to be critical of the events. The time between the beginning of the CGTP demonstration and the indignados’ one was excessive. This created a gap between the two demonstrations, when joining up in one single bloc would have been desirable.

Also, the unions’ demonstration was disbanded shortly after the arrival of the ‘indignados’ to the parliament. But despite this, many

image not available

workers remained there in an impressive showing of solidarity and unity.

A sustained programme of action is necessary to take the struggle forward. Last year’s strike showed how the bosses and government will do everything possible to ignore mobilisations and continue with their savage policies. The struggle to bring down this hated government and its policies will require a series of general strikes, including ones of 48-hours.

Such a plan should be democratically discussed and decided upon in assemblies and committees of action in workplaces, communities and universities and schools.

The downgrading of Portugal’s credit rating to “junk” status and the announcement of the payment of €34.4 billion in interest attached to the €78 billion euro bailout deal

with the troika, clarifies even further the depth of the capitalist economic crisis and the system’s lack of a way out.

The same policies were applied in Greece, Ireland and Iceland without any positive economic results.

Arguing for a clear alternative to the payment of the debt and the dictatorship of the markets is essential. The mass left parties in particular – the Communist Party and Left Bloc – have an historic responsibility in this.

Such an alternative can only be realised in a struggle for a government of working people and the youth, based on a total repudiation of the debt, public ownership of the banks, the financial sector and the most important companies and industries, democratically planned and managed by workers, consumers and their organisations.

Ireland: Resist latest austerity attacks

The Fine Gael/Labour coalition government in the Irish republic announced yet another austerity package on 4 December, amounting to a €3.8 billion (£3.27 billion) cut, to deal with its financial deficit caused by the banking failure and the capitalist recession. This attack on living standards is part of a €12.4 billion package of austerity measures planned over the next four years.

Taoiseach (prime minister) Enda Kenny while being “painfully aware” of the country’s high unemployment rate (14.5%) claimed that there was no alternative but to cut more public spending and increase taxes in order to plug the £16 billion budget deficit.

This latest tranche of austerity measures is on top of the previous

image not available

savage cuts imposed on the working and middle classes by the previous Fianna Fáil/Green Party government dancing to the tune of the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) - part of a €24 billion banking bailout last March.

In this budget €1.4 billion will be slashed from education, health and welfare spending, including a reduction in child benefit, disability benefit and fuel allowance. Some families will be €1,000 a year worse off as a result. University student charges

will also be increased as will VAT.

Last month in the Dáil (parliament) Socialist Party TD (MP) Joe Higgins attacked the government’s “savage austerity cuts on ordinary people’s living standards” which will “plunge society deeper into economic crisis”.

Joe went on to describe the catastrophe imposed on the Greek people by austerity measures three years ago. Then it was falsely argued by capitalist politicians and bankers that if the Greek people accepted these cuts, recovery would be on the way. Joe further rounded on the Labour Party which, while claiming to represent ordinary people, “slavishly submits to the diktat” of the capitalists.

More next week

Tamil Solidarity: Gearing up for 2012

Manny Thain
Tamil Solidarity national secretary

Tamil Solidarity in Britain took the opportunity on Sunday to take stock of the campaign’s progress and outline a plan for the year ahead. International coordinator, Senan, introduced a far-ranging discussion on the geopolitical situation in South Asia, as well as tracing the development of Tamil Solidarity which has established itself as a well-respected campaign among Tamil activists.

We will continue to strengthen our

links with activists in Tamil Nadu, southern India, which were made in a visit earlier in the year. A petition and finance appeal are being launched to help with that work.

The meeting highlighted the incredibly successful hearing in the European parliament, organised in June alongside Paul Murphy, MEP for the Socialist Party in Ireland, and the left/green GUE/NGL group of MEPs.

The downfall of Liam Fox, former Tory defence minister, was also good to see, given his close connections with the Sri Lankan regime

which was responsible for the massacre of tens of thousands of Tamils in 2009. Over a long period of time, Tamil Solidarity had drawn attention to Fox – including hand-delivering thousands of leaflets to Fox’s constituents months before he resigned.

Our 700-strong protest in September outside the Indian high commission against the death penalty was also a landmark, as was the participation at the National Shop Stewards Network conference – an important link with leading trade union activists.

Keerthikan gave a brief report of his visit to Sri Lanka and the extremely difficult conditions faced by Tamil-speaking people there, effectively living in militarised zones. He has also been responsible for developing model campaigning activity in the northwest of England, something we aim to spread further afield.

●Further reports can be found on the Tamil Solidarity website: www.tamilsolidarity.org

Check it out, and get union/community group donations to our important campaigning work.

The Committee for a Workers’ International

The Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated.

The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world.

For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE. email cwi@worldsoc.co.uk

www.socialistworld.net

The CWI website contains news, reports and analysis from around the world. Recent articles include:

image not available

Tunisia: Thousands occupy Constituent Assembly site

“Bardo 1” gives a new expression to persistent anger.

CWI reporter in Tunis

image not available

New Zealand: Election sees conservative government re-elected

Workers sceptical of Labour while new Mana party represents seed of an alternative.

Mel Gregson, Socialist Party (CWI, Australia)

image not available

Quebec: 30,000 students protest fees hike

Step up student strikes!

Julien Daigneault Boucher, Alternative Socialiste (CWI, Québec)