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Covid-19 pandemic in Italy

Phase 2: the capitalists want everything

- IV Online magazine - 2020 - IV544 - May 2020 -

Publication date: Sunday 17 May 2020

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After seven days of “phase 2”, the dynamics of the Coronavirus epidemic are still very uncertain in Italy; on the one hand, there appears to be a moderate decline in cases nationwide (although deaths are now over 30,000 and the infected more than 80,000) but, on the other, some regions remain exceptions to this, including Lombardy, where the vast majority of infections have been recorded.

At the end of the week we will be able to analyse the effects of the resumption of all productive activities, which dates 4 May. It is only then that it will be possible to know if a new total lockdown will be necessary - the person in charge of Civil Protection himself does not exclude this - or if the bars and restaurants can be reopened and other social structures, such as sports clubs and centres, resume. Schools will remain closed until the autumn.

A critical situation on several grounds

Beyond the announcements and the promises of several public organizations, the material resources which should, in phase 2, guarantee control of the epidemic, remain very insufficient. There are still millions of masks, gloves and serological tests missing and there are few swab tests because there is a lack of chemical reagents to check their results.

Three months after the start of the epidemic, neither Italian capitalism nor its state have been able to do what they had proclaimed: “Resume safely”. Workplaces are not “safe”: the National Employment Institute (INAIL) said that on May 4, there were more than 37,000 people infected at their workplaces, with an increase of 10% in deaths in the past few weeks. Every day 300 workers fall ill and ten die; the most affected are health and social care workers.

But it is also in the field of wages that things are going wrong because a large number of workers affected by technical unemployment (there were almost 7 million), in particular those in commerce and small enterprises, have not yet received a single euro.

This situation gives rise to strong tensions between the central government and that of some regions which want to proceed immediately with wider openings, but also within the government itself, so much so that the economic decree of 55 billion announced for days is still being postponed. There are many points of difference: the PD and Renzi’s Italia Viva are requesting the intervention of the ESM – to which the M5S is opposed; M5S wants to extend a form of basic income to the weakest sectors, while the others accept only a minimum and temporary support measure (2 or 3 months); PD and IV are convinced of the need to regularize migrants, while the M5S opposes this, maintaining a reactionary position.

Confindustria wants it all

The employers’ class, on the other hand, goes straight to the point and has decided that the best form of defence is attack. The platform of demands put forward by the employers’ organisation, Confindustria, laid out by its new president Bonomi, is very clear: it proposes to precisely adjust government policy to business requirements.

Technical unemployment, unemployment benefit, support for the weakest sectors, public intervention, all this, for Bonomi, is just wasted money: this money must be used instead as “immediate liquidity” for companies, exempting them from any form of control as to the use of subcontractors and environmental impact.

The bosses' targets:

- Deregulate as far as possible the use of the labour force to achieve the bosses' long-desired goal, the abolition of national contracts;
- Obtain large non-repayable grants to companies, without conditions and without state control;
- Suspension of corporate taxes, including the abolition of IRAP, the tax on productive activities created to finance public health;
- Elimination of all regulations that hinder the deployment of their business and entrepreneurial will,
- Derogation from, or perhaps even definitive revision of, Art. 2087 of the Civil Code, which attributes responsibility to companies for accidents occurring or illnesses contracted in the workplace.

A response to be built

This is openly a declaration of war against the working classes, to which the unions should oppose a platform in defence of health, rights, reduction of working hours, taxation that makes the capitalists pay the costs of the crisis, calling on the entire working class to mobilize to confront the looming conflict that is looming.

But, instead of denouncing the attack by Confindustria, they continue to dream of a new global social pact, contenting themselves with the crumbs that the government concedes to the popular classes to avoid (for the moment) too many social tensions, and by not questioning the huge new gifts made to the bosses.

We will see in the coming days what measures will be taken by government decree, but above all what will be the reactions of the most combative trade union and social sectors, to defend the health, work and income of all the exploited and oppressed, and also to resume full political and union activity and a presence on the streets, in the context of the safety measures that the epidemic requires.

13 May 2020

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