

The Million Voter March

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It was those voters excluded by Cavaco who turned the game on its head for the centre right. But this journey has only just begun. By Jorge Costa.

As many have said, the president was dismissive of the one million votes that went to parties to the left of the Socialist Party (PS). Less mentioned was the fact that it was precisely these one million voters who have actually defined the current political situation. What the right mostly lost, the Left Bloc, more so than PS, gained.

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Even before the elections, when António Costa didn't have a clue yet where he was headed, Left Bloc publicly offered to take part in future solutions, on the condition that certain severe measures in the PS electoral programme were set aside and other measures were adopted which were lacking in the programme. After the elections, with the strength of 36 elected MPs, left-wing parties got together to start negotiations and that was the beginning of a new political transformation. The right began their painful journey to the opposition and the confrontation shifted to defining an agreement that would end a cycle of impoverishment and begin the task of recovering the distribution of income. The one million, who Cavaco had condemned, began their march.

Not a single step back

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The impotence of the president did not suspend the open war from the right. The ?Venezuelisation? of the media landscape, invoking the PREC [Ongoing Revolutionary Process, the period of the history of Portugal from the Carnation Revolution in April 25, 1974 until the right wing counter revolutionary coup in November 25 1975] and the early stages of a civil war, was nothing more than a sample of the prolonged confrontations that were to come. Despite the guarantees from PS, that they weren?t abandoning the restrictions forecast in the ?macro-economic programme? presented by Mário Centeno, the Portuguese right hasn?t come to terms with the end of their happiest four years, a cycle of concentration of wealth led by Passos and Portas. For those who have benefitted from those years, a government that begins its term with the restitution of income is a heresy unknown to man and a call for the redeeming wrath of Berlin.

It is precisely here that the greatest risk lies for the majority agreement, signed by PS, Left Bloc and the Communist Party ? the European war machine against social rights. As Catarina Martins has stated, the expectations created by this agreement will have to confront the intransigent European powers which do not retreat before any social criteria. When the precise numbers of the deficit come to light, the tourniquet from Brussels will tighten and the Portuguese government will have to decide. It either sets new tax hikes and cuts ? a sort of back to ?normality? defined by Passos Coelho ? or respects its signed commitments. By that time, the journey will be more difficult and no state of grace could replace strong decisions regarding the Portuguese debt.

That will be the new phase of this million man march which should widen. From this point on ? and more so when European, employer and media pressure heightens ? a majority promoting the recovery of income will depend on mobilisation. A new role for the people is crucial, which demands the application of the signed agreement and forces new advances. This will depend on the return of those who were forced to leave the country, the support to those who have lost their jobs and the recovery of public services. This is only the beginning of the journey that began October 4th.

Translated by Anna Pires.

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