

di Tatiana Moutinho

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The “teacher’s crisis” or the *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* - a double-fold PS strategy vis-à-vis the 2019 elections

In January 2018, and due to the agreements established under the auspices Geringonça between the government party and the Left parties, the career progression in the public sector - which had been frozen by austerity imposition of the PS and PSD/CDS governments - was reset. Out of this agreement is the time count of the so-called “special careers”, whose progression is also based on the length of service count. Special careers include teachers who, throughout the entire legislature, have demanded the full count of the length of service (9 years, 4 months and 2 days). The recognition of the full length of service count of all special careers has been a claim supported by the Bloco que Esquerda and CDU (PCP + Greens) and has even been inscribed in the 2018 and 2019 national budgets.

Last March, the government unilaterally decided that the teachers’ time count would be of only 2 years, 9 months, and 18 days. This decree was subject to a parliamentary motion for review last week (May the 2nd) and, in a negotiating marathon between parties at the Commission for Education level, right-wing parties played a political turnaround and agreed with the Left (and against the will of PS) on the recognition of the full time count of service length for teachers’ careers. Without an agreement between the Right (who argued that the count of service length should be dependent on budgetary criteria, making it virtually impossible) and the Left (with proposals for staged and scheduled for replenishment), the full time count would be inscribed in the final wording of the diploma, making it responsibility of the next government to start a new negotiation process. The government responded by opening a political crisis: if the parliament were to approve the full count of the time of service of the teachers, even in the context of the next legislature, the government would resign.

While politicians from the right wing of PS promptly accused the left parties, that support the government’s solution via Geringonça, of being irresponsible and radical in their proposals, the prime minister António Costa chose to launch an attack on the Right with the accusation of taking part in a “negative coalition”.

The political hurricane that the PS needed vis-a-vis the two forthcoming electoral cycles was launched. On the one hand, and within three weeks of the elections, the campaign for the European elections that was manifestly bad for the Socialists passed in the political debate. On the other hand, the right-wing parties - who quickly announced that they would end up voting against what they had voted for in the Education Commission -, end this process in the most fragile position. This weakening of the Right may be absolutely instrumental to the greater purpose of the PS regarding the October national elections: a victory with an absolute majority.

The crisis ended a week after it was originally staged: in the vote the PS voted against all the proposals put forward, the right voted against the proposal of the left that secured the negotiation in a future legislature and the left voted against the proposal of the right that ensured that such be made impossible by budgetary criteria.

The political outcome of this simulated crisis will become evident in a near future.