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Italy

The 25 September general election, the reactionary, racist and fascist right-wing and how to fight them

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What a performance from the parties that make up the modern 'Barnum' political circus here in Italy. Tactical manoeuvres have characterised the beginning of the election campaign. It has been a shabby spectacle that has both disgusted and confused a great number of Italians. It is a perverse reflection of a dramatic political and social situation where the working class has for some time now lost any role as a protagonist.

This is the case both at the level of effective trade union action in terms of demands, and from the point of view of political organisation, i.e. the presence of a well-established left-wing force capable of defending their immediate and medium-term interests on the political terrain.

Clowns dancing to the tune of a single master

This situation of impasse has been going on for years in the face of a dramatic social context of growing poverty, increasingly generalised job insecurity, the dominance of neo-liberal policies and unbearable social inequality. This should provide the conditions for working people to rise up but it has allowed the various bourgeois forces to completely dominate the political scene and even more the electoral contests. The political parties' 'titanic' media clashes, the manoeuvres and counter-manoevres, the high profile moves of the various bosses and ringleaders of the so-called centre, serve to ensure their daily presence in the newspapers and on television, to 'prove' themselves as the most useful managers and servants of the bosses' interests. They build popular consensus through programmes (or more precisely electoral slogans) which are most often bogus and deceptive but are often indicative of whose interests they intend to represent (see Berlusconi and Salvini's flat tax).

In the meantime, the social class responsible for all this havoc, i.e. the bourgeoisie, the capitalists, remains out of the picture, it is never challenged. Certainly, its newspapers produce hypocritical editorials denouncing the weaknesses and wrongdoings of its own parties and the difficulties in building a coherent and effective political leadership. In the background we see the enormous profits of the big companies, from Eni to Enel and the Prysmian Group (cable and energy sectors) from Stellantis to Brembo, from Leonardo to Ferrari, from Unicredit to Intesa, including the Italian Post Office - so much so that La Repubblica newspaper is forced to headline 'A profits bonanza'.

The danger of the reactionary right-wing and creeping fascism - asking the wrong questions

The future of the working classes is threatened by the political, social and governmental role of the right-wing and extreme right-wing. It includes reactionary, racist and even fascist forces, whose coalition is widely seen as winning by all the polls with a hegemonic role for Fratelli di Italia (Fdi - Brothers of Italy - led by Giorgia Meloni)

The danger facing our country is great: a victory for these forces and their government can only bring terrible new difficulties for working people, starting with the weaker sectors, migrant workers, the poor and unemployed, and women.

There can be no underestimation of the risks: the post-election period will in any case be different and even more difficult socially, economically and institutionally, and we must be prepared for the new challenges. A FdI government 100 years after the march on Rome (when Mussolini took power) will unleash the worst dynamics. Cases like the one in Civitanova Marche (a racist murder) will multiply, and all sorts of police, fascist and racist abuse will be tolerated and justified.

Faced with this prospect there are many social, political and intellectual leaders and personalities, who have been active in recent weeks in appeals, articles and in improbable electoral/technical proposals of alliances to try to prevent or impede a resounding victory of the right-wing. Some even hope that some social economic demands or giving greater attention to the working class or poorer neighbourhoods may shift the centre of gravity of consensus or activate sectors that are today entirely passive. Of course the latter proposal is positive if combined in a perspective that is not only electoralist.

However all these arguments are badly posed or are completely unrealistic. Above all, they are incorrect because the authors do not want to identify and understand the reasons that have produced the widespread hegemony of reactionary ideologies in society, the demoralisation and resentment that push people towards the extreme right. Indeed, reading many of the speeches one wonders: where were they all in the last period? Why have they not lifted a finger against austerity policies? Or if they more or less criticised them, why did they continue to support those who managed them? Why did they believe in Draghi (prime minister from February 21 to July 22) and even today continue to see in him, grand servant of the bosses, the miracle worker of the Italian crisis? How can it be thought that those same people who for twenty years have battered the 1948 Constitution in various ways, already succeeding in distorting it in some fundamental parts, can defend the Constitution? How can they defend the democratic rights that it still partly preserves?

These people wanted to implement Draghi's government deadly and divisive 'differentiated autonomy' of the regions which will increase social inequality and reduce government resources in poorer areas. As it is the democratic aspects of the Constitution are very poorly represented in the current electoral systems. These politicians do not really champion the socially progressive aspirations in the text that have been contradicted by the social and economic counter-reforms of the last 30 years.

How can one think of tackling a huge social and political problem, which is the mass support for the extreme right, with electoral gimmicks, with alliances with those very same people who consider the 1948 constitution unfit for the needs of global competition?

Someone should explain why Fratelli d'Italia, which in the 2018 parliamentary elections garnered just over 4% of the vote and in the 2019 European elections 6.5%, and which was still hovering around 10% when the Draghi government took office, is now given 23% thanks to a skilful, albeit feigned political opposition, so much so that its leader, Meloni, presents herself as the next prime minister to all and sundry! We are talking about a party, which has the fascist flame and Mussolini's coffin in its symbol for these elections!

Perhaps the policies of Draghi's government supported by all the mainstream parties apart from the FdI were not so good, if new social sectors are looking to the extreme right in search of an alternative that is not only false, but very dangerous for the future of the country.

Some of these people should make an effort to understand that the current success of the reactionary and fascist organisations can be explained not only by the political vacuum on the left, but also by the large trade union bureaucracies' subordination to capital. In all these years they have not even tried to seriously defend the living and working conditions of the working classes, being content with the 'negotiating table', refusing to seriously and systematically build the conflicts and social struggles with alternative class objectives. This would have been the best

antidote to the propaganda of the right-wingers and fascists.

Without struggle Meloni wins

In the absence of class-based struggle, it is ideologies and media propaganda that inevitably condition the consciousness of the masses. Only participation, experiences of struggle, discussion of alternative agendas and platforms determine class consciousness, an understanding of one's place in society, a civil, democratic, collective and socialist consciousness. It is from all this that the will and the need to build another society arises. It drives forward the social and political organisations that take up this task. Through this process people understand who are the false friends and of course the enemies to fight.

Real openings are given to the reactionaries and the fascists when the trade union leaders:

- accept the logic of capitalist competition, i.e. competition between workers,
- do little or nothing to prevent the Fornero pension counter-reform or Renzi's labour reforms,
- forget to denounce the unbearable levels of exploitation by employers, in the countryside, but also those in logistics, where employer and state repression join together to strike at workers' struggles.

The battle against the right must be fought with great strength in the electoral campaign, but it must be done not only with respect to winning votes but above all by working to activate the insurgency and convergence of the exploited on a different class agenda. The capitalists, even if they would prefer a new Draghi government, will have no difficulty in using the forces of the reactionary coalition against the workers.

But at the same time we will have to point out those who are the false friends, those who more or less claim to be on the left, but who are nothing but one of the expressions of the ruling class.

If we are not able to campaign politically and campaign to support struggles, we will lose twice over, because the election result will be particularly bad and it will be even more difficult to withstand the impact of an extreme right-wing government or a new technocratic, authoritarian government, a direct expression of the bosses.

The reconstruction of a deep-rooted, authentic anti-capitalist left force can only happen through a resumption of mobilisations and a profound and radical change in trade union policies. We need to rebuild trade unions that do their job: building struggles, unionisation and the unity of all workers, those with more or less stable jobs, those with precarious jobs and those who have never had a job or who have lost one.

Some considerations on the pro-Atlantic and pro-European PD and Letta's strategy

We have already written about the role of the PD, a party that, for years, through the metamorphoses from the old DC (Christian Democrats) and the PCI (Italian Communist Party), has put itself forward as the most authentic, rational and, of course, 'democratic' manager of the political and economic choices of the big bourgeoisie, the Italian

one, but overall the European one, expressed in the European Union project. That is why the PD has been the most faithful supporter of the Draghi government and its policies; that is why it is also the most pro-European. Not in the sense of taking up the interests of the continent's working classes, but of defending the capitalist (and imperialist) project of Europe. It is also today the most pro US current, i.e. converging with NATO and US imperialism. Some may still be surprised that the PD was the most vocal supporter of Italian participation in the war in Ukraine, and of the massive increase in military spending, but there is consistency in these negative choices.

In the same way there is consistency in the electoral tactical choices it has made. The narrow electoral logic induced by the current system should have pushed Letta and associates to pursue an alliance with the M5S (Five Star Movement), which still has polling support of around 10%. It would have allowed it to compete in many first past the post constituencies, limiting the success of the extreme right. But for the PD's ruling group, the alliance with Conte (M5S leader) in search of votes through some distancing from Draghi's policies and an accentuation of some socially progressive demands, even if couched in an interclass way, was too risky. Too risky and contradictory, knowing full well what kind of policies the bourgeoisie will demand in the face of "the clouds gathering" to use Draghi's expression.

On the other hand there was no problem with the alliance with the Greens and SI (Italian Left, small satellite group of PD), useful to give the so-called 'broad coalition' a sprinkling of social concern, but whose limits and propensity to remain inside the PD's courtyard are well known. It was fundamental, from the PD perspective, to find an alliance also with the so-called centre, in the 'hope' of recovering votes on the right. It is also particularly useful to have a very moderate ally with which to justify an alignment with capitalist priorities and to dump the modest social and civil demands that are being advanced in the election campaign, such as those that are appearing on billboards.

These are choices that correspond to the PD's bourgeois nature consistently expressed in the most delicate political transitions, from Veltroni's leadership of the newly formed Democratic Party (PD) in 2008, then the support to technocrat Monti's government, Letta's and then Renzi's, and finally the decision to break, under pressure from Italian President, Mattarella, the alliance with the M5S in Conte's second government in order to participate in the government of national unity.

Letta's marriage with Calenda's centre was truly a farce. It lasted only five days. In any case, it would not have allowed him to seriously compete with the right-wing, even if it adopted a totally pro-business programme.

The historical ambiguities of the M5S in search of a revival in its fortunes

A few words on the M5S, it is good to remember that this was the most governmental party of the entire legislature and that even today it is in government with Draghi; its ministers have not resigned. The partially positive measures it has implemented can be counted on two fingers, while the list of negative ones is very long. We are talking about the policies that have produced and accentuated the social crisis in which we are immersed. It would be a serious mistake to confuse an isolated and uncertain 'non-participation' in a vote of confidence in the Senate on Draghi with the opening of a new path of opposition and 'struggle', as some on the left have wanted to 'believe', or 'delude themselves with'.

The Union Popolare (People's Union)

An alternative social and democratic programme, combined with the desire to rebuild the struggles of the oppressed, is what the forces that have come together in the 'Unione Popolare' list want to defend and represent in this election campaign. They are Potere al Popolo (Power to the People), Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation), the deputies of ManifestA (a split of 4 MPs from M5S) and the DeMa Movement of De Magistris (two time elected mayor of Naples).

Some limitations have characterised the formation of this list, starting from the inability or unwillingness to open up to a greater number of social and political forces. There has been some tactical ambiguities, but with serious political consequences, such as the search to form a political pole with the M5S, a structurally interclassist force. We also have the choice of the list's symbol with a name, presented as an electoral tactic for greater visibility, a choice that always entails the risk of contributing to the personalisation of politics desired by the dominant system. Finally, there is an aspiration to be a government force and the readiness for future alliances, which can only foster ambiguity and confusion as to the direction of travel.

For our part, we think it is necessary to support it and search as much as possible for collective work in the construction of a political alternative, and that this must always have a clear class orientation. We wanted to recall this critical evaluation that we have expressed in recent weeks. However, it does not prevent our support for the list. This is in fact the only slate with an alternative perspective with respect to the current dominant political framework. In contrast to the slates of Sinistra Italiana and the Greens which are completely subordinate to the PD, to the point of swallowing without any problem the Cottarelli (responsible for public spending cuts) agenda, a natural continuation of the Draghi agenda .

And it is no coincidence that there is media silence on it so far: better not to talk about it, better not to collect the necessary signatures for its presentation. In fact, for the People's Union there is a need, unlike almost all other political formations, small or large, to collect many tens of thousands of signatures in a very few days. This is thanks to the very politically dubious, but also constitutionally dubious, operation of Mattarella and Draghi, who gave such a short run in for the elections. They did this in a holiday period when there are some who can act as they please thanks to the media tools they have at their disposal and others, the forces of the left, who have to act from below just when factories and workplaces are closed for the sacrosanct holidays of workers. This is an attempt to make the pursuit of a fundamental right extremely difficult. It is also up to all of us to guarantee this elementary democratic right in the coming days by inviting people to sign up for the Unione Popolare slates.

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