

"The strike of 29 November is a sign of the resumption of social conflict, after a long period of passivity"

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8787>



Italy

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- IV Online magazine - 2024 - IV599 - December 2024 -  
Publication date: Friday 20 December 2024

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**On 29 November, half a million workers in Italy took part in the general strike called by the CGIL (General Confederation of Labour) and the UIL (Italian Labour Union). Are we at the dawn of a new lease of life for social struggles in Italy? A faint hope in a Europe that seems to be sinking ever more surely towards barbarism. *L'Anticapitaliste* spoke with Gigi Malabarba, a former trade unionist and former senator on the Communist Refoundation lists.**

**After more than two years of Meloni's government and the apparent lethargy of the social movements, does the general strike of November 29 indicate the beginning of a new phase of struggle?**

The strike of November 29 is in fact the sign of the resumption of social conflict, after a long period of passivity that goes back to well before the birth of the far-right government of Giorgia Meloni, a passivity that has also helped her rise. The trade union movement had never adequately responded to the hard blows inflicted by the liberal policies implemented by all the governments that have succeeded one another for more than ten years, such as the repeal of Article 18 of the Workers' Statute on trade union rights, the Fornero law on increasing the retirement age (much worse than that attempted in France), privatizations and draconian cuts in the health and education systems, the extreme precariousness of labour relations, penalizing tax measures in the face of plummeting wages, etc. The few strikes declared were at best the expression of a symbolic disagreement, never of a desire to oppose these measures.

Today, we have reacted, albeit very late, with the only effective instrument: the general strike. It is undoubtedly the result of a growing awareness of the abyss that is looming on all fronts, with the current government challenging democratic and constitutional rules, as well as the economic crisis that is affecting the entire productive apparatus of the country, without the shadow of an industrial policy appearing. The general strike has also given an outlet to company or sectoral struggles that had remained isolated for too long and incapable of changing the balance of power that was very unfavourable to workers.

**Would you say that the working class is coming back to the forefront not only in a conjunctural way, but that it could also begin to reorganize itself for a long-term struggle?**

When Maurizio Landini, leader of the General Confederation of Labour (CGIL), Italy's largest trade union, spoke of the need for a "social revolt", even drawing accusations of subversion from the right, he appeared to have little credibility within his own apparatus, which is no longer willing to organise resistance struggles until a goal is achieved, and prefers to devote itself to finding an institutional mediation table, the so-called "concertazione", an option that has long been a losing one.

On November 29, almost all the unions in the localities declared a strike, together with the CGIL and the UIL. It was the first time, and fortunately! even if with separate contingents. And some sectors of the social movements

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participated in the day of struggle with the aim of "generalizing the general strike". However, these positive signals are unfortunately not of a nature to allow the maintenance of the degree of mobilization necessary for the current level of confrontation.

For the moment, only the FIOM (Federazione Impiegati and Operai Metallurgici) and the metalworkers, who have opened their own national contract dispute and are at the centre of dramatic struggles in defence of jobs (think of the Stellantis crisis, the entire automotive supply chain and German industry on the brink of recession), seem able to give continuity to the struggles, having maintained an organised structure in the workplace and a clear combativeness, on 29 November.

## **What role do feminist struggles, international solidarity (particularly with the Palestinian people) and the climate emergency play in this resurgence of social mobilizations?**

The role of social movements is decisive, especially in terms of their strategic value in the face of the so-called ecological transition that capitalism is unable to face. The ecological movement, which had experienced an extraordinary surge, especially among young people, has not regained the same momentum after the pandemic. However, the convergence between the workers' movement and the ecological movement has seen extremely high levels of development, common platforms and initiatives around the struggle of the former GKN [automotive components plant] in Florence which, in the face of lay-offs, has been able, for three and a half years, to continue the fight for an ecological conversion and for the resumption of production under workers' control aimed at relaunching a movement for climate and social justice on a national scale.

The feminist and LGBT movement also remains on the terrain with participatory mobilizations that have brought tens of thousands of women into the streets, again this year, around the deadline of November 23-25 [International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women]. Equally significant is the duration of the internationalist mobilization against the genocide in Gaza, especially in universities. Finally, this December 14, there will be the first national demonstration to combat Decree 1660 on security, which is preparing repression against all social and union struggles. Let us think of the more than 3,000 denunciations of unionists in Lombardy and Emilia! This is an aggravation of the infamous Rocco Code of the fascist era. Fortunately, a wide range of forces will be present in this mobilization.

## **How do you see the capacities of resistance of the working classes in the face of government policies (cuts everywhere, decree on security, autonomy, presidentialism, etc.)? What are the forces capable of organizing popular anger, but also of outlining a horizon for the struggles?**

The ingredients for a change of phase are all there, and at the same time. However, the long wave of defeats of the radical left and the reformist left over the years shows no sign of remission. On the contrary, the ambiguities of the "anti-war" positions - between an exasperated Atlanticism on the one hand and a campist logic cut off from reality on the other - are the lead in the wing of the possible reconstruction of an alternative. There have been too many setbacks and too many losses of bearings to imagine a resumption of political initiative in the near future by the

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combative left. We must start again from "convergence", from the reconstruction of a social and political fabric of resistance that has been broken for decades: the seeds are there, but it will take a long time to make them develop.

Interview by Stéfanie Prezioso for the newspaper of the Popular Union (Geneva)

Gigi Malabarba , a worker for over thirty years on the Alfa Romeo (FIAT) assembly line in Arese, a former union leader of the FIOM and then of Sin.Cobas and then a senator elected twice on the lists of the Communist Refoundation Party, he has been involved in recent years in two workers' self-management projects, first with RiMaflo in Milan and now with GKN in Florence. Self-management in Movement - Fuorimercato is the socio-political organization in which he is currently active and which has begun a common journey with other forces, starting with the GKN factory collective, to organically sediment the strong impact of this conflict.

12 December 2024

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from **l'Anticapitaliste**.

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