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Italy

The crisis of the radical left and the recent debate in Sinstra Critica

- Debate - Building new parties of the left -

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The crisis of the Italian far left has accelerated in the last year and a half. After the 15 October 2011 demonstration, which ended with a violent repression by the police and a devastating debate among the promoting organizations, the fragmentation of the radical left and its inability to answer in a credible way the popular discontent produced by the European austerity policies, have increased.

The massive participation of young people and workers' resistance organizations to that demonstration had led to hopes in the starting up of radicalization dynamics similar to those that in the same time had grown in Spain, Greece, USA and North Africa. This has not happened.

The establishment of a technical government presided over by Mario Monti has been hailed as a liberation from two decades of Berlusconi (indeed Berlusconi ruled "only" for 11 years) by the PD, by the majority of the bourgeois press and by most of the trade union movement too, isolating the positions of the leftist trade unionism and of the anti-neoliberal left wing. The PD has been the most convinced supporter of the technical government in Parliament and the Cgil bureaucracy in this period has tried to avoid in every way the explosion of the social conflict. The Monti government has thus succeeded in delivering lethal blows to wages and to workers' rights without any significant reaction: pension reform, abolition of article 18 of the statute of workers (right to reinstatement in case of unjust dismissal).

Partial exceptions have been: National demonstrations organized by the No Debt Committee (in March and October 2012), the students and teachers of the secondary school movements in autumn, who managed to win against the government's attempt to increase working hours with same pay in the school, and to stop the bill for the abolition of democratic assemblies in schools.

In this context, the debate inside Sinistra Critica, that started during the seminar in autumn 2011 and went on with a long congressional debate between March and October 2012, has developed. During the preparation of the third congress of SC, after a long arduous period in which the organization was rather cohesive, even if with some differences that were never made official, a disagreement with the document of the majority of the outgoing leadership took shape. This dissent, after the debate in the national Coordination, led up to the preparation of some considerable modifications to the text, that were shared by some comrades of the outgoing leadership, and then by a minority of the Coordination.

During the congressional debate the two tendencies reached parity, electing in the national congress (28, 29, 30 September 2012) a leadership composed in equal numbers by the two tendencies.

The choice to propose amendments to the Congress rather than an alternative platform was motivated by two concerns. On the one hand, to highlight the broad analytical convergence between the two political tendencies, minimizing the different shades of interpretation of the social and political phase. On the other side to reach a framework that would make the organization accessible to different, but not necessarily contradictory, intervention projects, and check the possibility of synthesizing the differences in the light of class struggle in the near future.

The two tendencies share many points: the analysis of capitalist crisis; the consciousness of the serious attack on the rights and wages of the working class, the democratic crisis resulting from the detachment of the institutions from the social demands of the majority of the population, the ineffectiveness of an eco-reformist response (so-called Green capitalism); the need to build a broad and united movement against the crisis; the condemnation of the

collaborationist union bureaucracies; the insufficiency and the extreme weakness of the traditional organizations of the labour movement. Similarly, a shared element of analysis is the balance sheet of the experience of our current within the PRC until 2007, as it is outlined by the contribution to the debate on the construction of new parties proposed by Flavio C.

What we do not share can be summarized in two points: (1) the analysis of the “end of the workers' movement”, and the consequent underestimation of the still existing labour and political organizations of the working class, and (2) the dialectics between the radicalization and self-organization of mass movements and the construction of a revolutionary party.

1) The slogan of the “end of the workers' movement” has long been debated in our Congress and has often led to mutual misunderstandings. The subjective conditions of class struggle changed dramatically after the collapse of the USSR, the genetic mutation of reformist parties (Social Democrats and Communists) in Western Europe, the cooperation of the major trade union centers in disposing of workers' achievements obtained in the Sixties and Seventies. These changes are important and have long been characterized as a “crisis of the workers' movement”. Not from today, these elements outline a completely new phase of class struggle. But in this new phase, the old players have continued to play a central role.

To remain on the Italian affairs, the CGIL still organizes a large share of workers, not just the elderly and guaranteed. In some sectors (metal workers, schools and universities) it still is “with all its contradictions” a point of reference for those who struggle, workers, young temporary workers and students. Its line of subordination to the centre-left coalition has led the Cgil to launch a campaign called “plan for labour”, that contradicts its own work in recent years, in order to persuade the workers to vote for that coalition. This was not enough to stem the haemorrhage of workers' votes from the PD to the Grillo's Cinque stelle movement (the Democratic Party has lost about 3.5 million votes while Sel, the organization founded by Bertinotti's tendency in the PRC, can barely get the votes of the previous electoral bankrupt experience Rainbow Left), but it opens the way for an internal battle of consistency and independence of the trade union from the centre-left, towards the building of a significant left current inside the biggest trade union in Italy.

As for the radical left, it remains fragmented and politically hardly credible, so as not to be able to present its own candidates at the last election, with the exception of the unlikely alliance of forces united under the name of Rivoluzione Civile (PRC, PDCI, Greens and Italy of Values, an organization that is in the ALDE Group in the European Parliament) and under the auspices of the anti-mafia prosecutor Antonio Ingroia.

It should be noted, however, that the only significant experiences of social movements against austerity on a national scale, were promoted last year just by sectors of leftist unions, left trade union currents, and small extreme left organizations, gathered in the No Debt Committee. This coalition missed an opportunity to propose an electoral path from the bottom, because of the heterogeneity of the forces that are part of it, but some of these organizations, including Sinistra Critica, attended the meetings called “Change is possible” in December, that were called by Alba (a new radical left political formation created at the initiative of intellectuals close to the PRC in the past).

The problem of class consciousness being at a historic low (the crisis of the class for itself) is rightly pointed out. This level of consciousness is the product of decades of heavy defeats, the restoration of a savage liberal capitalism in the world, but also of recent events sharpening the attack of the bourgeoisie in Europe. In Italy, a great influence in this sense has been the negative role played by the PRC after the anti-globalization movement, and the choice to support the second Prodi government, and to collaborate in the carrying out of neo-liberal policies.

The tendency for the “anticapitalist area” considers very important the potential of the 5 Star Movement and its electoral result as an expression of “liquid” radicalization (i.e. formless, at least when compared to traditional forms of

radicalization), underestimating the fact that that result comes from the absence of a struggle against austerity and liberal policies in Italy. In contrast, the Italian electoral result, in which no class-based political proposal has emerged, and the success of the Cinque stelle Movement are the expression of the class defeats of the last years.

The aim of a revolutionary force must be to intervene among the most active social sectors (e.g. in Italy in the last years, among school and university students, but also the temporary workers in schools, the No Tav movement, the workers and citizens of Ilva in Taranto, the movement for public control of water service ...), because they are an incentive to encourage a resumption of working class struggle. The Occupy movement too, has tried to play that role in the US. It is a matter of restoring courage to millions of working men and women who suffer from the neo-liberal policies, with the example of struggle and maybe some partial victories. To do that, we can and we must focus on the most reactive and combative sectors, supporting and intervening even in the spurious forms of radicalization, but at the same time, we must have a policy and a practice whereby our comrades are able to speak clearly to all workers, temporary workers, unemployed and students.

This is not to pretend that the traditional organizations do not play any role on the development – and possibly on the involution – of class consciousness. In Italy in particular, the most significant mobilizations in recent years have been built with a driving force of the so-called “old” organizations.

For these reasons, we prefer to continue to speak in terms of “crisis of the workers’ movement,” without concealing its weaknesses, and continuing to denounce the reformist and social-liberal guidelines of its majority (CGIL, Sel, sectors of PD), but with the awareness that the class struggle has to be carried on also participating in the unions, in order to stay in touch with important sectors of workers, and proposing to the most radical parts of the workers' movement (trade union left, leftist unions, precarious workers' collectives, political organizations of the radical left, social centres and student collectives) the common task of rebuilding a class left (a new workers' movement), acting both on the political level and in the social movements, to reject the neoliberal policies and austerity imposed by the European bourgeoisie. In a sentence, building a united movement against the crisis.

2) The second point of divergence concerns the dialectic between the self-organization of the movements and the building of the revolutionary party. We are convinced of the need to build Sinistra Critica for the reconstruction of a political anti-capitalist and revolutionary subject, that proposes a global alternative to patriarchal capitalism, and that tries to focus the debate in the social movements on the need for a political and social revolution.

While the conditions for such a project are now even more difficult than in the past, it is not a project we intend to waive or postpone until better times. It is necessary for revolutionaries to operate on two fronts: on the one hand, the intervention in the social movements, stimulating organization and autonomy and encouraging wider experiences of self-organization, on the other, to explain to the militants of these movements and in general to the workers and the oppressed, a political proposal of overcoming capitalism, seeking convergences with all those who deal with this issue in view of the construction of a new anti-capitalist left.

Therefore we should also intensify the training on revolutionary Marxism, feminism, ecology; we should use tools of political propaganda: a website and a printed magazine on the main topics of political debate and the development of social resistance in the territories and at national level.

We do not share the idea of keeping the organization Sinistra Critica frozen while making an intervention in the social movements. The two axis of the political organization must be put into practice simultaneously and they have to reinforce each other, not to run the risk of being in an organization without meaning – and activists – or, on the other side, in a sectarian organization unable to speak to oppressed people, but also to labour and political organizations that interest us and that may play a role.

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