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Italy

Clash over national labour agreements

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When Italy's health crisis exploded in the spring, employers lobbied drastically to keep the economy on hold. Profits had to be maintained, even if it meant killing workers, endangering the health of entire sectors. These same employers, largely those in metallurgy, who put their interests ahead of our health, now want the bill to be paid economically and in terms of wages. The bill has, however, already been paid by the majority of workers, with technical unemployment (which, in Italy, covers on average just over half of the salary) and the hundreds of thousands of precarious workers who have been laid off.

La Confindustria (the Italian employers' organisation) has declared war on the unions, through its newly elected president, Bonomi; the new "hawk" of industrialists has explicitly attacked national collective agreements which, in Italy, are, historically, the main instrument for fixing wages, but also for fixing rights, hours and working conditions (as in fact there is no legal minimum wage and its level is set by the national agreements).

"Pact for the Factory"

Confindustria initially enjoyed an advantage as, in recent years, collective agreements have gradually weakened and today they have already lost a large part of their historical force, because of the continual retreats by the confederal union organizations but also the ever increasing precariousness of the working world and its fragmentation into company contracts and subcontracting contracts. In 2018, Confindustria proposed a new type of contract (the "Factory Pact") which effectively regulates wages by indexing them to inflation (moreover without energy costs, and therefore less than what workers really have to pay for). [\[1\]](#)

Metalworkers have endured this contractual model in its entirety: in four years, their monthly salaries have increased by only 40 euros, which is even less than the planned adjustments for pensions. But, for all workers, the time has come to settle scores with Confindustria, which demands respect for the "Pact for the Factory" on wages, while calling into question the very nature of the employment relationship and the link between wages and working hours, taking advantage in particular of the spread, caused by Covid, of remote working and the dangerous de-structuring of working conditions which may result from this. This moment of confrontation involves around 10 million workers who are awaiting the renewal of their national agreements, some with delays of several years, in both the private and public sectors.

A global response to be built

The stakes are therefore important and do not concern only the wages and the rights of 10 million workers, but also the very role of the national labour agreement in a very complicated situation, because of the economic crisis but also in view of the difficulties of mobilization and union activity itself because of the anti-Covid measures (holding meetings in the workplace has become difficult). All this as more and more establishments go so far as to cancel company negotiations.

Some sectors have already taken initiatives and announced mobilizations but, for the moment, the most important point of conflict is that of the metalworkers. A few days ago, Federmeccanica (the association of metalworking employers) broke off the negotiations which had been under way for almost a year and which had been halted for

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months because of Covid. The conflict is explicitly about the salary issue. On the one hand, the bosses who do not want to grant real increases but only local social and "human" benefits, deferring the negotiation to the level of each factory. On the other, the three main unions, for the moment united, are finally asking for real increases, for a sector whose wages, for five years, have been practically frozen.

Unions have declared a "state of unrest" (blocking overtime) and called for a four-hour strike on 5 November, which can last up to eight hours where conditions permit. It will not be easy to create a climate of struggle, but the "blue overalls" are finally starting to mobilize again.

What would be especially useful today would be an initiative by the whole confederation, to bring together all the oppositions concerning labour agreements, unify the initiatives of isolated struggles and create a climate of general mobilization of the whole of the world of labour in reaction to the massive attack by Cofindustria.

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[1] The agreement between the unions and Confindustria on the "new model of contractual and industrial relations" was signed on 28 February 2018.