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Italy

We defeated Berlusconi politically through a radical mobilisation

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Description:

A referendum was held in Italy on 12 June and 13 June 2011, on repealing legislation allowing for the privatisation of water services, repealing regulations permitting a return to nuclear energy and criminal procedure, (specifically a provision exempting the Prime Minister from prosecution). There was a 55% turnout of registered voters so the 50% quorum to make referendum results valid was reached - the last 6 have failed to get a quorum. About 95% voted yes on the water, nuclear and other referendums - i.e. about 26 million people. The Berlusconi-controlled media deliberately kept coverage low key and the government parties encouraged their supporters to abstain rather than vote, so that the quorum would not be reached.

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Statement from Flavia D'Angeli and Emiliano Viti from the national executive of Sinistra Critica

This result represents a historic turn in the political situation. The people's vote has put an end to the Berlusconi period. He is the champion of free market policies and so this result is also a defeat for privatisation policies and the primacy of markets over the common good. The slogan "Our lives are worth more than their profits" really has a meaning in Italy with today's referendum results. A phase has ended. Berlusconiism has been defeated by a democratic mobilisation through the referendum process. It is the case that referendums do provide more of a framework for a form of direct democracy.

It is important to highlight the role of a political subject which was lacking before - the Committees for public water - which played a decisive and in some respects an historic role. They worked away outside of the media glare but collected the highest number of signatures ever obtained for triggering a referendum. The Committees carried out a campaign based exclusively and consistently on the political demand for publicly managed water distribution. They were opposed by the PD (Democratic Party - main social democratic opposition party) who ought to listen to the clear message expressed in these results from the 'red' regions where they have already privatised water distribution. The IDV (Italy of Moral Values party led by Di Pietro) also opposed the committees. Today these two parties are exultant about the results. Nobody representing the Committees was ever invited onto any TV programmes. Today's victory is their victory. It is a great day for the movements who campaign against the overwhelming power of profit and money such as the NO to the TAV group (campaign against High Speed Train routes). Any initiative to bring these campaigns together into a united movement - against the refuse dumps and incinerators, local tariffs and the high speed train routes - is to be welcomed and Sinistra Critica will work tirelessly to that end.

This victory teaches us about the politics of the traditional and institutional parties. The battle was won because people were mobilised, there was passionate, radical work carried out in the community and workplaces and activists were able to take up a particular issue and build a strategy. It has been proved that radical demands can win. Emma Marcegaglia and all those industries who were hoping to make a killing with nuclear power and privatised water have also lost alongside Berlusconi. Of course these same forces will now throw themselves into the renewable energy sector! A clearly radical, anti-capitalist and ecological left is possible and its role is not to be subordinated to the trajectory taken by the PD and the centre left forces.

Our strategic political project has today been given a great boost.

Sinistra Critica - Organisation for an Anti-Capitalist Left