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Portuguese presidential election

Victory for the Right

- News from around the world -

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For the first time in Portugal, the right wing has won a presidential election. Ex-PM Cavaco Silva, defeated by the Socialist Sampaio in 1996, has now been elected in the first round with 50,6%. Less than a year after the electoral disaster of PSD/CDS coalition, the right wing is celebrating again. But this is mainly a victory for the big, neoliberal center: Cavaco focused his campaign in "strategical cooperation" with the socialist government.

For the Socialist Party, it is a big defeat. Its leadership could not avoid the existence of two candidates. Manuel Alegre was to be the official one. Well-known poet and former exile, Alegre benefits from a 'Utopian' aura (quite unmerited: as a socialist MP for 30 years, all he did was to vote for neoliberal policies).

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Left_Bloc_rally_2.jpg]

Left Bloc rally

But after the summer, Mario Soares, 81, ex-PM and ex-president, announced his second thoughts over retirement. Soares, as much as Alegre, was a fifth choice, after the refusal of several potential candidates from the socialist area to face Cavaco.

The SP started as a loser and everything got worse with Soares sticking to the Socrates liberal government. The result was the bizarre situation of an ex-president, formally supported by the gouvernement, finishing with 14%. Alegre, in the clothes of an independent citizen against party bureaucraties, proposed a vote of protest against the official SP. He got 20%.

Anyway, no good news is to be expected from this trouble in socialist waters. Alegre, 70, is ready to return to parliament, where he will stay under a cold eye from his colleagues. In the next socialist congress, Socrates will set good order in the house.

It won't be difficult: There's no trace of programmatic alternatives. Alegre's campaigners gathered around sympathy for the character (half antifascist poet, half Portuguese-kind of dandy) and internal complains in the SP. Votes came from popular rage against Socrates.

The Left Bloc candidate faced this complicated scenario in the name of an alternative to build in the Portuguese left. "We will be here tomorrow", chanted Left Bloc militants Sunday evening.

They had reasons to celebrate: it was a long and unforgettable campaign, with some of the biggest meetings ever held by the far left since the 1974-5 revolution, and Francisco Louçã getting 5,3%, almost 300,000 votes, the second best result of the Bloc in its 7 years.

Geographically, Louçã had a very homogeneous vote. And especially good in the island of Madeira (7.8%), governed for 30 years by an authoritarian right-wing cacique.

The candidate of the Communist Party (its secretary, Jerónimo de Sousa) saw a little growth to 8,5%, confirming that changing its leader the CP also changed the mood of the press and gave new breath to the militants. Its national meeting in Lisbon gathered some 20,000, and was quite a demonstration of force.

Unless something out of the ordinary happens, for three years, there will be no election in Portugal. This election stabilized the political framework for a while: the new president will now be a pole of attraction to the right, and socialist PM Socrates will thank this excuse. Bosses supported him last February like they supported Cavaco now: in the name of stability. Bosses' stability is in the way. Time for the left to mobilize.

The results in figures

Cavaco Silva: 50,59% (Social Democratic Party, rightwing)

Manuel Alegre: 20,72% (Socialist Party, independent)

Mário Soares: 14,34% (Socialist Party)

Jerónimo de Sousa: 8,59% (Communist Party)

Francisco Louçã: 5,31% (Left Bloc)

Garcia Pereira: 0,44%

Turnout: 62,61%

Blank votes: 1,06%

Null votes: 0,79%